

Jesus and the Paralytic of Bethesda

MEMORY VERSE: “*But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*” (John 5:17).

“The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law. It honored the Sabbath.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

Suggested Reading: *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 560–567.

1. THE HEALING WATERS

Sunday, Mar 9

a. For what purpose did many disabled people go to Jerusalem? John 5:2, 3.

John 5:2, 3

Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. **3** In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

b. What belief did the people have about the pool of Bethesda? John 5:4.

John 5:4

For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

“At certain seasons the waters of this pool were agitated, and it was commonly believed that this was the result of supernatural power, and that whoever first after the troubling of the pool stepped into the waters, would be healed of whatever disease he had. Hundreds of sufferers visited the place; but so great was the crowd when the water was troubled that they rushed forward, trampling underfoot men, women, and children, weaker than themselves. Many could not get near the pool. Many who had succeeded in reaching it died upon its brink. Shelters had been erected about the place, that the sick might be protected from the heat by day and the chilliness of the night. There were some who spent the night in these porches, creeping to the edge of the pool day after day, in the vain hope of relief.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 201.

c. How did the interaction between Jesus and one man at the pool begin? John 5:5–7.

John 5:5–7

And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. **6** When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? **7** The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

a. What humanly impossible task did Jesus bid the paralytic do—and with what results? John 5:8, 9 (first part).

John 5:8, 9

Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. **9** And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

“Jesus does not ask this sufferer to exercise faith in Him. He simply says, ‘Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.’ But the man’s faith takes hold upon that word. Every nerve and muscle thrills with new life, and healthful action comes to his crippled limbs. Without question he sets his will to obey the command of Christ, and all his muscles respond to his will. Springing to his feet, he finds himself an active man.

“Jesus had given him no assurance of divine help. The man might have stopped to doubt, and lost his one chance of healing. But he believed Christ’s word, and in acting upon it he received strength.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 202, 203.

b. In what spiritual condition do people who are separated from Christ find themselves? Isaiah 1:5, 6; Romans 7:24.

Isaiah 1:5, 6

Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. **6** From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

Romans 7:24

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

“By sin we have been severed from the life of God. Our souls are palsied. Of ourselves we are no more capable of living a holy life than was the impotent man capable of walking. There are many who realize their helplessness, and who long for that spiritual life which will bring them into harmony with God; they are vainly striving to obtain it.”—*Ibid.*, p. 203.

c. What is the only remedy for such a condition? Acts 9:34.

Acts 9:34

And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

“The Saviour is bending over the purchase of His blood, saying with inexpressible tenderness and pity, ‘Wilt thou be made whole?’ He bids you arise in health and peace. Do not wait to feel that you are made whole. Believe His word, and it will be fulfilled. Put your will on the side of Christ. Will to serve Him, and in acting upon His word you will receive strength. Whatever may be the evil practice, the master passion which through long indulgence binds both soul and body, Christ is able and longs to deliver. He will impart life to the soul that is ‘dead in trespasses.’ Ephesians 2:1. He will set free the captive that is held by weakness and misfortune and the chains of sin.”—*Ibid.*

a. How does Christ help us overcome? Ephesians 2:1–6.

Ephesians 2:1–6

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; **2** Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: **3** Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. **4** ¶ But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, **5** Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) **6** And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

“Man is naturally inclined to follow Satan’s suggestions, and he cannot successfully resist so terrible a foe unless Christ, the mighty Conqueror, dwells in him, guiding his desires, and giving him strength. . . . Satan knows better than God’s people the power that they can have over him when their strength is in Christ. When they humbly entreat the mighty Conqueror for help, the weakest believer in the truth, relying firmly upon Christ, can successfully repulse Satan and all his host.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 341.

“We must learn of Christ. We must know what He is to those He has ransomed. We must realize that through belief in Him it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, and so escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin, all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity. . . .

“As we partake of the divine nature, hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good. Ever learning of the divine Teacher, daily partaking of His nature, we cooperate with God in overcoming Satan’s temptations. God works, and man works, that man may be one with Christ as Christ is one with God. Then we sit together with Christ in heavenly places. The mind rests with peace and assurance in Jesus.”—*The Review and Herald*, April 24, 1900.

b. Describe the peace that comes by strength from Christ. Romans 8:3–6.

Romans 8:3–6

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: **4** That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. **5** For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. **6** For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

“Every child lives by the life of his father. If you are God’s children, begotten by His Spirit, you live by the life of God. . . . [And] the life of Jesus is made manifest ‘in our mortal flesh’ (2 Corinthians 4:11). That life in you will produce the same character and manifest the same works as it did in Him. Thus you will be in harmony with every precept of His law; for ‘the law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.’ Psalm 19:7, margin. Through love ‘the righteousness of the law’ will be ‘fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.’ Romans 8:4.”—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 78.

a. Ignoring the blessing bestowed upon the paralytic, why did the Pharisees become irritated? John 5:9 (last part), 10.

John 5:9, 10

And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath. **10** The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

“As [the restored paralytic] hurried on his way with firm, free step, praising God and rejoicing in his new-found strength, he met several of the Pharisees, and immediately told them of his cure. He was surprised at the coldness with which they listened to his story.

“With lowering brows they interrupted him, asking why he was carrying his bed on the Sabbath day. They sternly reminded him that it was not lawful to bear burdens on the Lord’s day. In his joy the man had forgotten that it was the Sabbath; yet he felt no condemnation for obeying the command of One who had such power from God. He answered boldly, ‘He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.’ They asked who it was that had done this, but he could not tell. These rulers knew well that only One had shown Himself able to perform this miracle; but they wished for direct proof that it was Jesus, that they might condemn Him as a Sabbath-breaker. In their judgment He had not only broken the law in healing the sick man on the Sabbath, but had committed sacrilege in bidding him bear away his bed.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 203, 204.

b. What had the Jews made of the Sabbath? Matthew 23:4.

Matthew 23:4

For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

“The Jews had so perverted the law that they made it a yoke of bondage. Their meaningless requirements had become a byword among other nations. Especially was the Sabbath hedged in by all manner of senseless restrictions. It was not to them a delight, the holy of the Lord, and honorable. The scribes and Pharisees had made its observance an intolerable burden. A Jew was not allowed to kindle a fire nor even to light a candle on the Sabbath. As a consequence the people were dependent upon the Gentiles for many services which their rules forbade them to do for themselves. They did not reflect that if these acts were sinful, those who employed others to perform them were as guilty as if they had done the work themselves. They thought that salvation was restricted to the Jews, and that the condition of all others, being already hopeless, could be made no worse. But God has given no commandments which cannot be obeyed by all. His laws sanction no unreasonable or selfish restrictions.”—*Ibid.*, p. 204.

5. THE SABBATH AND ITS OBJECTIVE

Thursday, Mar 13

a. How did Jesus relate to the law of God and to the Sabbath? Isaiah 42:21.

Isaiah 42:21

The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honourable.

“Jesus had come to ‘magnify the law, and make it honorable.’ He was not to lessen its dignity, but to exalt it. . . . He had come to free the Sabbath from those burdensome requirements that had made it a curse instead of a blessing.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 206.

b. What should and should not be done on the Sabbath? Exodus 20:8–11.

Exodus 20:8–11

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: **10** But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: **11** For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

“Among the afflicted ones at the pool [Christ] selected the worst case upon whom to exercise His healing power, and bade the man carry his bed through the city in order to publish the great work that had been wrought upon him. This would raise the question of what it was lawful to do on the Sabbath, and would open the way for Him to denounce the restrictions of the Jews in regard to the Lord’s day, and to declare their traditions void.

“Jesus stated to them that the work of relieving the afflicted was in harmony with the Sabbath law. It was in harmony with the work of God’s angels, who are ever descending and ascending between heaven and earth to minister to suffering humanity. . . .

“And man also has a work to perform on this day. The necessities of life must be attended to, the sick must be cared for, the wants of the needy must be supplied. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God’s holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour’s pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.”—*Ibid.*, pp. 206, 207.

PERSONAL REVIEW QUESTIONS

Friday, Mar 14

- 1. What belief was prevalent about the pool of Bethesda?**
- 2. What special case attracted Christ’s attention?**
- 3. How can our spiritual paralysis be cured?**
- 4. What greatly irritated the Jews about the miraculous healing?**
- 5. What works are in harmony with the Sabbath commandment?**

Suggested Reading: *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 560–567.

The health reform is a branch of the special work of God for the benefit of His people. I saw that in an institution established among us *the greatest danger would be of its managers’ departing from the spirit of the present truth and from that simplicity which should ever characterize the disciples of Christ*. A warning was given me against lowering the standard of truth in any way in such an institution in order to help the feelings of unbelievers and thus secure their patronage. The great object of receiving unbelievers into the institution is to lead them to embrace the truth. If the standard be lowered, they will get the impression that the truth is of little importance, and they will go away in a state of mind harder of access than before. **(1T 560.1)**

But the greatest evil resulting from such a course would be its influence upon the poor, afflicted, believing patients, which would affect the cause generally. They have been taught to trust in the prayer of faith, and many of them are bowed down in spirit because prayer is not now more fully answered. I saw that the reason why God did not hear the prayers of His servants for the sick among us more fully was that He could not be glorified in so doing while they were violating the laws of health. And I also saw that He designed the health reform and Health Institute to prepare the way for the prayer of faith to be fully answered. Faith and good works should go hand in hand in relieving the afflicted among us, and in fitting them to glorify God here and to be saved at the coming of Christ. God forbid that these afflicted ones should ever be disappointed and grieved in finding the managers of the Institute working only from a worldly standpoint instead of adding to the hygienic practice the blessings and virtues of nursing fathers and mothers in Israel. **(1T 560.2)**

Let no one obtain the idea that the Institute is the place for them to come to be raised up by the prayer of faith. That is the place to find relief from disease by treatment and right habits of living, and to learn how to avoid sickness. But if there is one place under the heavens more than another where soothing, sympathizing prayer should be offered by men and women of devotion and faith it is at such an institute. Those who treat the sick should move forward in their important work with strong reliance upon God for His blessing to attend the means which He has graciously provided, and to which He has in mercy called our attention as a people, such as pure air, cleanliness, healthful diet, proper periods of labor and repose, and the use of water. They should have no selfish interest outside of this important and solemn work. To care properly for the physical and spiritual interests of the afflicted people of God who have reposed almost unlimited confidence in them and have at great expense placed themselves under their care will require their undivided attention. No one has so great a mind, or is so skillful, but that the work will be imperfect after he has done his very best. **(1T 561.1)**

Let those to whom are committed the physical and also to a great extent the spiritual interests of the afflicted people of God, beware how they, through worldly policy or personal interest or a desire to be engaged in a great and popular work, call down upon themselves and this branch of the cause the frown of God. They should not depend upon their skill alone. If the blessing, instead of the frown, of God be upon the institution, angels will attend patients, helpers, and physicians to assist in the work of restoration, so that in the end the glory will be given to God and not to feeble, shortsighted man. Should these men work from a worldly policy, and should their hearts be lifted up and they feel to say, "My power, and the might of my hand hath done this," God would leave them to work under the great disadvantages of their inferiority to other institutions in knowledge, experience, and facilities. They could not then accomplish half as much as other institutions do. **(1T 562.1)**

I saw the beneficial influence of outdoor labor upon those of feeble vitality and depressed circulation, especially upon women who have induced these conditions by too much confinement indoors. Their blood has become impure for want of fresh air and exercise. Instead of amusements to keep these persons indoors, care should be taken to provide outdoor attractions. I saw there should be connected with the Institute ample grounds, beautified with flowers and planted with vegetables and fruits. Here the feeble could find work, appropriate to their sex and condition, at suitable hours. These grounds should be

under the care of an experienced gardener to direct all in a tasteful, orderly manner. **(1T 562.2)**

The relation which I sustain to this work demands of me an unfettered expression of my views. I speak freely and choose this medium to speak to all interested. What appeared in *Testimony* No. 11 concerning the Health Institute should not have been given until I was able to write out all I had seen in regard to it. I intended to say nothing upon the subject in No. 11, and sent all the manuscript that I designed for that *Testimony* from Ottawa County, where I was then laboring, to the office at Battle Creek, stating that I wished them to hasten out that little work, as it was much needed, and as soon as possible I would write No. 12, in which I designed to speak freely and fully concerning the Institute. The brethren at Battle Creek who were especially interested in the Institute knew I had seen that our people should contribute of their means to establish such an institution. They therefore wrote to me that the influence of my testimony in regard to the Institute was needed immediately to move the brethren upon the subject, and that the publication of No. 11 would be delayed till I could write. **(1T 562.3)**

This was a great trial to me, as I knew I could not write out all I had seen, for I was then speaking to the people six or eight times a week, visiting from house to house, and writing hundreds of pages of personal testimonies and private letters. This amount of labor, with unnecessary burdens and trials thrown upon me, unfitted me for labor of any kind. My health was poor, and my mental sufferings were beyond description. Under these circumstances I yielded my judgment to that of others and wrote what appeared in No. 11 in regard to the Health Institute, being unable then to give all I had seen. In this I did wrong. I must be allowed to know my own duty better than others can know it for me, especially concerning matters which God has revealed to me. I shall be blamed by some for speaking as I now speak. Others will blame me for not speaking before. The disposition manifested to crowd the matter of the Institute so fast has been one of the heaviest trials I have ever borne. If all who have used my testimony to move the brethren had been equally moved by it themselves, I should be better satisfied. Should I delay longer to speak my views and feelings, I should be blamed the more both by those who think I should have spoken sooner and by those also who may think I should not give any cautions. For the good of those at the head of the work, for the good of the cause and the brethren, and to save myself great trials, I have freely spoken. **(1T 563.1)**

[This and the following article are extracts from letters which I addressed to those at the head of the Health Institute, the first one, the first of May, 1867, and the second, in June following. E. G. W.] **(1T 564)**

God would have a health institution established which will in its influence be closely connected with the closing work for mortals fitting for immortality, one that will have no tendency to weaken the religious principles of old or young and which will not improve the health of the body to the detriment of spiritual growth. The great object of this institution should be to improve the health of the body, that the afflicted may more highly appreciate eternal things. If this object is not continually set before the mind and efforts are not made to this end, it will prove a curse instead of a blessing, spirituality will be regarded as a secondary thing, and the health of the body and diversion will be made primary. **(1T 564.1)**

I saw that the high standard should not be lowered in the least in order that the institution may be patronized by unbelievers. If unbelievers choose to come while its conductors occupy the exalted spiritual position which God designs they should, there will be a power that will affect their hearts. With God and angels on their side, His commandment-keeping people can but prosper. This institution is not to be established for the object of gain, but to aid in bringing God's people into such a condition of physical and mental health as will enable them to rightly appreciate eternal things and to correctly value the redemption so dearly purchased by the sufferings of our Saviour. This institution is not to be made a place for diversion or amusement. Those who cannot live unless they have excitement and diversion will be of no use to the world; none are made better for their living. They might just as well be out of the world as to be in it. **(1T 564.2)**

I saw that the view that spirituality is a detriment to health, which Dr. E sought to instill into the minds of others, is but the sophistry of the devil. Satan found his way into Eden and made Eve believe that she needed something more than that which God had given for her happiness, that the forbidden fruit would have a special exhilarating influence upon her body and mind, and would exalt her even to be equal with God in knowledge. But the knowledge and benefit she thought to gain proved to her a terrible curse. **(1T 565.1)**

There are persons with a diseased imagination to whom religion is a tyrant, ruling them as with a rod of iron. Such are constantly mourning over their depravity and groaning over supposed evil. Love does not exist in their hearts; a frown is ever upon their countenances. They are chilled by the innocent laugh from the youth or from anyone. They consider all recreation or amusement a sin and think that the mind must be constantly wrought up to just such a stern, severe pitch. This is one extreme. Others think that the mind must be ever on the stretch to invent new amusements and diversions in order to gain health. They learn to depend on excitement, and are uneasy without it. Such are not true Christians. They go to another extreme. The true principles of Christianity open before all a source of happiness, the height and depth, the length and breadth of which are immeasurable. It is Christ in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life. It is a continual wellspring from which the Christian can drink at will and never exhaust the fountain. **(1T 565.2)**

That which brings sickness of body and mind to nearly all is dissatisfied feelings and discontented repinings. They have not God, they have not the hope which reaches to that within the veil, which is as an anchor to the soul both sure and steadfast. All who possess this hope will purify themselves even as He is pure. Such are free from restless longings, repinings, and discontent; they are not continually looking for evil and brooding over borrowed trouble. But we see many who are having a time of trouble beforehand; anxiety is stamped upon every feature; they seem to find no consolation, but have a continual fearful looking for of some dreadful evil. **(1T 566.1)**

Such dishonor God, and bring the religion of Christ into disrepute. They have not true love for God, nor for their companions and children. Their affections have become morbid. But vain amusements will never correct the minds of such. They need the transforming influence of the Spirit of God in order to be happy. They need to be benefited by the mediation of Christ, in order to realize consolation, divine and substantial. "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek

peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” 1 Peter 3:10-12. Those who have an experimental knowledge of this scripture are truly happy. They consider the approbation of Heaven of more worth than any earthly amusement; Christ in them the hope of glory will be health to the body and strength to the soul. **(1T 566.2)**

The simplicity of the gospel is fast disappearing from professed Sabbathkeepers. I inquire a hundred times a day, How can God prosper us? There is but little praying. In fact, prayer is almost obsolete. Few are willing to bear the cross of Christ, who bore the shameful cross for us. I cannot feel that things are moving at the Institute as God would have them move. I fear that He will turn His face from it. I was shown that physicians and helpers should be of the highest order, those who have an experimental knowledge of the truth, who will command respect, and whose word can be relied on. They should be persons who have not a diseased imagination, persons who have perfect self-control, who are not fitful or changeable, who are free from jealousy and evil surmising, persons who have a power of will that will not yield to slight indispositions, who are unprejudiced, who will think no evil, who think and move calmly, considerately, having the glory of God and the good of others ever before them. Never should one be exalted to a responsible position merely because he desires it. Those only should be chosen who are qualified for the position. Those who are to bear responsibilities should first be proved and give evidence that they are free from jealousy, that they will not take a dislike to this or that one, while they have a few favored friends and take no notice of others. God grant that all may move just right in that institution. **(1T 566.3)**

Dear Brother F **(1T 567)**

My mind has been considerably exercised upon one or two points. When I get where I am writing letters to you night after night in my sleep, I then think it time to carry out my convictions of duty. When I was shown that Dr. E erred in some things in regard to the instructions he gave his patients, I saw that you had received the same ideas in many things and that the time would come when you would see correctly in regard to the matter. These are concerning work and amusements. I was shown that it would prove more beneficial to most patients to allow light work, and even to urge it upon them, than to urge them to remain inactive and idle. If the power of the will be kept active to arouse the dormant faculties, it will be the greatest help to recover health. Remove all labor from those who have been overtaxed all their lives and in nine cases out of ten the change will be an injury. This has proved true in the case of my husband. I was shown that physical, outdoor exercise is far preferable to indoor; but if this cannot be secured, light indoor employment would occupy and divert the mind, and prevent it from dwelling upon symptoms and little ailments, and would also prevent homesickness. **(1T 567.1)**