This is a story of God’s grace being shed on a miserable man.

It has twofold significance:

* In terms of the nation of Israel, it marks the turning point at which their reservations about Jesus turn into hardened unbelief & outright opposition against Him.
* Here in Jn 5 we’ll see Him opposed in Judea.
* In the next chapter we’ll see it happening in Galilee.

* In terms of this man at the pool of Bethesda, our text illustrates the sovereign/amazing grace of God, benefiting a man who doesn’t seek it, who has no faith in Jesus to provide it, & who doesn’t deserve it.

He is a physical picture of Israel’s spiritual condition: spiritually sick/helpless/hopeless in their sin.

He is also a picture of every one of us, apart from X.

Our text is an example of God’s grace helping a man who can’t help himself & who has no one else to help him.

He’s placed his hope in a false hope—a stirring of the water in a pool, which he incorrectly interprets to be angelic activity.

When Jesus arrives, & stands there looking at this hopeless individual, true hope is finally available.

But the people at the pool just ignore Jesus, preferring to wait by the pool for an angel to stir up its water.
There are people all over the world today doing the same thing, except they are waiting for spiritual healing—salvation.

They wait by some useless pool of manmade religion. They may feel a sense of their sinfulness, and their need to make things right with holy God.

But some religious guru is has given them bad advice, telling them to venerate an idol, or genuflect, say 5 “Hail Maries,” & take communion, think spiritual thoughts, seek spiritual experiences or live a good life so that their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds.

They may be waiting for some remarkable religious experience into which they can plunge, just as the invalid in our text waited for an angel to stir up the water, so he could plunge into the pool.

Meanwhile, they continue in their unbelief with Jesus standing there behind them, like the unbelieving invalid in John 5.

And yet He, the great physician of souls, is still disregarded & despised in their eyes, as He was while standing at the pool of Bethesda amid that needy crowd.

They do not seek salvation from His hand for their sick souls—but continue to wait on some hopeless, religious fiction, to meet their souls’ needs.

Nowhere in Scripture is the sinner told to wait for salvation. Instead, he is told to act in faith—and to act now.
* “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”’  
(Acts 16:31).
* “Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts”’ (Heb 4:7).
* “Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near”’ (Isa 55:6).
* “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other”’ (Isa 45:22).

If the story of Jn 4:1-9 were illustrated in 4 stained glass windows, those 4 windows could be named=>

* The Hopeless Context  
* The Healer’s Compassion  
* The Helpless Complainer  
* The Healing Commands.

**Window 1—The Hopeless Context**

The scene where Jesus heals the sick man is one of hopeless desperation.

There we find a throng of invalids competing with one another for a supernatural healing that would never come about.

We enter their sad world of misery in=>

[John 5:1]=> “After these things [Jesus’ healing the nobleman’s son in Galilee] there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.”

John doesn’t tell us specifically which Jewish feast this was.

He only mentions that some unnamed feast was taking place, in order to explain why Jesus had now left Galilee, & traveled 70 miles south to Jerusalem.

In verse 9 of this chapter, we also learn that it was on a Sabbath that Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda.
This is important because the Pharisees will call that a violation of the Sabbath Law by Jesus. It will become their excuse for opposing our Lord.

**Jesus’ miracles served as divine authentication that He was indeed the Son of God, & thus the Messiah.**

He healed the sick, cleansed lepers, cast out demons, raised the dead, and miraculously fed thousands of people. And He frequently did so on a Sabbath, just to make the point that He was Lord of the Sabbath, as He specifically said in Matt 12:9, Lk 13:10, and Lk 14:1.

He, as God, had created the Sabbath as a blessing for man, so it was His right/prerogative to use the Sabbath in any way He chose, for the purpose of blessing man. But this became a point of conflict w/ religious leaders because Jesus’ refused to observe all their legalistic Sabbath rules. They ignored the fact that His miracles proved that He wielded God’s own power & must therefore be God. They would claim that when He did those miracles on the Sabbath, He was doing work & violating the Law. Being Lord of the Sabbath, He was the only One w/ the authority to interpret Sabbath Law.

But that was a right the religious leaders had claimed for themselves, & they weren’t about to share it with Jesus (miracles, or no miracles).

**Instead of avoiding this conflict, Jesus met it head on.**
Being God incarnate, He would not compromise with these leaders who had usurped His authority.

He intentionally chose both the man/occasion around which to bring this conflict to a head=>

* Sabbath day among a large crowd at the pool of Bethesda
* And a man whose affliction, though pathetic, was not so life-threatening that he would have died if Jesus had waited until the next day to heal him.

Jesus provoked this conflict because it was essential for the religious leaders to recognize His authority as God.

**Now we really begin to see the hopeless desperation surrounding the scene in which this miracle took place.**

[Verses 2-3]=> "Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. / In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered."

"Porticoes" were rows of columns (often enclosed) which supported a roof.

In A.D. 333, a pilgrim to Jerusalem described 2 pools of water with a portico between them, and porticoes all around them—that was prob. the place where Jesus had performed this miracle 3 centuries earlier.

The 5 porticoes would have provided a welcome relief from both sun/rain to the sick people lying patiently on mats around the 2 pools.

Those who waited under the 5 porticos included:
* The “sick”—a word that essentially means “weak.”
   
   The man Jesus healed is described in verse 5 as one of these.

* In addition to the sick, there were others who were “blind” and “lame.”

* And then there were the “withered,” a word that means to be “dried up”—people w/o much life left in them.

It’s very difficult for us to think of what life would have been like w/o modern medicine.

It’s even difficult for me to remember what medicine was like when I was a boy, because its practice has advanced so much just since that time.

I have a scar on my left wrist that was caused by radiation. In those days, doctors routinely used radiation to burn away birthmarks, such as the one I had there as a baby.

But compared to 1st century medicine, even the somewhat primitive medical practices of my childhood, represented a quantum leap of progress.

From that perspective, you can see why sick people would have placed so much faith in a couple of pools where the water got mysteriously stirred up once in awhile, believing they had supernatural powers that would cure their illnesses.

If you were sick & that were your only hope, you too might have been among the hundreds of people huddled under the porticoes, waiting at the pools.
If we could transport ourselves back to that time/place, we
would undoubtedly experience sights/sounds/smells that
would burn themselves into our memories forever.

We would prob. want to close our eyes, as the tragic illnesses
resulting from Adam’s original sin overloaded our senses.
There were so many, John describes them as a “multitude.”
And it would prob. break our hearts, realizing that those
people were actually placing their trust for a cure in
nothing more than a fanciful superstition.
That superstition may be described by the words at the end
of verse 3, and throughout verse 4=>

[Verse 3b-4]=> “waiting for the moving of the waters; / for an
angle of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the
pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the
stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from
whatever disease with which he was afflicted.”

You’re prob. wondering why I said these words may describe
the reason these sick people believed in the water/pool.
It’s also why there are brackets around all these words=>
John prob. didn’t write them, and they prob. weren’t
included in the original text.
They are not found in the oldest manuscripts, which are
generally considered the most accurate ones.
They also contain words/phrases John himself never used.
Most scholars think that an early scribe, in copying the text, felt it
necessary to explain what the sick man meant in verse 7.
There he said=> “I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up.”

So vss 3b-4 were included in the margin as an explanation. Eventually, a later scribe, thinking the first scribe had put them there because he’d just forgotten to include them in the text, simply did that for him when he made a new copy—from the old text.

The early church father named Turtullian gives essentially the same explanation for why people were continually gathering about the pool at Bethesda.

It is very unlikely that there was any sort of supernatural cause for the agitation of these waters.

The 2 pools were fed from Solomon’s pools upstream, but an intermittent underground spring may occasionally have also fed water into them, causing an abnormal water flow.

There was also a red discoloration of the water, as the spring carried iron & other minerals into the pool.

It’s easy to imagine a sick person accidentally falling into the pool, feeling refreshed by the mineral waters, getting out and telling all his friends about the experience.

Word travels fast among desperate people, & when they’re sitting around a pool with nothing to do, a whole mythology can emerge from their conversations.

But sadly, mineral waters are not a cure for blindness, nor lameness, nor most other diseases.
So the whole scene suggests a pool of disappointment in the hearts of people too desperate to give up hope.

*Window 2—The Healer’s Compassion*

[Verse 5]⇒ “A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.”

John doesn’t specify the exact illness, but verse 7 indicates it was an incapacitating “weakness” of some kind.

This man had suffered from his illness for almost 4 decades.

We have no idea how long he had been coming to the pool, but he prob. had his own spot in the porticoes, like a 2nd home. Can you imagine spending that much time w/ other sick people who are just as hopeless/desperate as you are?

[Verse 6]⇒ “When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, ‘Do you wish to get well?’”

This was a very fortunate man, because he caught Jesus’ attention when He saw him lying there.

Why He chose to take special notice of this man among all those lying under the porticoes, John doesn’t say, but we can be sure it had to do w/ the divine election of God’s grace.

Somehow, Jesus fixed His gaze on this particular man, knowing every detail of the 38 years he had lain there—including every painful disappointment.

Jesus’ tender heart longed for joy to replace his misery. And w/o doubt, Jesus’ sympathetic/compassionate heart was touched by the man’s hopeless desperation.
John says, X knew the man had been lying there a long time.
   How did He know that? Prob. the same way He knew all about the immoral life of the woman at the well=>
   He had internal access to supernatural knowledge.

**Jesus asked if he wished to get well.**
This was prob. intended to focus the man’s attention on his need, to let him know how much X cared about his plight, and to re-awaken in his heart a long suppressed hope for healing.

**As you think about it, this is a strange/tragic scene.**
Here was the Creator of man’s body—the Great Physician—walking among a multitude of sick people, & no one cried out=> “Over here, Lord,…choose me! Heal me!”
   No one said, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”
Maybe none of them had heard about Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple & the miracles He had done in Jerusalem.
   But here was the Savior of both man’s body/soul walking through a graveyard of demolished hopes, & instead of looking to Him, they were all watching the pool, for any unusual ripples in the water.

**Unfortunately, this scene is being repeated in churches all over the world right now, possibly even in this church.**
Jesus is able to heal the heart of anyone—including yours.
   No heart is so hard/twisted, that X can’t heal/soften it, even if it’s been sin-sick for 38 years, like this man’s body.
   X’s mighty power reaches higher/deeper than anyone’s sin.
Yet once again, Jesus is ignored by most people, who are looking in some other direction to find healing/satisfaction for their souls, as He stands behind them, quietly whispering>

“This is the way, walk in it” (Isa 30:21).

As was true in the scene of John 5, He still doesn’t get angry w/ those who ignore His gracious call, nor does He strike out at them in frustration/irritation.

Instead, He pities them, knowing that their useless little versions of the “pool” will inevitably end in disappointment—and even eternal destruction, if they continue refusing to look to Him instead.

And Jesus says to them too, “Do you wish to get well?”

He appeals to conscious minds, unlike some churches that sprinkle babies before they can say their own names.

Jesus worked on the intellect, seeking to bring people into an understanding of their lostness & His salvation.

I would do the same thing this morning, asking you to reflect on whether/not you desire to be made whole spiritually.

I’m not asking you if you have a desire to escape hell.

That’s simply a result of regeneration.

I’m asking if you want to be saved from the power of sin;

From being covetous, worldly-minded, bad-tempered and unrighteous; from being an ungodly, willful, selfish person, or even a drunkard, or a profane individual.

Will you give up your sin in order to receive heart-healing?
*Window 3—The Helpless Complainer*

[Verse 7]=> “The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’”

It may seem unkind to call this man a complainer, but as we get to know him, we see that he’s not a very nice person. In verse 11, he will answer the religious authorities who demand to know why he’s carrying his bed on a Sabbath, by saying that the person who healed him, told him to. He won’t seek to protect Jesus from them, even though he doesn’t yet even know Jesus’ name. And when he learns it, he’ll run back to those same authorities to report Jesus to them.

I suppose one might argue that after 38 years of disappointment, this man had good reason for his unpleasant attitude. But just out of human decency, you’d expect a little more loyalty from him than this.

The most amazing thing of all, is that Jesus knew ahead of time how he would react, & yet He chose to heal him anyway.

**This man at the pool had waited 38 years to be healed.**

Before Jesus arrived on the scene, he had no alternative. But now it would have been inexcusable to keep waiting.

Friends, Jesus’ presence is here w/ us today, so if you have been waiting to really commit your heart to Him, now’s the time. You say, “But I’ve been so religious while I’ve waited!” So were those at the pool; they believed in that pool.
But the pool could do nothing to heal them.

Waiting at the pool of religious activity, rather than giving their hearts to Jesus, has damned millions of souls.

Isn’t it time to do something better than just keep waiting, allowing Satan to blind your spiritual eyes as you just keep staring at the pool & ignoring Jesus, the Savior?

* Window 4—The Healing Commands

Jesus gave this man 3 commands=>

[Verses 8-9]=> “Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, pick up your pallet, and walk.’ / Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk.”

Jesus was commanding this man to do the very thing he had just said he couldn’t do.

Jesus commanded him to “Get up,” but he could not get up.

Jesus commanded him to pick up his bed, when he had been unable even to get up from his bed for 38 years.

Then Jesus commanded him to use his will to walk, in spite of the fact, his muscles were incapable of walking.

This has always been the way God operates.

He said, “Let there be light!” (Gen 1:3), & to whom did He say it? The darkness; ultimately, to the nothingness.

But the rest of that verse reads=> “There was light.”

God told the prophet Ezekiel to tell a lot of dry/dead bones: “O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD” (37:4).

3 verses later we read=> “There was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its
bone. / And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them”
(Ezek 37:7-8).

In the same way, a preacher says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” and an honest person must say, “I can’t do it!”

The preacher says, “Repent of your sin,” & the person says, “I can’t do that either.”

That’s true, you can’t do it, but God has commanded you to, just as Jesus commanded a man who could not rise, take up his pallet, or walk, to do all three.

It all seems absurd, but the word spoken in faith, obeyed by a heart that has received faith from God, results in a miracle.

The power by which the man at the pool rose, carried his bed, & walked, was not in him, but in Jesus.

There was prob. no one there in all that multitude, more surprised that he was rising/carrying/walking than he.

Anyone who has never believed in Jesus unto salvation, can do so by the power of the H.S. if he will simply decide to obey God’s command, trusting Him to provide the power.

But he must turn his back on the “pools” of religious deeds, spiritual feelings, & personal goodness, resting alone in the blood of Jesus, who died to save sinners,
saying=> On a life I did not live,
On a death I did not die,
I stake my whole eternity!
“God’s Grace for a Miserable Man”
August 18, 2013

Text: John 5:1-9

1. Our text is an example of God’s grace helping a man who [12 can’t] help himself and who has no one else to help him.


If the story of John 4:1-9 were illustrated in four stained glass windows, those four windows could be named…

* Window 1—The Hopeless Context
2. The scene where Jesus heals the sick man is one of [18 hopeless] desperation.

[John 5:1]

3. Jesus healed the sick, and He frequently did so on a Sabbath just to make the point that He was [10 Lord] of the Sabbath.

Matt 12:9; Lk 13:10; 14:1

[Verses 2-3]

4. Those who waited under the five porticos included the “sick,” a word that essentially means [10 weak]; the man Jesus healed was one of these.

5. If we could transport ourselves back to that time and place, we would undoubtedly experience sights, sounds and [14 smells] that would burn themselves into our memories forever.

[Verse 3b-4]

6. The two pools were fed from Solomon’s pools upstream, but an intermittent underground spring may have occasionally also fed water into them causing an [18 abnormal] water flow.

* Window 2—The Healer’s Compassion
[Verse 5]

[Verse 6]

7. Why Jesus chose to take special notice of this man, John doesn’t say, but we can be sure it had to do with the divine [18 election] of God’s grace.
8. Jesus asked if he wished to get well to focus the man’s attention on his need, to let him know how much Christ cared about his plight, and to re-awaken in his heart a long suppressed hope for healing.

Mk 10:47; Isa 30:21

*Window 3—The Helpless Complainer*  
[Verse 7]
9. It may seem unkind to call this man a complainer, but as we get to know him, we see that he is not a very nice person.

*Window 4—The Healing Commands*  
[Verses 8-9]
10. Jesus was commanding this man to do the very thing he had just said he couldn’t do.

Gen 1:3; Ezek 37:4, 7-8

11. The word spoken in faith, obeyed by a heart that has received faith from God, results in a miracle.

12. Anyone who has never believed in Jesus unto salvation, can do so by the power of the Holy Spirit if he will simply decide to obey God’s command, trusting Him to provide the power.