

# Lesson Five

*(John 4:43-5:18)*

The following verses mark the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee, a period which was about 16 months long and included one trip to Jerusalem (John 5). The author of this gospel says little about this period, perhaps because Matthew, Mark, and Luke had already gone into such detail about it (Matt. 4:14; Mark 1-6; Luke 4-9).

## **Jesus Heals an Official's Son**

*(John 4:43-54)*

<sup>43</sup>After spending two days there, Jesus left and went to Galilee.

<sup>44</sup>For he himself had said, "A prophet is not respected in his own country." <sup>45</sup>When he arrived in Galilee, the people there welcomed him, because they had gone to the Passover Festival in Jerusalem and had seen everything that he had done during the festival.

<sup>46</sup>Then Jesus went back to Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. A government official was there whose son

was sick in Capernaum. <sup>47</sup>When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to go to Capernaum and heal his son, who was about to die. <sup>48</sup>Jesus said to him, "None of you will ever believe unless you see miracles and wonders."

<sup>49</sup>"Sir," replied the official, "come with me before my child dies."

<sup>50</sup>Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live!"

The man believed Jesus' words and went. <sup>51</sup>On his way home his servants met him with the news, "Your boy is going to live!"

<sup>52</sup>He asked them what time it was when his son got better, and they answered, "It was one o'clock yesterday afternoon when the fever left him." <sup>53</sup>Then the father remembered that it was at that very hour when Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." So he and all his family believed.

<sup>54</sup>This was the second miracle that Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Jesus returns to his home territory in order to avoid an untimely conflict with the Pharisees back in Judea (4:1-3). He knows the Galilean mentality well enough to believe that they would not get as heated as the authorities at Jerusalem, but he also realizes that they will not receive him as their Lord, either (4:44).

And sure enough, these "home folks" are not as interested in him as they are in his power (4:45). They welcome him, much like children might welcome a magician. They want to be entertained and dazzled, not taught. They want wonders, not principles. They want a miracle worker, not a Master.

So Jesus moves on to the scene of his first miracle (4:46), only to encounter the same sort of attitude. One of King Herod's officials approaches Jesus and asks him to make a 20-mile trip to Capernaum in order to heal the man's dying son. The Lord's statement in 4:48 is no doubt addressed both to the worried father and to the curious crowd. Perhaps shrugging his shoulders in a gesture of frustration, he says: "None of you will ever believe unless you see miracles and wonders."

We must remember that Jesus performed miracles because he had compassion for the people and in order to confirm his authority. And John records this miracle for the express purpose of creating belief in Jesus as God's Son (20:30-31). Each miracle that Jesus performed was a "sign" (or symbol) which pointed beyond the immediate event to his authority over all things (Ephesians 1:21-23). And each miracle was a "wonder" which

caused amazement among the people. But these Galileans, even after witnessing several of his miracles (4:45), apparently are no closer to accepting Jesus as the Messiah than they were before.

In 4:49 the government official, a man who was used to asserting his own authority over others, humbles himself and begs for the help that he thought Jesus could provide. Perhaps this man had even heard that Jesus once said, "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks will receive, and anyone who seeks will find, and the door will be opened to him who knocks" (Matt. 7:7-8).

In any event, the anxious father swallows his pride and asks Jesus to heal his son. And Jesus does not disappoint him. Just as a human father will not give his child a snake when he has asked for bread, neither will God. For Jesus said, "As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:11).

Unlike Naaman, who expected Elisha to heal him with some dramatic ceremony (2 Kings 5:10-12), this man fully believes Jesus' simple statement, "Go; your son will live!" Here is an excellent example of how faith (i.e., deep trust) always results in obedient action. Jesus says for him to "go" and the man immediately heads home. It is a pattern which we are also expected to establish in our own lives:

Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice. Whoever listens to the word but does not put it into practice is like a man who looks in a mirror and sees himself as he is. He takes a good look at himself and then goes away and at once forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks closely into the perfect law that sets people free, who keeps on paying attention to it and does not simply listen and then forget it, but puts it into practice — that person will be blessed by God in what he does (James 1:22-25).

And the father is certainly blessed for faithfully obeying Jesus. For even as the man is rushing toward home, his son's high fever suddenly and completely disappears. The boy's mother, unaware of the real cause for his unexpected recovery, happily orders the servants to take the marvellous news to her husband.

When the servants finally contact the father, he asks them what time it was that his son recovered and learns that it was the *same hour* that Jesus had pronounced him well. If this man had acted

like many people today, he would have said: "Say, fellows, that was quite a *conincidence*. Now that I think about it, my son probably would have gotten well anyway. After all, there is no scientifically observable evidence to connect his recovery with what Jesus said. Isn't it just amazing what the proper food and a little rest will do!"

But that is not the reaction of this man and his family. John says, "So he and all his family believed" (4:53). They believed that Jesus healed their child by the power of God. They believed that Jesus was whom he claimed to be, the Son of God.

Today's so-called "faith healers" look feeble and powerless compared to Jesus. The Lord had no secret formula (nor even a standard procedure) for healing people. And Jesus never had to hunt an excuse for failing to heal a sick person, but healers today often try to excuse their failures by saying that the sick person did not have enough faith.

Interestingly, the *only* place in the Gospels where Jesus requires faith for healing is in Matthew 9:28. Of the 30 other cases in the Gospels, there is no indication of faith in 9 or them. Faith was absolutely impossible in four of them (Luke 7:11-17; John 5:2-13; 11:1-46; Matt. 9:18-26). And the presence of faith was very unlikely in the others.

The miracles of Jesus and the apostles are in a class by themselves. No one today has the power to heal *every* person brought before them. In his book, *Psychology, Religion and Healing* (p. 488), Leslie D. Weatherhead speaks as both a psychiatrist and a minister when he warns:

Many healing works carried on today, even in the name of religion, are only spasmodic and sporadic illustrations of ill-regulated and half-understood psychological phenomena. Many Christian Science cures, healing-mission cures and claims from Lourdes and other centres; many "healings" wrought often by cranks and charlatans, illustrate the power of the mind over the body, rather than the kind of thing Christ did. . . . We know that by examining what lies behind the cures.

What lay behind the healing of this boy was the power of God. It is the second miracle which John chooses to emphasize in this gospel, not that others had not been done (2:23; 3:2; 4:45).

Paul Butler says, "Between the incidents in Cana of Galilee (chapter 4) and His return to Jerusalem for the unnamed feast of 5:1, Jesus carried on a considerable ministry in Galilee. He returned to His home town Nazareth, preached in the

synagogue, and was rejected (Lk. 4); He called the four fishermen the second time and healed many (Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Lk. 5); He made a Galilean tour among great crowds (Mt. 4; Mk. 1; Lk. 5); He healed a leper (Mt. 8); a paralytic (Mt. 9); called Matthew (Mt. 9); and ran into controversies about eating and fasting (Mt. 9; Mk. 2; Lk. 5)" (*The Gospel of John*, I, 171).

### **The Healing at the Pool**

(*John 5:1-18*)

<sup>1</sup>After this, Jesus went to Jerusalem for a religious festival. <sup>2</sup>Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool with five porches; in Hebrew it is called Bethzatha. <sup>3</sup>A large crowd of sick people were lying on the porches — the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. <sup>4</sup>A man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. <sup>5</sup>Jesus saw him lying there, and he knew that the man had been sick for such a long time; so he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

<sup>7</sup>The sick man answered, "Sir, I don't have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first."

<sup>8</sup>Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk."

<sup>9</sup>Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking.

The day this happened was a Sabbath, <sup>10</sup>so the Jewish authorities told the man who had been healed, "This is a Sabbath, and it is against our Law for you to carry your mat."

<sup>11</sup>He answered, "The man who made me well told me to pick up my mat and walk."

<sup>12</sup>They asked him, "Who is the man who told you to do this?"

<sup>13</sup>But the man who had been healed did not know who Jesus was, for there was a crowd in that place, and Jesus had slipped away.

<sup>14</sup>Afterward, Jesus found him in the Temple and said, "Listen, you are well now; so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

<sup>15</sup>Then the man left and told the Jewish authorities that it was Jesus who had healed him. <sup>16</sup>So they began to persecute Jesus, because he had done this healing on a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup>Jesus answered them, "My Father is always working, and I too must work."

<sup>18</sup>This saying made the Jewish authorities all the more determined to kill him; not only had he broken the Sabbath Law, but he had said that God was his own Father and in this way had made himself equal with God.

The festival mentioned here was probably that of the Passover. This is a key verse in trying to establish the length of Jesus' earthly

ministry. If this reference is to a Passover then, since three others are also mentioned (2:13; 6:4; 13:1), his ministry must have spanned a period of about three and one-half years.

Please note that Jesus did not stay home from worship, as some people do today, merely because his parents made him go as a child or because there were too many hypocrites there. Instead, Jesus set the example for all those who claim to be his followers by humbly joining his imperfect brethren for worship at every opportunity.

The Greek word for "pool" (*kolumbethra*) means a body of water large enough to swim in. This may have been what today is called "The Virgin's Pool," a pool located south of where the Temple was located. It has been known to bubble over due to a natural spring nearby. Some ancient manuscripts call the pool "Bethzatha," "Bethsaida," or "Bethesda," and it just may be that all of them are correct. For the people of that day may have used all three terms to refer to this pool, just as people today often refer to New York City as "Gotham," "The Big Apple," or "Fun City."

The last half of 5:3 and all of 5:4 are not found in the best manuscripts and are, therefore, deleted from the TEV and many other recent translations. But among the sick people lying inside the colonaded areas (as partial shelter from the weather) is a man who has been sick for 38 long, miserable years (5:5). Jesus notices him and asks whether he really wants to get well, perhaps indicating that some people would live in sympathy than to be healed and have to face life like everyone else.

The man responds by complaining that he keeps trying to get down to the pool at the right time but others beat him to it. The passage leading to the Virgin's Pool is so narrow that those who were more mobile could easily force this man aside. So here is the case of a person who is about to be healed, yet his faith is still in the curative powers of the water, not in Jesus.

Jesus commands him to "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk" (5:8). And that is exactly what he does. There is no laying on of hands, no loud praying, no fainting and falling backwards. There is simply a command which, when obeyed, results in instantaneous healing. He didn't have to claim a healing and then wait six months for it to evolve!

The Jewish authorities, however, do not rejoice with their brother in his undeserved good fortune. Refusing to accept it as a miracle of God, they can only see his healing as a violation of their traditions. The original Sabbath prohibition was aimed at

restricting commercial transactions on Saturdays (Exodus 20:10; 23:12; 31:12-17), but the Jewish theologians had added numerous man-made rules to it. Jesus certainly recognized the validity of God's original Sabbath law, but he warned against substituting more rules for "the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice and mercy and honesty" (Matt. 23:23).

After the crowds disperse, Jesus searches for the man and finds him in the Temple. You see, Jesus was interested in this man's spiritual condition, as well as his physical health. Many sick people today make all sorts of promises to reform if they recover, but usually when they are healed they fall back in their old habits of life. Apparently Jesus sees a similar danger here that this man would resume his sinful living.

Jesus does not mention what sins this man is guilty of (5:14). But it is clear that sin is the source of this man's poor health, as it so often is today for those who engage in sexual immorality, smoking, gluttony, etc. It is not true that all suffering is the result of personal sin on the part of the sick person (9:3).

Was this man a coward for trying to get himself off the hook (5:15)? It is entirely possible that he believed that this man who healed him could just as easily take care of the Jewish authorities. He may have even thought his naming of Jesus was a courageous act of witnessing. But whatever his motives, this identification resulted in problems for Jesus (5:16).

The Sabbath (both the Hebrew word *sabbath* and the Greek word *sabbaton* mean cessation of activity) day was and is the *seventh* day of the week, Saturday. It was the day upon which God expected the Jews to gather together to worship him. But the observance of the Sabbath as a day of worship was voided on the day of Pentecost in 30 A.D. Since that day Christians have met for worship upon the *first* day of the week, Sunday or the Lord's Day. Nowhere in the Bible is Sunday called "the Christian Sabbath," nor are the various rules of the Jewish sabbath binding upon us.

It is strange that these prejudiced Jewish leaders understand the claims of Jesus better than many so-called Christian leaders. They properly interpreted his statement in 5:17 to mean that he is equal with God the Father. The Greek word *isos* means equal, and from it we get our phrase "isosceles triangle" which refers to a triangle with two equal sides. So it is that Christ is equal with God (1:1).

**Thought Stimulators on John 4:43-5:18**

1. How long did Jesus' Galilean ministry last?
2. Why is it that a "prophet" (or a preacher) is often unappreciated by the "home folks"?
3. Why did Jesus perform miracles?
4. Why did John record many miracles?
5. Do you ever find yourself failing to receive certain blessings from God because you simply fail to ask for them? Why?
6. Faith or deep trust in Jesus always results in what?
7. Think up and list some helpful steps to enable you to put into practice what the Bible teaches.
8. What is the end result of putting God's word into practice?
9. Compare Jesus' methods of healing with the methods of today's "faith healers".
10. Put yourself in the place of this sick boy's mother. How would you react — honestly, now — when your husband comes home and says that a fellow named Jesus healed him from a city 20 miles away.
11. How long was Jesus' entire ministry?
12. What are some of the "far out" excuses you have heard people give for not attending worship? What is their real problem?
13. Where was the sick man's faith centered when Jesus healed him?
14. How long did it take for the healings which Jesus pronounced to actually take place?
15. How is it that poor health is often (but not always) related to sin?
16. Is Jesus equal with God?