

The Mind of Christ - Lesson 59

June 17, 2020

Welcome to the Mind of Christ. This is section 49 in the list of sections on the chronology of the life of Christ. I am using A. T. Robertson's "A Harmony of the Gospels". This is a very, very long section covering John Chapter 5. The occasion is the healing of a man who is paralyzed but it opens the door for quite a bit of teaching that Jesus is going to do. This section is long and has some very difficult parts to it. So we will do this section in small bites so we can do 'justice' to the text. It may take us 3 to 4 weeks to cover the chapter.

I want to remind you that as we go through The Mind of Christ our intention and our purpose is to make sure we are acquiring the mind of Christ for the purpose of becoming like Him. It is part of the discipling process that if we are going to understand who Jesus is and follow Him, then we are going to have to **know** Him. That means knowing more than simply quoting what He says or being able to retell the story, but it must become an integral part of our own lives where we make it a part of our daily practice so that we may learn how to think like Him. So, this is an in depth study; it's more meat than it is milk.

Let's read the text. I won't read the entire chapter right now because it is very long and we will not be able to cover it all today, so let's read the first 17 verses because I think that will give us a good flavor for the 'story' part.

John 5:1-17

After these things 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 porticoes. ³ In these, lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered ... Please note when you read the second part of verse 3 and all of verse 4, in many Bibles you will see brackets or italics, or something indicating that these words were not in some of the better texts of the Bible, but we'll come back to that. It says there, [*waiting for the moving of the waters; ⁴ for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.*] ⁵ A certain man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?"

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, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." ⁹ Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk.

Now it was the Sabbath on that day. ¹⁰ So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet." ¹¹ But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" ¹² They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your pallet and walk'?" ¹³ But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him,

“Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.”

¹⁵ The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well and so

¹⁶ *for this reason* the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But He answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”

Okay, there are a lot of details to unpack here so let’s dive into this. He mentions here that the occasion is a feast of the Jews and Jesus is coming into Jerusalem, obviously to celebrate. Robertson, in his chronology sees this as His coming from Galilee after He had called Matthew, and after he had talked about fasting which we covered. Now He’s coming down into Jerusalem for this feast of the Jews. The feast itself is not named in the text but Robertson suggests, and it is reasonable, that it is a Passover feast; and if it *is* the Passover, it is the second Passover that Jesus has celebrated since His public ministry started.

The word “feast” here simply means a solemn feast or a public festival. It is especially used in relation to the Passover. Reading His life, it seems Jesus attended all the *required feasts*; in other words, those required by Moses and the Law. It is interesting to me that His disciples are not mentioned as being with Him, nor His family mentioned. We should not assume anything by this, but they aren’t mention in this story.

When John says, “After these things”... he is not specific, but in his context, he has just referred to the ministry in Galilee so it is logical to say that after His ministry work in Galilee, He came to Jerusalem for this feast. When it says, “coming up to Jerusalem” that is about the terrain since Jerusalem is on a hill, so almost anyone who comes to Jerusalem has to ‘come up’ to Jerusalem.

He mentions the **sheep gate**. This is an internal gate to the Temple area; it’s not a gate of the city or the outer wall. It suggests that this is a gate through which sacrificed animals are brought. John describes the pool near this gate as Bethesda. You may recognize that we often name hospitals “Bethesda”, and there are some cities called “Bethesda”. This pool was discovered in the 19th Century. The name means “House of Mercy” or “Grace”. It is interesting that the word for ‘mercy’ here is “hesday”, in light of the discussion we had in **Hosea 6:6** in the call of Matthew’s story when we talked about Hesed. This is the same root word as hesed. The Hebrew was likely more Aramaic, the common language of the Jews at the time.

The five Porticoes mentioned are porches that surround the pool. The word “pool” means ‘to swim’ or ‘to dive’; a place where anyone may swim. It may be a pond or a pool. I’m not exactly sure what the function of this pool was; it could be a public bath or a swimming pool. Those who congregated there are described as *the sick, the blind, the lame, and the withered*. The sick are those who are powerless, they’re infirmed. Metaphorically it could be those who are in doubt or have some kind of hesitation. It is the same word that is used in **Romans 15:1** to describe someone who has a dispute or is weak in some kind of way.

The idea of ‘the *withered*’ in this text is the “dry land”. It is used in **Matthew 12:10** of the man whose hand was “withered”, also In **Mark 9:18** in the NASB it uses the phrase “stiffened out” so “to make one stiff or withered”. The King James Version says “he pineth

away”. There is a loss of life or elasticity like an old wine-cloth or old wineskin as we mentioned in our last story. It’s used for people who have lost elasticity in their muscles ... The Nestles’ Text omits verses 3b through 4. The New American Standard Bible sets this apart in brackets. This is the section that is not “considered to be” a part of the best manuscripts. That’s why you may find them in brackets or sometimes down at the bottom of the page or left out completely. However, the sentiment of what is inserted there is found in verse 7 in an uncorrupted text ... **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”**. Verse 7 suggests that there is some activity concerning the water that will lend them to believe in its healing properties. It says, “When the water is **troubled**” or “**stirred up**”, meaning when the water is **agitated** or **troubled**. For other examples where this word is used is **Matthew 2:3** “**When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.**” When Herod heard of Jesus’ birth he was troubled or stirred up. In **Matthew 14:26** when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the Sea they were frightened, stirred up or disturbed. **John 12:27** says Jesus soul became troubled in view of the hour being at hand. In **John 13:21** Jesus became troubled in His Spirit in thinking of the one who would betray Him. In **Acts 15:24** in a letter sent from Jerusalem to Antioch it acknowledges that some of those from Jerusalem sent without authority “disturbed” you with their words, unsettling your soul. So we can ‘stir people up’ in both good ways and bad ways by what we say. In **Galatians 1:7** we read, “**Some who distort the gospel are disturbing you.**” Again, the waters are disturbed; they are stirred up; they are unsettled.

So, what is this troubling of the water? Someone thought they should explain it by adding to the text and their explanation was that ‘an angel of the Lord was doing it providing healing for whoever got in first’. Of course, this supernatural explanation sounds plausible and would explain why this man and others were there. But is it true or merely conjecture based on the word in verse 7 (the word ‘stirred’) there? So, if not this; what stirred the waters? How did the waters become stirred if it wasn’t an angel?

I can think of many natural means by which it might ... like the release of air in the pockets beneath the ground, but this would not explain why so many gathered there except for maybe some superstition they may have had. This occurs in places all over the world and is attached to many different religions. I guess there is no way to really **know for sure** what was going on in the Bethesda on that occasion.

The fact is that the man was there and he had been sick for 38 years ... and that’s a very long time! And Jesus is the One who sought him out for healing ... but why him? Why did Jesus look for this particular man? Others were there. Nothing is said about their being healed.

It was, though, the Sabbath ... and the Jews were watching. Jesus tells him to ‘take up his palate and walk’ and **this broke the rules!** Jesus slips away leaving the man to fend for himself with the Jewish leaders. Later we will find that Jesus is going to return, and He engages with the man and He engages with the Jews on that occasion. So let’s talk about all these.

Thirty-eight years is a long time. One year longer than Brenda and I were married (when I wrote this back in 2011). Perhaps he was born this way, we don't know; or he contracted a disease in infancy. He was sick long enough to confirm that he was 'actually' sick. Did Jesus go specifically to him knowing that this was the one who would receive healing that day or did He merely happen upon him? We don't know exactly why Jesus picked this particular man out.

Jesus asked him the key ★ question: "Do you wish to get well?" The word 'well' here means sound or healthy, of good health of the body or it can even mean 'sound teaching' or 'well teaching' or 'sound doctrine'. Again, I must ask what I cannot totally know. Was Jesus feeling sorry for one afflicted, and depending on a superstition to heal him? If so, why didn't Jesus attack the superstition and tell all those sitting around the pool to go home? Often, I am amazed at what Jesus does **not** do as much as what He **does** do.

The focus comes to be on that fact that *that was the Sabbath Day*. That becomes the whole focus of this story. Surely this man wants to get well or why else would he come there daily to the pool? I just thought of this ... but I wonder; how did he get there on the Sabbath Day? Who carried him there ... or did he stay overnight? Did he not go home on Friday night and just stay over until the Sabbath day because no one could carry him home? I don't know.

Was it the "fellowship of the miserable"? Was this where all the miserable people came to just hang out every day? Did the ailing just sit around and talk about how bad things were, or where they hurt, or was this kind of like a nursing home? Was the man simply dropped off each day? Did he have food and water, and how did he go to the bathroom? Who were his friends or family members who brought him there each day? Can you imagine how much better their life was not to have this daily task?

Whose prayer did Jesus really answer in healing this man? And had this man been in a situation where he had seen people over and over again get into the water first and be healed and maybe there were others who were in line next and maybe Jesus just passed over them. You know, Jesus is offering freedom from the only life this man has known for thirty-eight years. The man's answer shows his dependence on others. He never says he wants to get well; he says, "I have no man to put me in the water." Certainly there are those who have no choice but to depend on those who could help "put them in". But others come to expect others to do it for them. I'm not saying that's the case for this man but it brings up just this idea. This dependence creates a social mess that cripples the society that it leans on for help. Perhaps Jesus' question was a 'reality' check. Do you ***really want*** to get well? If so, why do you keep doing, day in and day out, the same thing expecting different results? Why do you keep coming here? If you really want to get well, why do you keep doing this because you've been doing this for a really long time and nothing new has happened? This is 'insanity'. Jesus was this man's alternative, and this was his 'new day'. And I add that ***Jesus is our alternative to insanity.***

According to the text, the man never really answered Jesus' question. Instead he gave his reasons, his excuse for being in this condition after such a long time. But he didn't say he wanted to be well. Nothing was said of his willingness or his faith. He didn't even know who Jesus was! This appears to be merely a sovereign act of God without obvious

conditions, like choosing Jacob over Esau, as in **Romans 9:6-12**. It was God's sovereign choice. Did Jesus deliberately look for someone to heal on the Sabbath just to cause a ruckus? Was this man's healing a 'prop' in a larger discussion? This brings up perspective. To the man, this was all about his being made well. He was the center of attention. The important thing about that day to him was that his life was totally changed. It was a new beginning. But from Jesus' perspective, what was more important was the opportunity for the teaching that followed. The healing was a means to a greater end. It was an attention-getter. And it led to a much bigger discussion than just simply healing someone. The discussion that followed would benefit millions while one man's healing, no matter how dramatic, would benefit only a few.

Jesus told the man to do three things. First, he told him to 'arise', second he told him to 'take up your palate' and thirdly, 'walk'... a simple, everyday task. But what "seemed" simple turned very complicated, very quickly.

The Jews had rules. Of course, the backdrop for all the rules is God's statement, "to keep the Sabbath holy". God was the One who said to keep the Sabbath holy. The Sabbath began a few minutes before sunset to sunset until you can see three stars in the sky. All of this is 'modern day'. Festive meals are eaten Friday night, Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon. Shabbat means resting or ceasing from labor. References to it from the Old Testament are **Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 16:26 and Exodus 20:8-11**. In modern Judaism the Sabbath commemorates these three things: redemption from slavery, the creation of the universe, and a taste of the Messianic age. Generally, the Sabbath was to be a time of celebration and refraining from even *talk* about work. It is thought that the work from which man rests is creative work or in changes made to the environment.

Jeremiah 17:21 is important here. "Thus says the Lord, "Take heed for yourselves, and do not carry any load on the Sabbath day or bring anything in through the gates of Jerusalem.²² You shall not bring a load out of your houses on the Sabbath day nor do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers." The prohibition here is not to carry a load on the Sabbath or do any work. If you read this text, it's easy to see why the Jews were concerned about this man carrying his mat on the Sabbath. Jeremiah is very plain that the simple act of carrying a load on the Sabbath has dire consequences (verse 27). "But if you do not listen to Me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying a load, and coming in through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates and it will devour the palaces of Jerusalem and not be quenched."

In the narrative that talks about Sabbath-keeping a couple of themes stand out. One is the *authority* that Jesus has over the Sabbath. That's one of the themes that stand out here. Jesus is the LORD of the Sabbath! And there is the *hypocrisy* of the Jews condemning their fellow Jews, while doing *similar* things that benefit themselves; removing an animal from a ditch, for instance. So, these two things stand out. One is the *authority* of Jesus as being **Lord** of the Sabbath. The other is the *hypocrisy* of the Jews in doing things on the Sabbath that they condemn in others. And then the third theme; and that is the *purpose* of the Sabbath which was for man's benefit, and not to be used as a hammer to beat them.

But with all this said the challenge to understand how God wants us to handle a command like Sabbath-keeping and to be able to see it like Jesus does is admittedly very hard to do. So, since Jesus is God and has the *authority* to do whatever *He* pleases with the Sabbath laws, does not mean that we can do the same thing at will.

The lame man was right to take up his mat and walk on the Sabbath regardless of any of the laws that might pertain to this situation simply because **Jesus** had the authority to tell him what to do. Now, at the time, the man didn't even know who was talking to him, but He may have thought that if He had the authority to heal him, maybe He had the authority to tell him to take up his mat.

Jesus has demonstrated this authority by *forgiving sins* on earth and by *healing*; it was a suspension of natural law for the good of man. But what are we to do? Does Jesus' practice give us permission or authority to do the same thing? Jesus suspended the law at times, but not at *all* times. He was selective. Should we assume that we should be selective? What complicates the matter for me is that Sabbath-keeping is not just 'Mosaic Law' but precedes *all* law. It is rooted in creation! But since it was incorporated into Mosaic Law, does the canceling of this law also cancel the obligation for Sabbath-keeping? What is Jesus' real mind on this subject? Another complication for me is that Jesus seems to roll the idea of God and Jesus still working into the narrative. In **John 5:17** He talks of He and God still working and He rolls that into the discussion now. ¹⁷ *But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."*

For the man who was healed, it was simple, just as it was in **John 9**. The man who healed me told me to carry my mat. Case closed. Anyone who can heal has the authority to command. Was he afraid Jesus could take the 'healing' away if he did not obey Him?

Well, the Jews focused on the question of "who", and this was the right question. They put some energy or "work" into the investigation. As long as they did not 'pick up' something, they were okay ... I guess. Could Jesus be looking at the *spirit* of the law instead of the specific *violation*? Could the folks in Jeremiah's day be so greedy, or many other things, to give any consideration to God or His will on His day?

The Paralytic did not know who healed him. John says that Jesus 'slipped away' ... He withdrew. Literally, the word means "to swim" ... (He swam out; he escaped by swimming; generally to escape). I don't think He swam across the pool of Bethesda, but He "got clear of the place" ... He went somewhere else. But later, Jesus found the man in the Temple. What was he doing there? Could it be that for thirty-eight years he was not allowed in the Temple because of his defect? Perhaps he dreamed of going to the Temple for the last thirty-eight years. If some personal sin was the reason for his paralysis, he had thirty-eight years to think about his sin and its consequences. We don't know *how old* this man was but, let's say he was 58. Maybe at age 20 he did something very, very stupid or very wrong. Perhaps he was with another man's wife who came home early and was beaten by the man and a vertebrae was ruptured and damaged his spinal cord making it impossible for him to walk. Well, I guess that *could* have happened. But Jesus **does** connect the man's paralysis to sin. In verse 14 He says, "*Behold, you have become well. Do not sin anymore so that nothing worse may befall you.*"

Remember in **John 9:2-3** the disciples tried to connect the man's blindness to his parents' sin or to his sin, but Jesus said that sin was not the man's reason for his blindness. The word "well" here is the same as in verse 6, "**Do you want to get well?**" Now He says "you have become 'well'".

This is the journey that we all have to take. When Jesus is in it, we can move from one to the other. In other words, Jesus can come to us in our sin, or our sickness and can ask, "do you want to get well?" and we can move to the place of Him saying, "you are well". But I wonder if "well" has sunk in by this point to the man. Some do not do "well", "well". Many know how to do "sick" so well, that they don't know how to do well when they are. (I hope you followed all of that.)

Or could the "sin" that Jesus is referring to not be the *cause* of the man's condition, but the attitude, perhaps, that he developed **because of** the condition? Perhaps he had become negative; critical, resentful, bitter, angry. Maybe he was crippled because of child abuse and he has stewed on that for 38 years and was emotionally crippled by it. ***Well, let's rethink the sin connection.***

Does Jesus actually say that there is some specific sin that caused this man's condition? Not necessarily. Jesus could be saying that in addition to this man's physical problem, he has a more serious problem that can cause much greater consequences. **Whoever** or **whatever** caused his paralysis is nothing compared to the sin that he has in this effect. Later, Jesus will tell the woman caught in adultery to "go and sin no more". This is a repentance message. 'Sin no longer'... just as he was done with the sickness because of healing Jesus provided, so now he can be done with sin by the power and forgiveness that Jesus provides.

So what could be worse than being paralyzed for thirty-eight years; trapped in a body that does not work; cannot enjoy life as God intended; cannot serve to be productive? Hell is worse, but shy of that, could the consequences of sin that come as the result of his new ability be worse? You see, a paralyzed person is not immune from sin even if it is a sin of the heart. Attitudes, words, sinful thoughts, manipulation, etc. may be very real and prevalent in his life, but mobility...now that he is well...now that he can walk and he can move around provides him with an opportunity to do 'wrong'. Perhaps he was resentful of someone who did not take care of him, or a wife who left him because of his sickness. He could, now, confront the hurtful ones and do what might land him in jail...or worse! It's better to point to the fact that sin can cause worse things to happen. There is a definitive and definite consequence to sin. He says in the text that there are things that can **befall** you, or **happen** to you, or come into existence, or into your life, to be created, to take place or come to pass.

Often today we hear phrases like "It happens". To Jesus, what "happens" is a consequence of something else; and the 'something else' is often rooted in the will of the person to whom it happens, and the will of another who affects the happening of another. In either way, the 'happening' is someone's responsibility; but we say, sometimes, "It happens". We sometimes mean that it's **not** a consequence! It's **nobody's** fault! It merely happens! You know, I don't really like this phrase ... it happens. It's a cultural cue of our time. It speaks to anti-responsibility.

So, how might I respond if Jesus said directly to me with my specific sin-set, “Do not sin anymore?” What if he told me to not sin anymore like in **John 8:11** when He told the adulterous woman “Go and sin no more”? Now, she had specifics in mind. Was she the ‘other’ woman or was she spurned woman. It doesn’t matter why she was in bed with someone who was not her husband. But if Jesus looks someone straight in the eye and says, “Stop sinning”, what does He mean by it? And is His expectation that the person can stop sinning? Is it reasonable? Does Jesus underestimate the struggle of the person who may have, especially, a sin addiction?

If a person says, “Later” or “someday” (meaning I’ll stop later or someday) what do they think will change that will make it ‘doable’ *then* as opposed to **now**? If the sin is stress-induced as coping mechanism, yet the sin itself carries its own stress because we realize we are being disobedient, then there is never a better time than now to break the cycle. And certainly when Jesus says there is a **worse** circumstance that’s coming, if it is not dealt with now, then this worse circumstance will surely produce more stress. So, it is less stressful to stop sinning **now** and replace it with a healthy way of coping with the stress.

All of this is reasonable, but sin-responses are never reasonable regardless of all the mental justifications we pull up on our screens to make it alright. And now, in this man’s life, he had the constant stressor of being chronically ill. Jesus removed it immediately and replaced it with the *stressor of responsibility*! Again, it was stressful to be sick for 38 years, but it’s also going to be stressful to be healed and have many more opportunities to do good or to do evil. Now the man had choices he did not previously have. Choices bring stress, but choice also relieves stress because we have actions that we can take. Decisions often eliminate stress.

Now, if all of this is true, and if Jesus knew this and more, then reducing his instructions to a simple command was like giving a person a medication and not bothering to tell them how it works. It is an act of *trust* ... that if I take the med, I will be better. So the words, ‘**stop sinning**’ are like a med that will make me better for **all** the reasons I mentioned and more. Now, all I need to do is **swallow** it because it now becomes something I can **do** or **not do**.

So, once the man knew it was Jesus who made him well, he went and he told the Jews. No motive is assigned to the man. In verse 12 they had asked him “[Who is the man who said to you, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk?’](#)” but he didn’t know. The blind man healed in John 9 had more of a dialogue with the Jewish leaders, but this man was also clear that it was “Jesus” who made him well ... who told him to take up his mat and walk. And from the look of things, everyone was all in the same location at this point.

In verse 16 it says that the reason the Jews persecuted Jesus was because He did the healing on the Sabbath. The focus was not only about ‘the healing’ but the day of the healing. To persecute somebody is to put something in rapid motion. To pursue, to follow, to pursue in a particular direction, to follow eagerly, to endeavor earnestly, to acquire someone, to pursue with malignity is to persecute. So when someone is persecuted, they are being followed; they are being pursued or they are being chased. In **Matthew 5:10-12** Jesus teaches, “[Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute.](#)” Blessed are the

“*persecuted for Jesus’ sake*” and are promised a reward for the prophets were also persecuted. In **Matthew 5:44** Jesus said, “**But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...**” We are to pray for those who persecute us. In other places, Jesus warns his disciples that this will happen to them. It seems that those who follow Jesus will ‘be followed’ or pursued malignantly.

It is interesting ... the response to the healing on the Sabbath was the interpretation of the violation *clearly implying that Jesus did, in fact heal the man*, but was worthy of persecution, not some other sanction as ... rebuke, correction, teaching; but why persecution? They could have rebuked Him; they could have corrected Him; they could have taught Him better; but why did they persecute Him? Were the Jewish leaders that threatened by what He did? Was it because Jesus might lead *others* astray, like the paralytic? *Jesus is the persecuted God!* It takes a lot of nerve to persecute God, don’t you think? And how do you do that?

How could you possibly think there will not be some problems with this? But they weren’t thinking. Tradition and legalism *react*. A thought gets stuck in someone’s head, and once that sticks it becomes complete justification for a reaction. Jesus is doing good for a man trapped in his own body for 38 years; but **all they** can see in it is “*it’s the Sabbath day*”.

“On the Sabbath” gets replaced with “in the worship” sometimes when we begin to talk about things or some other prohibited circumstance. Jesus came to teach us that **it is always the right time to do good**.

We’re going to stop here and we’ll pick up again next week in **John 5:17** and we’ll flesh this out some more about the Sabbath Day. But this is a good start for understanding how all this works.

Remember in closing, that this is to try to attain the mind of Christ. This is a very difficult subject here. It is hard ... difficult for us to understand how Jesus looked at this occasion, looked at this day, looked at what He did, and yet it challenges us; it stretches us, in order to try to understand how Jesus thinks. And it’s in those times that we are also stretched to become more like Him.