John 5 • The Miracle & the Message

Introduction
The Gospel of John limits relating all the miracles of Christ’s earthly ministry to just seven as a teaching of different aspects of salvation. The first (water into wine in John 2) shows that salvation is through the Word of God. The second (healing the nobleman’s son in John 4) shows that salvation is by faith. The third one recorded here demonstrates salvation is by grace. Together these three miracles show how a person is saved. But as with all the miracles Christ performed, they are meant to teach a message much greater than the signs themselves. In studying the Gospels it’s always important to pay attention to what happens before and after a miracle in order to realize the greater spiritual truth behind it.

[Read v.1-16] The Miracle

Q: We have people who could be healed if they could get into the water at the right time, but lack the power to get there. What is the greater spiritual teaching behind their physical problem?

A: First, it’s a picture of the sad condition of the unsaved. Second, it’s a teaching about how if the sinner could keep God’s perfect Law he could be saved but is unable to do so. It’s a two-fold picture of the need for salvation by grace – something freely given by the Father although we’re helpless and don’t deserve it.

Q: How is this illustrated through the physical conditions of those around the unfortunate man?

1. They are impotent, that is without power. “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” (Romans 5:6)
2. They are blind and unable to walk correctly. “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” (Ephesians 2:1-3)
3. They were paralyzed, waiting for something to happen but with little or no hope. “remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (Ephesians 2:12)

Q: What does “Bethesda” actually mean? How might it relate to what’s taking place here?

A: It means “house of grace”. By definition “grace” means kindness to those who are undeserving.

Q: But what did Christ do which proves that the Law had nothing to do with either the man’s physical or spiritual healing?

A: Jesus healed Him on the Sabbath, proving the Law had nothing to do with the cure.

Point: We are not saved by keeping the Law.

Q: How do we know that physical conditions often reflect a deeper spiritual conditions?

A: By Jesus’ admonition, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.” (v.14) Whether or not this indicates the original illness was caused by sin to begin with is open to interpretation, but what is not is the greater message that sin can
16 For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.

17 But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

18 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

Q: How might this be revealed by the setting, the pool being located near five porches near the sheep gate?
A: In biblical symbolism, “five” (in this case “five porticoes”) is the number of grace. And the pool being located by the sheep gate speaks of sacrifice. The greater message is that the Lamb of God had to die before God’s grace could be poured out on sinners.

[Read v. 17-23] The Message

Q: What was wrong with healing on the Sabbath? What Old Testament Laws did it violate?
A: It didn’t violate ANY Old Testament Laws. It was a Jewish tradition added to the Law.

Q: In v.17-21, what is Jesus showing where He and the Father are concerned?
A: He is showing that He and the Father are equal in works. Christ does nothing on His own but “whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner”. (v.19) This extends to even giving life to the dead (v.21), which is what Christ did spiritually for the man healed by the pool.

Q: In v.22, what is Jesus showing where He and the Father are concerned?
A: He is showing that He and the Father are equal in judgment. Confirmed again later in v.27, the only way that God could commit all judgment to the Son is if the Son is equal with the Father. Again, that judgment was demonstrated in the healing of the man.

Q: In v.23, what is Jesus showing where He and the Father are concerned?
A: He is showing that He and the Father are equal in honor. No mortal man would dare ask other men to show him the honor that only God deserves, which the healed man ultimately gave to Christ.

Point: The first part of the greater message of Christ is His threefold equality with the Father.

[Read v. 24-29]

Q: What kind of resurrection is Jesus speaking of in v.24-27?
A: The resurrection of dead sinners today. The man Christ healed was really a “living dead man” until He heard the Word of God and believed, at which time he was given a new life in a new body, a picture of the ultimate spiritual resurrection to come.

Point: Christ has life in Himself and therefore can give life to others.

Q: What kind of resurrection is Jesus speaking of in v.28-29a?
A: This is the future resurrection of believers. (See 1 Th. 4:13-18 and 1 Cor. 15:51-58)

Q: What kind of resurrection is Jesus speaking of in v.29b?
A: This is the resurrection of damnation. (See Rev.20:11-15). All who have rejected Christ will be judged not to see if they get into heaven, but to determine what kind of punishment will be theirs in hell, what is often result in much more harm than physical illness. The greater call is to repentance.

[Read v. 30-37] The Message

Q: What kind of resurrection is Jesus speaking of in v.30-37?
A: The resurrection of the body. All who have rejected Christ will be resurrected, but they will do so in the resurrection of damnation, a picture of the ultimate spiritual resurrection to come.

Point: The second part of the greater message of Christ is His threefold equality with the Father.
of judgment.

30“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

31“If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true. 32There is another who testifies of Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true. 33You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. 34But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. 35He was the lamp that was burning and was shining and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

36“But the testimony which I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish—the very works that I do—testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me. 37And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. 38You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 39but I say these things so that you may be saved.

40“I do not receive glory from men; 41but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. 42I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. 43How can you believe, when you receive glory from another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? 44Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.

45“If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. 46But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?”

Q: There are three witnesses listed in this passage. To what do they all commonly testify where Christ is concerned?

A: They all testify to Christ's deity.

Q: Who is the first witness to Christ's deity as revealed in v.30-35?

A: John the Baptist.

Q: What is ironic about the way John the Baptist was received by the people?

A: They listened to John and many even rejoiced at his ministry, but ultimately they rejected him and his message which pointed others to Christ.

Q: Who is the second witness to Christ's deity as revealed in v.36?

A: This is sort of a trick question because it should be worded “WHAT” is the second witness rather than “WHO”, but the answer is “Christ's works”.

Q: Who else in the Gospel of John admitted that Christ's miracles proved He came from God?

A: Nicodemus.

this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

John 3:2

Q: Who is the third witness to Christ's deity as revealed in v.37-47?

A: The Father in the Word. The Old Testament Scriptures are the Father's witness to His Son.

Q: How is the process of Christ's rejection by rejection of God's Word detailed here?

1. They refused the Word. (v.38)
2. They would not come to Him. (v.40)
3. They had no love for God. (v.42)
4. They would not receive Him. (v.43)
5. They sought honor from men rather than from God. (v.44)
6. They would not listen to His Word. (v.47)

Application: Spiritual deception does not come about because someone has put a "spell" on you, but by steadfastly and continually seeking to live according to your own desires and ways instead of God's. Ultimately your choices cause you to be given over to deception.
**Point:** This threefold witness to Christ's deity was demonstrated literally in the course of His miracles and then spiritually through the teachings supporting them.

**Overall Application**

A person may experience physical healing which is only temporary, but is still in need of spiritual healing which is eternal. The miracles of Christ point to the greater lessons we're to learn which don't require us to experience any kind of supernatural sign or wonder: Christ's being God (His equality with the Father), Christ as the source of life (the Resurrection), and His sovereignty (or deity). The greater attributes of Christ the Son of God is what our faith is to embrace and put into practice based on His Word.