

Weaving the Word

Storming the Calm

Part 91 – October 7, 2018

Welcome to where we're learning how to weather the *calm!*

Do you want to get well? If you say, "From what?" then your answer is probably "no," and you might be experiencing a type of calm that requires a storm.

We're following Jesus' 3.5 year ministry; and, we left off one year before the cross.



The Twelve had been sent out on their own to Judea, while 72 other followers paired up to prepare 36 towns in Galilee for Jesus. As Jesus is wrapping things up in *town 36*, and preparing to reunite with the Twelve in Jerusalem, John the Baptist, imprisoned for two years, is suddenly executed by Herod.

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill **you.**" He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people **today** and **tomorrow**, and on the **third day** I will reach my **goal.**' In any case, I must keep going **today** and **tomorrow** and the **next day**—for surely **no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!** [So, in three days He'll be in Jerusalem] "O **Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets [like John] and stone those sent to you, [like Jesus] how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. [What house? The one where He often gathered the people in Jerusalem, but will do so no longer. The word can refer to the Temple, but doesn't; because He'll continue to gather there (Jn 7:2, 14)] I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'**" [One year later at His triumphal entry, when the people cry out this exact phrase (Mt 21:9)] – Luke 13:31-35 NIV

Each story of Jesus going to Jerusalem during this interim year shows Him sneaking around secretly. (Check out John 7:2-10)

There's a strange story in John's Gospel that weaves in only here, where the sick gather at a pool to wait for an angel who often comes and stirs the water, and the first to get in are healed.

Imagine the pathetic site of seeing so many people in need of help struggling to get into the water ahead of one another. **Why would God do such a thing?**

Did you know that John's Gospel covers only *21 days*? Half his Gospel covers Jesus' last week; and one third covers 24 hours!

[Therefore it comes as no surprise, that after telling of an early miraculous healing, when John says] **Some time later**, [it turns out to be about a year and ten months; and perfectly aligns with Luke's "third day" ministry goal] **Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews** [i.e. *Passover* (Jn 6:4), and to reunite with the Twelve] Now there is in Jerusalem near the **Sheep Gate** [built by the High Priest Eliashib (*God Restores*) (Neh 3:1); and used for sacrificial lambs, sheep, rams, and goats as an entrance, but never an *exit*, except for the Lamb of God who goes in and comes out ... to *heal* ... and to *judge* ... as we'll see at] a pool, which in Aramaic is called **Bethesda** [which has a double meaning: "*House of Grace/Mercy*" and "*House of Disgrace/Shame*"] and which is surrounded by five covered **colonnades** [i.e. *walkways*]. – John 5:1-2 NIV



That's unusual. Most had *four sides* with descending steps. But, a "double" pool with a *fifth* walkway (like this scale model) has been discovered near where the Sheep Gate was.



Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the **blind**, the **lame**, the **paralyzed**¹—and they waited for the moving [stirring; agitation] of the waters. [Why?] From time to time an **angel of the Lord** [Jesus' OT title (as we've seen)²] would come down and **stir up the waters**. [As a signal for the next healing] The first one into the pool **after each such disturbance** [It isn't limited to a single occurrence] would be cured of whatever disease he had. [Like the three listed: blind; lame; paralyzed] – John 5:3-4 NIV



Not a single blind, lame, paralyzed, or deaf person is healed in the Old Testament? Know why? These miracles were reserved to distinguish and identify the Messiah. (Is 29:18, 35:4-6)

That's why, when John asked if Jesus is the One to come, Jesus replied, "The blind receive sight, the lame walk". (Mt 11:4; Lk 7:22) So, who's this "**angel of the Lord**" who takes Jesus' OT title, and periodically gathers the people of Jerusalem at this "house", and comes to perform the healings reserved for the Christ? Replace "**angel of the Lord**" with "**Jesus**" and it sure makes sense.

Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed—and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time **an angel of the Lord** [Jesus] would come down [from the *Sheep Gate* (Jesus' name for His followers and Himself) and the steps into the pool] and stir up the waters. – John 5:3-4a NIV

And since Passover is near, they're expecting Him to appear.

¹ Bibles based on the earliest manuscripts omit John 5:3b-4 (beginning with "*and they waited for the moving of the waters*"). However, this passage is found in a *majority* of early manuscripts. And the story makes little sense without their explanation of how the water was stirred (in verse 7), which even the earliest manuscripts include.

² Zechariah 12:8-10; Judges 13:21-22; Genesis 32:24 & 30 along with Hosea 12:3-4; Genesis 48:15-16; Exodus 3:2-6

But, why stir up the water before each healing? As a *sign*.

“I myself will tend my sheep ...” declares the Sovereign Lord. “... **I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak** ... I will shepherd the flock with justice. ... Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied ... Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns ... **I will judge between one sheep and another.**” – Ezekiel 34:15-22 NIV

He’s come to simultaneously sift, heal, and judge His sheep. How? By coming to the *House of Grace and Disgrace*, and stirring things up, in order to reveal the heart of each sheep. How cruel! No. Nothing cruel about this. **All Jesus did was offer a healing pool. Every cruelty was the result of human behavior. He’s trying to reveal how much pain we bring on ourselves.**

This is *how* He brings judgment. He’s like, “I don’t have to *discipline* you; I can just *bless* you and *let* you discipline *yourself* with the consequences of your behavior.” **Do they put others first, guiding the blind and helping the lame? Or, do they push and shove to help themselves? Or worse, are they too complacent to help others or themselves?**

One who was there had been an **invalid [weak and frail]** for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there **[over the past two years]** and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, **[quietly, drawing no attention]** **“Do you want to get well?”** **[Which is the perfect question if He’s seen him show up again and again, alone, and making any real effort]** “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.” **[He’s not blind, lame, or paralyzed; yet, they’re making it to the water. And ... he never says “yes”.** Jesus says, “Do you *want* to get well?” and he says, “I’d *rather* wine.” 38 years a beggar is a tough gig to give up. It’s routine. What else would he do? Why do you even come to the pool? Well, “My donors have to *believe* I want to get well; and they feel even more sorry for me when I don’t; and *plus* ... that Angel is wiping out all my competition!” This guy doesn’t *ask* for healing, doesn’t affirm a *desire* for healing, and doesn’t exercise any faith to *receive* his healing] Then Jesus said to him, **“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”** **[And, ready or not]** At once the man was cured; **[and Jesus disappeared into the crowd before anyone recognized Him]** he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” The man who was healed had no idea who it was, **for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there [because He’s alone; and hasn’t reunited with the Twelve]**. Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. – John 5:5-14a NIV



When Jesus saw the faith of the guy lowered through His roof, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven,” “take your mat and *go home*.”

And the man went home praising God. (Lk 5:21-25)

But to *this* guy, He says, “Pick up your mat and walk,” and ...

Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” [Is that a warning or a threat?] **The man went away [not praising, but tattling] and told the Jews [knowing full well they’ll deal harshly with his healer] that it was Jesus who had made him well. [And took his meal ticket!]** So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. [And they try to kill Him (Jn 5:18), making Jesus’ point for leaving the house desolate where He’d often longed to gather Jerusalem’s children as their Father Hen (Lk 13:34)] – John 5:14b-16 NIV



So, why’d Jesus sneak back to heal a guy who only wants pity? To stir things up! He’s the Lord who “*stirs up the sea*” (Jer 31:35) **When we think of Jesus as the One who calms the storms, we’re half right. He also storms the calm to shake us out of complacency, confront our self-sufficiency, and turn us from outright rebellion.**

He sent His word and healed them ... For **He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves** ... They reel to and fro ... and are at their wits’ end. **Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble,** [because sadly, *that’s what it takes*] and He brings them out of their distresses. **He calms the storm, so that its waves are still.** [He stirs things up in order to bring true peace] **Then they are glad because they are quiet [the deep calm they couldn’t have found without the storm]** ... and they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord. – Psalm 107:20, 25, 27-30, 43 NKJ

That might first seem like a bad God; but it’s a good Dad. Because, it’s exactly what it takes and what we need! **The storms reveal spiritual weakness and frailty and where we’re living in contradiction with God, others, and our true self.**

We kind of enjoy the attention that comes from having problems. That’s when others most love us, and care for us, and help us. But it’s a dangerous drug that’s easy to get hooked on. **And after a while we can feel nothing but sorrow for ourselves.**

True change requires courage and determination. That’s why **we usually refuse to change until the pain of staying the same outweighs the pain of change.**

Who do you think brought the storm that Jesus calmed that revealed his authority to His disciples? Without the storm they couldn’t have comprehended the depth of His power and authority.

Deep change usually comes when a crisis is at hand; that’s when the opportunity most forcefully and effectively presents itself. So, **Jesus has to make outer waves so He can calm our inner storms.** Often **the love we need most is the love we want least.** Sometimes the Lord’s love feels like the opposite of love, but that’s only because we can’t see everything he sees.

We’re not here to avoid pain; but, to respond to it. Because, **Behind the very real pain He allows, is an even more real love.** Blessed are the poor and hungry and grieving because they’ve been prepared to receive added depth that isn’t possible otherwise. Not that there’s a guarantee that they’ll receive it. **We usually prefer to remain in “less than” condition rather than face the risks and fears that come with healing and change.**

Jesus has already spoken healing to many of us. And it’s time we get off our mats and walk!