

Title: Gift or Giver?**[Slide 1]****Text: John 5:1-24****A Healing Word****A Long Exile:**

In the northeast corner of the Old City of Jerusalem, just north of the Temple enclosure lies an archaeological park marking the location of two ancient pools from the time of Jesus. The northern pool was created by damming a stream running through a deep valley. Centuries later a second pool was built on the south side of the dam. In Jesus' day the two pools were surrounded by columned porches, with a fifth colonnade on the dam between the pools.

[Slide 2]

Wide steps, still visible today, led down into the southern pool, making it possible for people to immerse themselves in its waters.

It was here at the five-colonnaded Pool of Bethesda that Jesus met a man who had been sick for a very long time:

[Slide 3]

John 5:1-5 NIV

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

38 years! To a Jewish person, the number 38 recalled Israel's long exile in the desert after leaving Egypt. A journey that should have taken only 2 years was extended *another 38 years* because of their failure to trust God for victory when He commanded them to enter the Promised Land.

But today, the paralyzed man's 38 years of suffering were about to come to an end.

The healing Word:

There, under one of the five colonnades, the paralytic met Jesus:

[Slide 4]

John 5:6 NIV

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

It was a question the man had forgotten how to answer. Instead, he retold the story of his helpless condition:

[Slide 5]

John 5:7 NIV

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

Think of it: he was in a place renowned for its healing properties. Every morning his family or friends dropped him off at the head of the stairs leading down into the pool. When the water roiled in the pool, he tried to drag himself down into the water, but was never fast enough. One more missed opportunity.

A Healing Word:

In response, Jesus gave him a three-fold command:

[Slide 6]

John 5:8-9 NIV

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The God who created the world and everything in it by speaking it into existence, was present here at the Pool of Bethesda, speaking life into

paralyzed and atrophied muscles. He was speaking hope into a man who had lain sick for a lifetime. "Get up! Get your stuff. Start walking!"

The man had the faith to take Jesus at His Word. He *did* get up, pick up his mat and walk. The Promised Land now lay open before him. The giant of paralysis had been slain.

What would he do now?

A Second Test

The Sabbath:

It's a funny thing: being healed made life much more complicated. You might have thought that when Jesus spoke the healing word, the man's troubles were over. Instead, he immediately found himself in a world of trouble. Getting to the Promised Land is one thing; conquering it is quite another.

You see, Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath, the holy day in which it was forbidden to do any kind of work – including carrying things like a sleeping mat. No sooner had the man headed home, than he ran into the religious police:

[Slide 7]

John 5:9b-10 NIV

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

All of a sudden, the man discovered that God's healing Word came with a test: would he be loyal to Jesus, the Word made flesh, or would he cave into the unbelief of Jesus' enemies? Would his journey to the Promised Land bring him into the Presence of the God who saved him? Or would he turn his back on the Savior?

Who's to blame?

The man made his choice: he pinned the blame for carrying his mat on the One who healed him:

[Slide 8]

John 5:11 NIV

But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' "

The leaders asked him who this man was, but he didn't have a clue. Jesus had slipped away into the crowd.

John tells us that a little later he met Jesus once again. When Jesus found him He gave him a stern warning, a warning that fell on deaf ears:

[Slide 9]

John 5:14-15 NIV

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

The Second Test:

The real test of faith that day was not responding to Jesus' command to get up, pick up the mat and walk. The real test came when the man had to choose sides: would he be loyal to Jesus or would he side with Jesus' mortal enemies?

He had experienced the awesome healing power of God. But he refused to let God into his world. He failed the real test of faith. He failed to put his trust in the Word made flesh.

In a way, this paralyzed man represents all of those who saw and heard Jesus, but refused, like Israel of old, to trust Him. Instead, he chose to keep on wandering in unbelief and fear of those around him. He chose to conform instead of choosing to be *transformed*.

Gift or Giver?

Gift or Giver:

Two back-to-back miracles: a nobleman's son and a paralyzed man are both healed with a word. Both the nobleman and the paralyzed man received a priceless gift from Jesus.

But only one went on to put his trust in the Giver of the gift. Remember the nameless servants who dared to obey Jesus' command to pour water in stone jars then serve it as wine? In order for them to do that, they had to not only believe that Jesus could do something miraculous; they had to *trust Him not to throw them under the bus!* They needed to believe *in Him*.

The same was true for the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus' miraculous knowledge of her past life opened the door for her to put her faith *in Him* as Messiah.

The nobleman put a radical faith in Jesus when he took Jesus at His Word and started walking home. He put his trust *in Jesus, not just in Jesus' power*.

It was a step that the paralyzed man refused to make. He was happy to receive the gift, but he was not willing to be loyal to the Giver.

Gift or Giver, You decide:

Gift or Giver? Which is more important to you? Think of what it is that you most need God to do for you right now. Would it be enough if God just stepped in and made the problem go away? Would the gift be sufficient? Is that all that God is asking of you?

"Fix the problem, Lord, so I can go back to doing my thing. Oh, and thank You very much."

Or can you see that the gift is just the beginning of your faith journey. It opens the door for you to meet the Giver in a whole new way. The true test of faith is *not* believing for a miracle. The true test of faith is *putting our whole trust in Jesus*.

Jesus alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The gifts of miracles are signposts that point us to Him. He is the goal of the journey.

In what way is He inviting you to take the next step in your faith journey?