

Our God and our Father, as we come to Your Word this morning, we pray that You will speak to us. Send Your Holy Spirit to help me to speak clearly, boldly, and confidently as I ought to speak, and that Your Word will be unleashed here for the glory of Your name and the growth of Your kingdom and the good of Your people in Christ, we pray. Amen. Please take your seats. And if you would, turn with me in your copy of the Word of God to John's Gospel chapter 5. Read the first 18 verses. We note an increasing tone of antagonism between Christ and the ruling authorities in Jerusalem in these chapters. This is the Word of God. Please take heed how you hear. After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now, there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, an Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he'd already been there a long time, he said to him, do you want to be healed? The sick man answered him, Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool. When the water stirred up, and while I'm going, another steps down before me. Jesus said to him, Get up, take up your bed and walk. And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, It's the Sabbath, and it's not lawful for you to take up your bed. But he answered them, The man who healed me, that man said to me, take up your bed and walk. They asked him, who is the man who said to you, take up your bed and walk? And the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as it was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, see your well. Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, my father is working until now, and I am working. This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him. because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father and making himself equal with God. Amen. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the Word of God endures forever. So as we move into the fifth chapter of John's gospel, we meet the third sign. You remember in John, John loves numbers. There are seven signs, and there are seven I Am statements, all pointing to the reality of who Christ is. Sign number one was the wedding in Cana. That shows Christ as the great Messiah, who replaces the the lukewarm stagnant water the Jews use for washing their hands, and he gives them the wine of the very finest quality to wash their souls. He brings a new wine for cleansing. That's the first sign. The second

sign we saw at the end of the Canaan narrative, which is John 2-4, And at the end of John 4, we come back to Canaan, we see the official son is healed by the word of the prophet. That was the great complaint of Christ, that no one honors the prophet in his own hometown. Christ was being dishonored. They were happy to see his signs, but they didn't really want to hear his words. And in that, Christ sets forth this miracle where he speaks a word. He sends this man, you remember, back home with a word, a bare word, a word that travels through time and space, all the hundreds of miles back to where this man lived to, well, not hundreds, but long walk to, at least over 24 hours walk to get back home. And the word travels all that way before the man gets home and heals the son the very moment the word is spoken. So Christ is the prophet with a word that can pull people back from the grave. And this third sign today, we'll see Christ healing a helpless, hopeless cripple by the pool of Bethesda. And the focus in chapter 5 is Christ's equality with the Father. He is the Father's Son who rules with the Father's authority and judges with the Father's judgment and heals with the Father's power. But unlike other healers, the power doesn't just come through Christ. It comes from Him. And that marks him out altogether as different. And so Christ comes down to Jerusalem, or sorry, up to Jerusalem in this chapter, and he's walking onto the scene, a bit like an apex predator. I was watching this morning on the news, some brave guy had put a GoPro camera on the head of a lion. great white shark, and you could see it swimming through the ocean near the surface. It was quite spectacular footage, actually, with the sun coming through the waves and so forth. Glad I wasn't swimming up above. It was a brave marine biologist. All you needed was Campbell on the cello, and the picture would have been perfect with the duh-duh-duh-duh of the movie. And so, in a similar sense, Christ is the apex predator here on the scene. as he walks the line of the tribe of Judah. He's on the hunt, not to destroy people, but to save them, not to eat them, but to feed them, to heal them with his merciful power. And that's the thing you see about Jesus as he's on the move. He moves with such poise. He's never in a hurry. He's never rushed. He's never shoots from the hip. He's never reactive. He's always responsive. with saying the best thing, doing the best thing, at the best moment, for the best reason. And as he leans into the conflict here in John 5, 6, and 7 and following, not only does he not flinch, but he actually invites the conflict. He's coming in to the ring as the lion of the tribe of Judah, the one who gave the law to sinners, humbles himself to be judged by the law of sinners. Amazing condescension. an amazing mercy in our text this morning. So I see three things about Christ, three details about Christ here as he kind of walks down to the

tool of Bethesda. He is the one in charge. He's the great cosmic Christ. And you see that in his choice of the place, his choice of the man, and his choice of the day to begin the conflict with these religious leaders. that he chooses the place, his choice of the place. He could have gone anywhere. Christ, there were many sick people in Jerusalem and the surrounding villages. He could have gone to any. He could have healed any of them. But he chose to go to this place and to heal this man. He chose the place. After this, it was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now, there was in Jerusalem, by the Sheep Gate, a pool in Aramaic called Bethesda, which is five roof colonnades. Interestingly, I haven't got much time to spend here this morning, but the liberals in the 19th century had a field day with this, because the nearest pool to the Sheep Gate had no colonnades. And they went, ah, see, John was wrong, the Bible was wrong, wasn't written by witnesses. the guy who wrote John's gospel had never been to Jerusalem otherwise he'd never have said that the pool of Bethesda had five colonnades and they rubbed their hands with glee. Well fast forward 100 years to the early 20th century and a famous archaeologist and I forget his name should have written it down but he was doing excavation near that pool it's called the pool of Beth Beth Echra Ben Israel, I think is the name of that pool. But there's another, actually two more pools near it that are joined together, upper and lower pool, and they're surrounded on all four sides by a colonnade, which is a roofed kind of shaded place with porticoes around it, on all four sides by four colonnades. And in the middle, dividing the two pools, there was a fifth colonnade providing shade for the sick, just as John said. Yet again, the liberals were wrong, and God is right. No surprise there. But back to the place, right? Like any good storyteller, John zooms in on what he wants you to see. There's the pools over here, and Christ going in. But the camera zooms in on the sign Bethesda, right? Warning, no lifeguard on duty. Those who bathe here do so at their own risk. These waters may heal you, but they can also drown you. The sign, right? And then above the sign, there's another sign with an arrow pointing to the sheep gate. And he zooms in on that. He's not doing typology, in a sense. He's not typology. He's giving symbolism is the idea. He's, I've lost the word, but anyway, he's giving symbolism. He's not saying like the five porticoes or the five books of Moses, that would be crazy. He's not doing that. But he is giving you symbolism because these words have meaning, Bethesda, house of mercy, and the sheep gate where the sacrificial animals come in. It's a little bit like in the storytelling you've seen in the Westerns, where the family, they're kind of pushing the frontiers and they're going out west in the wagon and they go into this wooded hill area and they make camp. And as they're making camp, the

camera zooms in on a rattlesnake over on some rock slithering out of its slimy pit and up onto the rocks, and he shows you that. The family haven't seen it, but

he shows you it to get your worry juices going, right? And then mommy goes down to the river to get water, and daddy goes off to get some squirrels for breakfast. He brings his shotgun, and the camera zooms in as daddy picks up the shotgun. So not only are mom and dad not there, but the shotgun's gone too and Timmy and Johnny and their young sister Sally are playing in the in the campground and Sally hears a rattle and crawls over to investigate and you're going oh no because you know There's a rattlesnake across there. You've already seen that. He's

zeroed in on that detail. Well, here, John is zeroing in on the place where this is, Bethesda, which Bethesda means house of loving kindness, house of covenant mercy, which is interesting, as Christ is coming down to this place of covenant mercy. And then he tells you, oh, no, by the way, just over the street on the far side of the road, there's the sheep gate through which the sacrificial animals, the lambs and the goats are being brought in, in their herds, to be slaughtered in the temple. And so he begins with the place of mercy, Beth Chesed, and he has the price of mercy, these animals being slaughtered. that for anyone to receive mercy, someone's got to die. And it's interesting that John just finds ways to weave that into the story. Now, there's a superstition going

on here. And if you look at your verses, it goes verse 1, verse 2, verse 3, and then verse 5. And somebody asked me, where was verse 4? Well, there's this kind of, the paralytic speaks of the waters being stirred up, and people wonder, what's that? What's that mean? And it seems as if a later scribe in his Ligonier Study Bible, Version 101, wrote in, in between the middle of the verses, There was a legend back in Jerusalem in those days that there was an Artesian well that bubbled up, and when the water stirred, they thought it was an angel stirring the water, and the first person who gets in the water after the water stirred up by the angel was healed, right? And that's it. If you have a new King James this morning or a King James version, that verse is in your Bible. If you're in the ESV or some of the other more modern editions, you'll find it in the bottom as a footnote. And the reason is the earliest manuscripts we have of John's Gospel go back to the 3rd and 4th century AD. don't have the legendary bit

about the angel stirring up the waters. That seems to come into the scribal tradition later on. It doesn't undermine any of our faith in the Bible, because you can understand how a scribe might add that in as a clarifying detail, like a non-inspired bit in the Ligonier Study Bible, just giving you a bit of detail. And then later scribes just copied everything, including that, and it kind of, from that point on, it found its way into the textual to children

coming from that kind of paternal manuscript evidence. But the earliest manuscripts don't have verse 4, and so we don't put it in our Bibles because we don't think it was there when John wrote the original autograph. So the place of mercy And the price of mercy, that's the first point. Jesus chooses the place. He goes to this pool, near this gate, and it's the house of Beth Chesed, to show himself as the great healer coming, I think, to bring God's covenant mercy and a great cost to himself. And secondly, we see Jesus chooses the man. There was a whole host of people sick there. And Christ could have healed them all, but he didn't. He didn't have to heal any, but he did heal one, just one man. He goes up, and the text is very emphatic. In these days lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years. And when Jesus, now literally in the Greek it says, him Jesus seeing, lying there. Him Jesus seeing. It's very emphatic.

Jesus saw him in the particularity of his individuality. Jesus saw him and knowing. that he'd already been there a long time, he said to him, do you want to be healed? And the sick man answered him,

sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. Picture the scene. R. Kent Hughes so wonderfully puts it like this. What a pitiful crowd of broken humanity. It does not take much imagination to see those withered, wasted bodies, to smell the stench, to see the filth, and to sense the pathos of the old and young among that impotent, suffering humanity. It had to be a horrible, distressing sight, except for one thing. Jesus was there. And Jesus is here this morning

in this room, walking through the lampstands of His people, putting His hand on heads and hearts, rubbing His fingers through the fleece of His sheep, warning the goats to repent while it's still called today. He's here. Can you feel Him?

What a difference His presence makes in a room full of the ruins of Adam, blind, lame, invalids, just like these people that in their bodies they were this way, but by nature we're this way in our souls. We can't see as we ought to see. We can't serve as we ought to serve. Sin has lamed us. It's crippled us. We can't make ourselves better.

But Christ is here, and Christ comes to this man. And he knew him. He knew he'd been there a long time. 38 years, that's longer than some of you have been alive. He knows everything about you, your thoughts, before there's a word upon your lip. Behold, he knows it all. He's enclosed you behind him before he let his hand upon you. He knows you through and through. He knows the problems you're

facing, the burdens you're carrying, the stress you're feeling. It can't be hidden from him. And Christ comes to this man,

and he chooses to save, rescue, heal this one man. And why? I think it's a picture of his sovereign grace. He didn't need to save any, but he chose to save one. He could have saved all, but he chose to save one. And it's funny, the superstition was the first one into the water gets healed. And Christ heals the man who couldn't even get into the water. And everything about this man portrays his unworthiness of Christ. Think about it. He's helpless. He isn't just dead in the water. He can't even get to the water to be dead in the water. Two gamblers on the way to their gambler's anonymous meeting, looking over the wall. Oh, the water's been stirred this morning. I wonder who's going to get in first. They're not going to bet on this guy. crawling across the concrete around the pool trying to get to the water. He's not only helpless, this has been going on for 38 years. He had no one sitting there to help him get to the pool. I bet you also he had no one to help him get to the restroom. He's lying there in his own filth for 38 years. Think about that, 38 years. Years waiting. He's helpless. He's hopeless.

When Christ asks him, do you want to be made well, out come a long list of excuses. He has no idea he's standing before the Lord of heaven and earth, whose Word sustains the universe. He's lost hope. He's helpless, he's hopeless, he's also faithless. He doesn't have any faith. I have no man, he says. Do you want to be made well? Oh, I have no man. How common it is, Calvin says, for the eyes of our faith to fix themselves on the means of our deliverance or lack thereof. and thereby the logic of unbelief. If I can see a way out of my trouble, I'm okay, and if I can't, well, there's no way out, I'm in trouble. So for ages, we had our house sold in Greensboro. It was sold, done deal. Our neighbor's best friend came around, bought the house, Christian guy, great guy, in love with the house, bought the house, fantastic. He's moving to Greensboro for a new job, changing office. It's all going wonderfully. Couldn't find a house here. We searched for nine months, couldn't find a house. And eventually, in God's mercy, up pops a house, a perfect house in Blythewood. It fell through. It was sold. We couldn't get it. And then that sale fell through. And last weekend, we signed on that other deal. And we went under contract with the house. Praise the Lord. Next day, house in Greensboro falls through. The guy's job changed. And they wanted him to stay in the home office. He's not moving to Greensboro anymore. He doesn't need her house anymore. House sales falls through. Immediately, I think, it's OK. We'll put it under a realtor. And it's in a great neighborhood. It'll sell in no time. See, I'm putting my trust in the way I can see out. It's no problem. We'll get out of this mess. And then the whole clatter of people come to see the house yesterday. And the ring doorbell's a great

thing. You can listen to them leave your house. And they're leaving the house and one of them said, oh, there's a lot of grass to cut in this neighborhood, in this yard. I'm thinking, there is almost an acre of grass. I'm thinking, oh no. Then the next people leave and they say, the house across the way is a real mess. It's a really dirty, mingy yard across the way. I don't like that at all. I'm thinking, oh, no. And suddenly, I'm gone from the top of, you know, we'll sell this house in no time to, no one's going to buy this house. Because I'm just thinking about, you know, what I can see and what I can't see and all of it's mess. And our hearts work like that, don't we? And we're just like this man. If we can see a way out, we're OK. And if we can't, we're lost. And that's that man. No hope,

hopeless, faithless, and yet Christ came to him. But it gets even worse. Not just is he hopeless and helpless and faithless, he's also lost in his sinfulness. There are many sicknesses. that have no connection to our sin. All suffering comes from Adam's sin, no doubt there. But not every time we suffer in this earth is God thwacking us because we've done something wrong. Sometimes he is, but not always. But in this situation, Jesus comes to this man, and it's very sober. He finds him afterwards and says to him, see you're well. stop sinning, literally, that nothing worse may happen to you. And it seems that Christ is implying that this man's sickness was a direct result of his sin in the past, and that he needed to stop that malarkey or something worse could happen to him. Something, what could be worse than 38 years of lying in your own filth by a pool waiting for someone to help you down into the water? Outer darkness. The everlasting wrath of God.

The lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death. where there's wailing and gnashing of teeth and where the worm dieth not, that's something worse. And Jesus says to them, repent, for as bad as things were, they can get an awful lot worse, son, which is very, very sobering. And to make matters worse, the man himself doesn't actually show any evidence of repentance. It's interesting. We haven't got much time. We need to speed. But if you were to compare, go home this afternoon and read John 5 and compare it with John 9. Very, very similar. Two men in trouble. Christ sees them in both events. Christ heals them on both events.

The healing happens on the Sabbath day in both events. The Pharisees get upset and they go and ask the person, who healed you on the Sabbath day? Why are you carrying your mat? And so forth and so on. Exactly the same. The men don't know who Christ is. Christ goes back in both occasions and finds the man and meets him again, has a conversation with the blind man in John 9 and this man in John 5. In John 9, the man falls down and worships at Christ's feet and acknowledges he is the son

of man. In John 5, none of that happens. Why are you carrying your mat? And the man doesn't add him. You know, the woman you gave me made me do it. Don't blame me. The guy who healed me, it's his fault. That's what he's saying. And then when Christ goes back to him and gives him that warning, which was pretty bracing. Verse 15, the man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who healed him. It's a little bit like a downed paratrooper in the Second World War. And he maybe helps the former son out of a bear trap in the woods. And the wee boy goes back and tells the man he was made better, he was rescued. And the Gestapo asks the wee boy, who made you better? And the man said, it was that guy in the woods over there, the American airman. He's kind of ratting Jesus in. Reader Boss makes that point in his commentary. The healed man returns to the Jews, verse 15. He takes their side, remains in his old world, and does not let himself be led out of it by Jesus, neither by his healing, nor by the warning word of farewell. This involves more than weakness of character. It's a betrayal of people who will not let themselves be moved to enter the kingdom of God by Jesus, by his power, his words, no matter how liberating the effect of those words. This story represents a particular response to the gospel, one with which, without any further explanation, the evangelist unmistakably confronts his readers. He takes the benefits of the gospel, a new body, but doesn't trust the Christ of the gospel. So you see him, this man. He's helpless. He's hopeless. He's even faithless. He has no faith. And he doesn't even repent. He's lost in his sinfulness. There's nothing in this man to attract the Savior's attention. There's nothing in this man to attract Christ's mercy. But the wonderful thing about Christ, He's different from you and me. You and I need some beauty in the object of our love in order for us to love it. We don't love ugly people. But Jesus is different. He doesn't need goodness in you to attract him. He can love people and help people because there's enough goodness in him. It flows from him, does the beauty, does the glory, does the kindness, and goes down to this man and rescues him. Not from his sins. The man is lost. I don't think the man was ever saved. But Christ healed him and was kind to him. And if Christ would be kind to a man who's helpless and hopeless in his sinfulness, don't you think Christ will be kind to you? If Christ was kind to a man who had run from him to rat him out to his enemies, do you think Christ will reject you if you run to him this morning and beg him for mercy? He won't. Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His heart is big, and it's beautiful, and it's full of grace and kindness, and it doesn't flow up towards beauty. Well, it does. It flows out to his Father's beauty and to the Spirit's beauty, but it flows down. to the depths and can love people



even in their ugliness. Even this man, he helps this man. He shows mercy to this man in his kindness, and he'll show mercy to you this morning if you run to him. Christ chooses the place, and he chooses the man, and we'll come back next week. I sank the morning, the 8.30 service, trying to go to the day. He chose the day, and I'll not do that to you this morning. I'll come back next week. He chose today, though. Interestingly, he could have gone on the next day or the day before to heal this man and saved himself a world of trouble and even saved himself the cross. He could easily have avoided conflict with the Jews and saved himself crucifixion. But he incites conflict with the Jews, knowing it would lead to crucifixion because He loved them well enough and He loved you well enough not to sidestep the cross. Even this man, he didn't have to go back to this man and say, stop sinning, less something worse. The man didn't know who Christ was. Christ was free and clear, in and out, like a SEAL Team Six raid in Mogadishu. No one saw them come. No one saw them go. They were out and clean and free and clear. And Christ could have said nothing. But he loved this man enough, he went and warned this man about his sins. Even though it would be the spark that would begin the controversy, that would lead him to the fires of hell because of the hatred of these Jews. But he loved this man enough, he did it. And he loves you enough this morning, he will tell you the truth about yourself to save you from your sins. If you've ears to hear and a heart to believe and eyes to see, that Christ is. He's the way. The best you can be without him is lost. He is the truth. The best you can be without him is wrong. And he is the life. The best you can be without him is dead in your trespasses and in your sins, dead now and dead forever. But if you come to him, he'll not cast you out, I tell you. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word. will be in deep waters these next few weeks. Grant me grace, clarity, and simplicity to make it known clearly to these dear folk, and cause your word to abide in our hearts. For Jesus' sake we pray, in Christ's name, amen.