

“A Mat Without A Man” (Jn. 5:1-17)

1. Incident (1-4)

- a. Occasion: Feast in Jerusalem
- b. Superstition: v. 4 not in oldest manuscripts and later inserted to explain the reason for man being there. Pools were partially spring fed and occasionally stirred. Bruce Milne: “The manuscript evidence is poor for verses 3b and 4 and they should be omitted (as in NIV). Later copyists apparently thought it would be helpful to the reader to explain why the sick gathered there. That the pool was fed by some natural spring which had spa-like healing properties is perfectly credible. The popular explanation invoked the visitation of an angel (*cf.* NIV footnote *b*), and added (7) that the first into the water when it was disturbed by the spring would receive some physical benefit.”¹ “The evidence suggests that pagans, too, regarded it as a sacred site. At one stage it was dedicated to the healing god Asclepius.”²

2. Infirmary (5-9)

- a. Restriction:
 - i. The man apparently paralyzed & unable to get to the pool.
 - ii. All of us are spiritually dead and unable to see the kingdom.
 - iii. A motif emerges in these first encounters e.g. →
 1. Jesus has said that being born of the cleansing/life-giving water was necessary to enter the Kingdom.
 2. Jesus had turned the water in the ceremonial pots into wine which pointed to the efficacious blood which would be spilt by enduring God’s cup of wrath.
 3. Jesus told the Samaritan outcast that she could have spring fed water which would cause life to spring up w/in her.
 4. And now Jesus fully physically heals a man w/o even pointing to the waters of superstition.
- b. Inquisition: Jesus asks what seems to be obvious. Many get addicted to assistance. Some purposefully get arrested. With ability comes responsibility! To whom is given more, more will be expected.
- c. Restoration:
 - i. Perhaps you have known someone who experienced a miracle and yet does not walk with the Healer. I remember a man ... Do you seek Jesus for what He can do for you or for who He is?
 - ii. The man is healed w/o request or faith it seems. Physical restoration doesn’t equate to spiritual restoration. Physical healing is good but not salvific. But is it wrong to do good even if it doesn’t equate to spiritual salvation?
 - iii. I find it very telling that our society tells us to keep our faith/spirituality to ourselves. However, the Bill of Rights affords us to practice religion in our living.
 - iv. Furthermore, when we don’t preach but simply promote the social justices of biblical mandates, we are also condemned for being political rather than spiritual. See the hypocrisy? We can neither preach nor practice w/o conflict. Is your Christianity just getting people saved w/o living it out in discipleship, evangelism, and justice?
 - v. Such enacted faith is not “Liberation Theology” but simple/humble influence of the Gospel – “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven.”

¹ Milne, B. (1993). *The message of John: here is your king!: with study guide* (p. 94). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

² Wright, T. (2004). *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (p. 55). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

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- vi. Jesus did miraculous healings, feedings, and such which aided many, and many failed to follow Him. Nevertheless, we see that when Jesus says rise, the subject obeys. “The verb for *get up* (8, *egeire*) will be used again in the following dialogue for the life-bringing effect of Jesus’ call at the last day (28–29)”³ He has authority over nature, physical disease/infirmity, sin/evil, and death itself (vv. 28-29).
- 3. Insecurity (10-11)
 - a. Sabbath Police. It’s not our job to go looking to condemn folks, although we lovingly promote repentance. Ezek. 33’s man in the watchtower.
 - b. If you are a bit (or a lot) Pharisaical, try to think this way: Relax, if you are opposed or even corrected, you are better off considering the counter perspective. If you are persuaded you are correct, have peace and try not to police. If, however, you are in err, rejoice that such is brought to mind. Rebuke a fool and he’ll curse you. Rebuke a wise man and he’ll praise you. Ignorance is a choice.
 - c. Irony: It was lawful to carry a mat if it had a man in it but not carry a mat if you are a healed man?! “According to the Mishnah, a couch could be carried only if it had a man on it. At this point it was the man who was held to be at fault”⁴
- 4. Ingratitude (12-13)
 - a. To God: Pharisees more interested in self-importance than God’s glory or compassion for an invalid.
 - b. To Jesus: The man didn’t bother getting Jesus’ name or inquire about Him.
- 5. Iniquity (14)
 - a. Jesus’ loving warning! Being an invalid is not the greatest concern!
 - b. No good deed... We cannot shy away from evangelism because salvation is man’s most desperate need. Repentance is required!
- 6. Indignant (15-16)
 - a. Ingratitude and cowardice: Rather than further inquire of Jesus, he runs off to tattletale.
 - i. Snarky grumble as if exasperated by the obvious question (7).
 - ii. Blame Jesus for instruction (11). Technically Jesus did instruct him to disobey the Mishnah (man’s laws). I too have disobeyed such out of a moral conviction. At times it is unhealthy, unbeneficial, unbiblical, and sinful to obey man’s laws.
 - iii. Dull and/or shockingly indifferent to inquire of why and who healed him (13)!
 - iv. Finger pointer, narc, fink, squealer who proved unaccountable for his own actions! How ungrateful? He has been fully healed from nearly 4 decades of paralysis and blames the one who healed him. Adam blamed the woman God gave to him (= blaming God) and Eve blamed the serpent rather than take responsibility.
 - b. Enslavement and fear: Perhaps he feared the Jews if they found out He found out who Jesus was and then failed to inform them. R U purposefully ignorant? Do you intentionally avoid uncomfortable encounters and neglect sharing the life-giving Gospel to others? If the former invalid proclaimed Jesus (as he should have), he would have lost favor w/ the societal ‘somebodies.’
 - c. What do you fear? Do you fear God’s condemnation/disapproval more than man’s? Do you fear being ostracized? Do you fear of losing a close relationship, advancement of some sort?

³ Ibid. Milne. 95.

⁴ Guthrie, D. (1994). *John*. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1036). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

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Do you fear losing credibility? I'd rather stand for Jesus and be judged by men than stand w/ men and be judged by Jesus!

- d. How offensive it is to God when He heals one and that one fails to stand up for God. Will you give God praise and obedience when strong opposition comes? It is not you whom they are really persecuting – it is Jesus (cf. Acts. 9:4). Luke 12:8-9!!

7. Integration (17-18)

- a. Jesus was actually working on the Sabbath! The Rabbis understood that God stayed personally active in creation and ‘allowed’ that because His dominion is infinite, He was not bound by such a laws. Their law stated a prohibition of moving an object from one domain to another and since God’s domain is the universe, He’d not be breaking Sabbath by doing such. Jesus claimed to be equal with God and thus enraging them further (18).
- b. Jesus was co-agent Creator on the ‘six days’ of creation and rested on the (now) seventh day.
 - i. He made the heavens and earth and all that lives in those 6 “days” and no more new physical creative activity has been performed by God’s direct fiat.
 - ii. However, since the fall of man, the triune Godhead has been working redemptively toward the restoration of heaven and earth that was estranged by evil, sin, and death.
- c. Jesus has worked really hard (understatement) for our salvation. He literally moved heaven, earth, and hell so that we could be saved.

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Though revolving around a miracle, this passage is about the refusal to trust Jesus’ clear authority over nature, health, sin, and (later) even death (vv. 28-29). John’s Gospel account divides those who encountered Jesus by those who believed and are saved, and those who refuse to trust, even what they saw and heard. It seems that Jesus was setting the confrontation up by commanding the invalid to get up and take his mat, knowing the ‘Sabbath Police’ would certainly investigate. Jesus showed His authority over sickness and man’s law (Mishnah) and used the opportunity to testify in word what He demonstrated via works. He was an affront to their control, manipulation, egos, and authority. Rather than give God His due praise for His compassion and power, they condemn the carrying of an empty mat when they would not have condemned the carrying of a mat with a man on it! Which is more laborious? The irony is pointed out in verse 17. Jesus pointed out that He indeed was working on the Sabbath with His Father and that condemning Jesus’ work and commands would equate to condemning that of God’s.