

From a talk by B. Cobbey Crisler
 Book of John, A Walk with the Beloved Disciple

(From Transcription Notes with earlier permission from Janet Crisler)

over-distance what? Light, magnetism, electricity, sound, things like that. Action-over-a-distance. Jesus said humanity better consider *another* candidate for action-over-a-distance, a candidate that will eventually replace all. Namely, prayer. Prayer-action-over-a-distance.

You didn't have to be physically near someone to have someone healed. What freedom that announces to mankind if there's no physical prerequisite for healing! Healing can occur *regardless* of time and space (and time and space are no obstacle to healing), it occurs mentally or in thought. Prayer travels faster than a man could walk from Cana to Capernaum. The healing got there before the father. The healing was there just as Jesus indicated in John 3:13, "*No man ascendeth up to heaven except he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.*" This is how Jesus regarded the son of this nobleman, and then proved his vision.

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Do we have any evidence of what Jesus said was the summary of his mission? Proof that angels were ascending and descending on the Son of Man (John 1:51)? In the case of the nobleman's son, it is healing. There is a verification. There is a *semeion*, or an identifying mark, or feature of Jesus' theology. Completely leaving the old definition of religion for the new, a practical form of theology which brings with it results.

5:2

John 5:2. We're now at the famous incident at the "Pool of Bethesda." Near what serves as an occasional sheep market today, there is still a pool that has been excavated, that has archeological remnants which suggest the five porches. There was apparently, if this is the correct location of the pools, a structure that had two pools, each with two porches. Down the middle was a fifth porch with pools on either side. It may have been the ancient equivalent of a hospital.

John 5:4. There's some indication that it might have been at some point in its history a spot that had been associated with Aesculapius, the pagan founder of medicine, and that this superstition may have gotten to the point *"that those who stepped into the pool when the water was troubled would be instantly healed."*

John 5:3. At least *"an awful lot of people were waiting around for that event,"* so that the news must have spread that this occurred.

5:5 John 5:5. Here we run into a man who doesn't seem to be going anywhere. *"He'd been there for thirty-eight years."* I'm sure that many of us would feel for him. We all have been sitting around our own pool of Bethesda waiting for something to happen, something miraculous, something fateful. We have all waited for something unexpected from the outside to lift us out of a condition that we haven't made too much of an effort to do anything about.

There was an environment there that did not help the problem. As a matter of fact, here's how Professor Dodd describes it. I like this:

"There is another story about a man who had given way to a chronic disability, and for years had nursed a grievance which excused him from doing anything about it."

John 5:7, *"Someone else always gets in before me."* If that sounds like a familiar excuse, then Bethesda isn't so far back in history. So he translates Jesus statements this way. Do you want to recover? That pinpoints it, doesn't it. Do you see how that translation exhibits Jesus dealing with the thought of the patient. Where must it happen?

If communication from God to man must work, where must we work? In the thought of the receiver. Do we want to recover? That almost sounds silly to people who have been in a longtime condition, but it may very well be the core of the issue. Do we really want to be healed? Or have we become so settled into our condition that for thirty eight years, we just sit there with our friends and talk about our operations? Misery loving company is a quality that attaches itself to human nature.

5:6 John 5:6. Here's how Dodd again translates Jesus' question and then his demand on the patient. *"Do you want to recover?"*

John 5:8, "*Then pick up your bed and walk.*" Jesus wasn't about to volunteer to pick up his bed for him. 5:8

That says a lot. How else do we know Jesus but to study his thoughts, his words, his methods, his messages, the intent, the *logos*, not just the word but the thought behind it? What is required for the healing of a paralytic condition that had lasted practically a generation? It's the very thing that he thought he couldn't do, to pick up his bed and walk. Do you want to be healed? "*Let there be light!*" (Genesis 1:3). That's permission. Let it in.

John 5:9, "*Immediately the man was made whole.*" We don't have any sense that there was a convalescent period. "*He took up his bed and walked.*"

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5:9

But did Jesus fail to check the calendar?

Don't you think that Jesus would have noticed it was the Sabbath day? He could have said, "Look, fellow, you've been there thirty-eight years. Wait one more day and I will heal you. I don't want to get anybody angry with me."

He brushes aside the religious, ritualistic concept that the Sabbath was more important than man. He proves that it was not a rule established by God because God does the healing. If, therefore, God was healing this man on the Sabbath, the calendar apparently made no difference. And it made no difference to Jesus.

But look what it did to man's definition of religion. It was thrown into consternation because it touched upon something that had been written down and accepted as a law. Later, in Mark 2:27, Jesus makes his own comment on it: "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" And God is working on the Sabbath as well. So, the "rest" which is indicated that God had on the seventh day, and which the Sabbath symbolizes, could not have been inertia.

Even the rabbis of Jesus' day recognized that. So he was on fairly safe rabbinical ground if they wanted to argue the point (which they usually did). The rabbis of Jesus' time, from indications that we have, were already saying that rest on the seventh day meant inertia.

If that was so, then everything would come to a stop. But everything images God, and therefore, God could never stop action.

Jesus simply imaged that and showed that this was one more example of the angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man, lifting the Son of Man out of ritual. It certainly seems evident that before Jesus is able to heal many of these people he runs right smack up against the theologically encrusted tradition.

5:10 John 5:10. So after they debate about whether it was lawful for the man to carry his bed, the poor fellow is already carrying his bed obediently.

John 5:11, "*He said, Don't blame me. There's a fellow back there that said, Take up thy bed and walk.*" So that's what I'm doing. He didn't even know who had healed him.

Notice in John 5:14, "*Jesus is saying, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more.*" This was another aspect to healing before it was complete, dealing with the *thought* of the patient. Jesus often views himself in the role of physician. Remember, he said, "*A man that is whole needs not a physician*" (Matthew 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31). "*Sin no more*" was something that man had to comprehend in thought to avoid a recurrence.

So, we're equipped to receive and to act on the instructions given us via communication. All we need to do is tune in.

Notice the priority with which he dealt with the patient's thought. "Do you want to recover?" OK great, we've got something we can work with.

"Do you really want to?"

"Do you want to give up this 38-year record of horizontalism?"

We have an even longer record of that. Stop and think of how the "bed" dominates our lives, especially after a long day. All the way from birth to death, in sickness and in sleep. There is so much happening and looming, so large in this concept of bed, that when Jesus healed the man, he made him take up what had dominated him for thirty-eight years. He said, "You dominate that bed and get out of here!" Jesus spoke with some degree of authority. And that's just what happened.