

In the Name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit

One God Amen



The Gospel According to Saint John the Evangelist Chapter 5

1 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **2** Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. **3** In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. **4** For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. **5** Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. **6** When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "**Do you want to be made well?**" **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." **8** Jesus said to him, "**Rise, take up your bed and walk.**" **9** And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. **10** The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." **11** He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" **12** Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" **13** But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. **14** Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "**See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.**" **15** The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. **16** For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.

17 But Jesus answered them, "**My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.**" **18** Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. **19** Then Jesus answered and said to them, "**Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.**" **20** For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. **21** For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. **22** For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, **23** that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. **24** "**Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.**" **25** Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. **26** For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life

in Himself, **27** and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. **28** Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice **29** and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. **30** I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."

31 "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. **32** There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. **33** You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. **34** Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. **35** He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. **36** But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish--the very works that I do--bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. **37** And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. **38** But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. **39** You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. **40** But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. **41** I do not receive honor from men. **42** But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. **43** I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. **44** How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God? **45** Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you--Moses, in whom you trust. **46** For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. **47** But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

General Interpretation:

Jesus and the paralytic:

After four months since the events of the previous chapter, during which Jesus stayed at Galilee, there was another major feast of the Jews (either Tabernacle, Passover, or Pentecost). In accordance with the Law, which required all males to represent themselves before God in the temple, Jesus went up there in obedience and compliance. It was also an opportunity to discourse with the people who would come to the feast.

Jesus chose to enter the temple through a gate called the Sheep Gate where there was a pool with five porches where a lot of people with infirmities used to lie waiting for the stirring of the water for whomever gets in the pool first was made whole again. This supernatural phenomenon most probably began right after the consecration of the Sheep Gate during the days of Eliashib the High priest as a sign that God had accepted his prayer (Nehemiah 3:1).

Jesus encountered a man who was paralyzed lying at the pool for thirty eight years waiting to be pushed into the water. Apparently, this man had neither friends, nor relatives nor anyone who was interested in his cure. However, Jesus cared, and upon approaching him, He asked the man if he wanted to get well. The man still had hope and explained his situation to Jesus; he confessed of his complete helplessness and inability to get into the water when it was stirred. So, Jesus ordered him to rise, carry his bed and walk, and that day was the Sabbath.

It was a strange thing what just took place. For in the temple vicinity where all the people and their leaders were trying to please God by obeying the Law, this man was walking around carrying his bed as if telling all those whose eyes falling upon him that he did not care for all these rules and regulations.

The temple regulations were so strict that people would face expulsion if they disobey, let alone break the Law in the holiest place. For this reason, this man's act, carrying his bed on the Sabbath, enraged the other worshippers' spiritual feelings to the extent they rebuked him. Perhaps his humble appearance stirred their compassion and stopped them from going further in their reproach. However, he was following the order of Whom Who cured him, for He was no ordinary man to end his sufferings of thirty eight years with just seven words¹.

The pool place was so crowded with people in need of healing; along with their relatives and friends helping them to get into the water whenever it is stirred that usually took place on the festive days. There were also the priests and the temple workers that prepared the sheep for the sacrifice offerings. All of this crowd made it hard for the paralytic man to have a chance to know Jesus on a personal level, especially when Jesus withdrew himself from the crowd. For this reason, he could not answer his

¹ According to the NKJ translation

accusers of who was it that told him to carry his bed. Yet, Jesus revealed Himself to him in the temple and warned him to sin no more.

With this revelation, the man went and testified to the Jews that it was Jesus Who healed him. But instead of glorifying God, the Jews wanted to kill Jesus for He, according to their sinful thoughts, broke the Sabbath.

The Works of the Father and the Works of the Son

In verse 17 our Lord explained to the Jews the homogeneity between the Father's and the Son's work, to which the Jew were enraged and wanted to kill Him. But, in verse 19 Jesus went further to ascertain His equality with the Father and challenged the Jews to accuse the Father of breaking the Sabbath (for He never rested as they incorrectly think), and if they could not, then why were they accusing the Son of breaking it?

These verses are investigated in greater detail in the Theological Interpretation section.

The bond between the Father and the Son:

In verses 20 -22, Jesus explains the love between the Father and the Son and as a result the Jews would see great works done by the Son. The Father raised dead in the OT through the prophets, so is the Son in the NT raised whomever He wishes. Also, the Father created the world through the Son, saved it through the Son and so will judge it through the Son.

In verses 23 and 24 Jesus explains that the Father gives the judgment to the Son, so that the honor given to the Father is given to the Son as well. In other words, the Father and the Son are equal in honor

Jesus the Giver of life:

In verses 24 – 26, Jesus explains that His mission is to give life to everyone who hears His voice. By His coming into the world, He reconciled man with God and through this reconciliation man can live again.

The “dead” mentioned in verse 25 are those spiritually dead who upon hearing the Son's voice and believing His word may live. Jesus explains that by His coming into the world, the hour has come for this to take place and even, upon natural death, there is no judgment but everlasting life.

Witness to the Son:

In the last part of the chapter (verses 31 – 47), Jesus mentions three witnesses to Him:

- *The Father: When Jesus was baptized, the Father testified: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matt 3:17)*
- *His Works: All the miracles He wrought and specifically the paralytic man that was just healed.*

- *John the Baptist*

In verse 43, Jesus warns them that they reject Him even though He has come in the Father's name, and will accept the Anti Christ who will come in his own name.

Finally, Jesus reminded them of the Torah in which Moses prophesied about Christ the Son of God.

Spiritual Interpretation:

Jesus and the paralytic: Hope and Trust

The Lord of the feast went up to Jerusalem to celebrate it with His people. Under the Mosaic Law, the Lord used strong winds, thunder and thick clouds to signal His presence to His people. But now under the new Law of love, He is physically present with them in the person of Jesus Christ. Far from His awesome and fearful presence in the Old Testament when none of the people could approach or dare to look, He entered the temple through the Sheep Gate humbly as the unblemished lamb, among great multitudes, reconciling them to Himself through His own sacrifice, He was about to offer, and to turn their eyes upon Himself as the real sheep gate for indeed He cried: "I am the gate for the sheep" (John 10:7)

By entering through the Sheep Gate, Jesus had to pass by the five porches as if to fulfill the Law and all its commandments realizing the perfect purification, for our sake, before entering the temple. Also, as the pool was used by the priests to wash and purify their sacrifices, so did Jesus go by the pool as both the High Priest and the sacrifice.

Just like Jacob in his old age lying on his bed and unable not move till he was told Joseph had come², this paralytic man was crippled and could not step one inch from his bed till Jesus came to him and healed him.

The Bridegroom had not yet entered the banquet of His feast upon meeting this disabled soul. He had compassion on it for being so long abandoned at the gate of the temple and not being able to join in the many feasts that came to pass during those thirty eight years of sufferings. The Lord shined on this poor soul and gave it back its freedom to enter the temple and to join in the praising and the blessing of the Lord Almighty.

Surely, He is not an ordinary Bridegroom who only cares for the reception, the honor He would get and the dignitaries that are present. Above all, He cares about the captives He sets free and the helpless to whom he stretches His hands and the sick whom He heals, so that all may be able to join in His banquet. For to such He came down to the world, so He may lift them up to heaven.

² Genesis 48:2

The Works of the Father and the Works of the Son

God worked for five days before creating His ultimate creation, mankind, the jewel of all His works. He created man on the sixth and made him ruler over all the world and He was very glad. After that, He rested on the Sabbath, yet man wanted to kill His creator on that day. With total ignorance and with their blind eyes, the Jews refused the healing of their paralytic brother. They shut their eyes and closed their ears to hear Him Who came to give them life after being buried in the graves of their sins. They persecuted Jesus not as an evildoer, but rather as a benefactor, just like their fathers who out of envy sold their brother Joseph to the Midianite traders.

Word Meaning:

Sheepgate - Which was next to the temple; so called, because the sheep were brought through it to be sacrificed.

Spiritual Life Application:

Jesus and the paralytic:

*There were lot of people in need of healing sitting around the pool waiting for the moving of the water. Yet, Jesus came specifically to meet the paralytic man who had no one to care for him. After 38 years, God finally visited that man when hope seemed to have ceased to exist. This is a powerful lesson for us suffering from the troubles of this world. No matter how long it may seems to us that our prayers return unanswered, God **will** look on us.*

Very few people can claim they have suffered physically, emotionally or psychologically as much as this paralytic man had suffered. Nevertheless, many of us complain, blame God and even threaten to leave Him for minor things we face daily in this world. So what can we learn from this man?

Certainly during his illness, this paralytic suffered loneliness and interaction with the outside world and the freedom to move freely to the point he could not even move his body into the water of the pool. Yet, he kept his peace as Jesus asked him if he wanted to be made well, even after thirty eight years of such agony. Not knowing Who Jesus was, he just wanted Him to help him get into the water and did not expect anything more. Now, the question we need to answer: Who among us can keep his or her peace after a minor worldly setback? We fear and become anxious for worldly matters and imagine that God has abandoned us and is not listening to our prayers. This man's peace, ought to convict our mistrust. for we know our Jesus the Lord of hosts, a knowledge that clearly this man did not possess.

Let us always keep St Paul's prayer before our eyes: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

Theological Aspects

Jesus and the paralytic:

The meeting between our Lord and the paralytic revealed the following facts:

- *God does not heal us without us and does not save us without us. He offers salvation, but it is up to us to accept it.*
- *God may use disease as a way of punishment for a particular sin, so that the sinner may be led to repentance and therefore salvation.*

The Works of the Father and the Works of the Son

Jesus' dialogue with the Jews disclosed a glimpse about two persons of the Trinity; mainly the Father and the Son

- *As the Father works on the Sabbath (e.g. sustaining the world) so does the Son saving men's lives³ even if it happens to be the Sabbath.*
- *The Father and the Son are equal in essence. The Jews clearly understood this relationship as they wanted to kill Jesus for "making Himself equal with God" (18).*
- *The works that the Father does, the Son also does for both persons are of the same essence and both have the same will. (19)*
- *In verse 19, Jesus explained that the Son does the same works as the Father and in verse 20 He goes on to say that the Son would do greater works than healing this paralytic man. As the Father raised the dead through the prophets in the OT, so did the Son raise the dead, as in the case with Lazarus. But unlike the prophets, He raised them through His own will (21) for He is the source of life as He declared to Martha "I am the resurrection and the life"⁴.*
- *There are no different works for the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit for the three persons work in unity, but each has His own job. For example, the Father sent His Son Who offered Himself on the cross to save humanity through the grace of the Holy Spirit.*

The bond between the Father and the Son:

- *The love of the Father to the Son is mutual, eternal with no beginning and is beyond any human understanding.*
- *The honor of the Father is the same as that of the Son for they are equal and of the same nature and of the same essence (22)*
- *As the Father has life in Himself, so does the Son. This means there was no time when the Son was not there, for the Life He has is essential, original and inderivative*

³ (Luke 9:56)

⁴ John 11:25

being equal to the Father. In other words, this life is not bestowed on the Son from the Father, but rather it is His will that the Son gives eternal life to whom He wishes according to the economy of salvation. (26)

- *Verse 26 also can be understood in terms of the eternal birth of the Son and of His will to give eternal life.*
- *Since the Son has the authority to Judge (23,27), He bestows everlasting life on those who believe in Him and the One who sent Him.*

Witness to the Son:

This chapter is no different than the rest of the Gospel in that it is full of deep theological revelation about our Lord Jesus of which He referred to and pointed them out to the Jews:

- *John the Baptist witness (31-35).*
- *His signs and works (36).*
- *His Father, and (37)*
- *The Scriptures (38-47)*

The purpose of these witnesses are to affirm that Jesus is the Son of God through Whom only salvation can be attained..

Church life Application

This chapter and in particular the story of the paralytic is well known in the Coptic Orthodox Church as it is read on the fifth Sunday of the Holy Great Lent.

When sin controls the soul, one becomes under its influence and loses his freedom to move freely and may be at the steps of the church but cannot enter, just like this man who was cast off at the temple's gate and could not enter it. So, by reading this chapter, the Church introduces her bridegroom to everyone incapable of entering the wedding. The bridegroom will heal every soul and set it free to join Him and to be with Him.

Early Christian Writers:

St. John Chrysostom, one of the greatest Early Church Fathers of the 5th Century, was born around 347 AD. St. John became a monk and was ordained a priest to serve the Church in Antioch where his eloquent preaching on the Sacred Scriptures earned him the title of "Chrysostom," meaning golden-mouthed." In 398, Chrysostom was called upon to assume the responsibilities of the Patriarch Archbishop of Constantinople⁵.

The following is just a sample of what John Chrysostom wrote regarding the sixteenth verse. It is a very beautiful writing concerning envy and how it can destroy souls:

⁵ Refer to Lesson 4 for more detail on the early Christian Patriarchates.

“Let us consider awhile how great an evil is envy, how it disables the eyes of the soul to the endangering of his salvation who is possessed by it. For as madmen often thrust their swords against their own bodies, so also malicious persons looking only to one thing, the injury of him they envy, caring not for their own salvation. Men like these are worse than wild beasts; they when wanting food, or having first been provoked by us, arm themselves against us; but these men when they have received kindness, have often repaid their benefactors as though they had wronged them. Worse than wild beasts are they, like the devils, or perhaps worse than even those; for they against us indeed have unceasing hostility, but do not plot against those of their own nature, (and so by this Jesus silenced the Jews when they said that He cast out devils by Beelzebub,) but these men neither respect their common nature, nor spare their own selves. For before they displease those whom they envy they displease their own souls, filling them with all manner of trouble and misery, fruitlessly and in vain. For wherefore do you grieve, O man, at the prosperity of your neighbor? We ought to grieve at the ills we suffer, not because we see others in good repute. Wherefore this sin is stripped of all excuse. The fornicator may allege his lust, the thief his poverty, the man-slayer his passion, frigid excuses and unreasonable, still they have these to allege. But what reason, tell me, will you name? None other at all, but that of intense wickedness. If we are commanded to love our enemies, what punishment shall we suffer if we hate our very friends? And if he who loves those that love him will be in no better a state than the heathen, what excuse, what palliation shall he have who injures those that have done him no wrong? Hear Paul, what he says, “Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3); now it is clear to every one that where envy and malice are, there charity is not. This feeling is worse than fornication and adultery, for these go no farther than him who does them, but the tyranny of envy has overturned entire Churches, and has destroyed the whole world. Envy is the mother of murder. Through this Cain slew Abel his brother; through this Esau (would have slain) Jacob. You indeed now kill not, but you do many things worse than murder, desiring that your brother may act unseemly, laying snares for him on all sides, paralyzing his labors on the side of virtue, grieving that he pleases the Master of the world. Yet you war not with your brother, but with Him whom he serves, Him you insult when you prefer your glory to His. And what is in truth worst of all, is that this sin seems to be an unimportant one, while in fact it is more grievous than any other; for though you show mercy and watch and fast, you are more accursed than any if you envy your brother. As is clear from this circumstance also. A man of the Corinthians was once guilty of adultery, yet he was charged with his sin and soon restored to righteousness; Cain envied Abel; but he was not healed, and although God Himself continually charmed the wound, he became more pained and wave-tossed, and was hurried on to murder. Thus this passion is worse than that other, and does not easily permit itself to be cured except we give heed. Let us then by all means tear it up by the roots, considering this, that as we offend God when we waste with envy at other men’s blessings, so when we rejoice with them we are well pleasing to Him, and render ourselves partakers of the good things laid up for the righteous. Therefore Paul exhorts us to “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Rom 12:15), that on either hand we may reap great profit.”