

# ☒ LIFE OF JESUS

March 14, 2021 | *The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda*

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Read John 5:1–17

Pray that God would help you meet Jesus in this passage.

## THIS WEEK

### ☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The lame man and the Jewish leaders failed to encounter Jesus. The Jewish leaders missed encountering Him because they could not see past their own view of God's Messiah. The lame man missed Him because he simply was not looking for Him.

### ☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

This week, we will examine how others have missed encountering Jesus. Their negative example will help us ensure we meet Jesus and are better able to lead others to Him.

### ☒ MEDITATE

*“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working’” (John 5:17).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

👤: *Have you ever missed something significant (i.e., a celebrity or a major spectacle) because you were not looking for it?*

Q: *Why is it difficult to recognize someone you have not seen for a long time?*

The phrase “hidden in plain sight” is used to refer to objects that, even though they are not actually hidden, are easily overlooked. Often, they are missed because they defy expectations. The person seeking the object overlooks it because they are anticipating something else. Sometimes, however, objects “hidden in plain sight” can be missed simply because people are just not looking for them.

In this week’s passage, it appears as though Jesus the Messiah is hidden in plain sight. On two occasions, Jesus was overlooked by those who should have been seeking Him. He did not match the expectations of the Jewish elites who were looking for the Messiah. And the lame man did not see Him simply because he was not expecting to encounter Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. In both cases, Jesus should have been recognized by the sign He performed, but nevertheless, the Savior of the world was missed by those who needed Him the most.

Q: *What measures would you put into place to ensure that you did not miss something you were expecting?*

Q: *How can Jesus continue to work in our lives even after we are saved?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – This lesson focuses on two negative examples of missing Jesus Christ. The passage shows us what not to do, but what positive steps can we take to ensure we encounter Jesus Christ in a life-changing way? The best way to recognize what you are looking for is to be intimately familiar with it. Agents who are employed to spot counterfeit money do not attempt to keep track of every possible variance between a counterfeit bill and an authentic one. Instead, they focus their energy on becoming so acquainted with the real thing that they can spot the fake one immediately. The same principle works in the Christian life. The best way to encounter Christ and not miss Him is to be so acquainted with Him and how He works that you will automatically recognize His work in your life.

## || UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+ John 5:1–17 shows us the tragedy of missing Jesus. We can miss Jesus by failing to see Him work or by simply not looking for Him.

# 1. ENCOUNTERING JESUS

## 2. OVERLOOKING JESUS'S WORK

### 3. OVERLOOKING JESUS HIMSELF

#### GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will investigate John 5:1–17 to see how these verses encourage us to lay aside our idols and pursue Jesus.*

## 1. ENCOUNTERING JESUS

### ■ JOHN 5:1–9

Q: *Why was this man lying by the pool at Bethesda?*

Q: *Whose power was this man relying on to solve his need?*

“God helps those who help themselves.” This once popular phrase seems to be declining in use, but it still resonates with the ideals of determination and independence. It encourages us to act when we might otherwise be driven to idleness. While it may be a successful slogan for much of life, it does not appear in the Bible and can be quite misleading in terms of the gospel. And it is the gospel that takes center stage in this man’s encounter with Jesus. This man had struggled with an unspecified illness for thirty-eight years. His main reprieve was lying in a pool named Bethesda. When the waters of this pool were stirred, it had a therapeutic effect. This man had been relying on his own power to cope with his infirmity, but his ability to cope had run out because he was no longer able to gain access to the pool.

These verses have remarkable parallels with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel teaches us that Jesus took on our sin debt, a debt we could never pay. Our best laid plans to cope with our sins always fall flat. Like the man in this story, we simply cannot help ourselves when the issue is our sin in the face of an infinite God. Jesus, on the other hand, is able to take the full penalty of our sin upon Himself. The only thing we need to do is to confess our need for Him and turn from our sins.

Q: *In what ways have you tried to help yourself out of the penalty of your sins?*

Q: *How has your own power failed you in addressing your sin?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Many people believe that the answer to their sin problem lies within them. Like the man in this story, they rely on their own strength to address an issue that can only be resolved by the transforming power of Jesus Christ. If this describes you, turn your focus away from yourself and to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. No matter how much you try to help yourself, you will never be able to overcome your enslavement to sin and the condemnation you deserve because of it. Jesus Christ, however, lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial death on your behalf. You can never have the power to cope with sin, but His resurrection from the grave is a demonstration of His abundant power to cope with the sin of the world, including yours.

Q: *Is verse 4 missing in your Bible? If so, why?*

Q: *How can variations in the Bible give you confidence in how the Bible has been preserved throughout the centuries?*

If you are a careful reader of the Bible and use a modern translation, you will notice that occasionally the Bible skips a numerical verse. This occurs at verse 4 of this week's passage. At other points, you may see a note in the margins of your Bible giving another wording for what appears in the text. These are often indicators of a variation in the manuscripts used to produce our Bibles today. The Bible was originally written down by hand by an author. This original handwritten document was then copied multiple times before becoming lost to history. To produce more Bibles, copies were made from the copies of the original, and then even more copies were made from those copies, and so on. When documents are copied by human hands, there are inevitable errors in the copying process. Sometimes, the scribes copying a manuscript added a sentence or a phrase in their copy to help explain something in the text. This appears to have been the case in the passage for this week's lesson. In an effort to explain why the pool of Bethesda was stirred up, a scribe included a note that an angel descended to stir up the waters. This note somehow became part of the biblical text and was enumerated as verse four. When this scribe's manuscript was compared to other manuscripts, modern biblical scholars were able to determine that it is unlikely that verse 4 was originally part of the Gospel written by John.

Q: *What precautions should you take when encountering variations within the Bible?*

Q: *How would you respond to someone who denied the veracity of the Bible because of variations such as the omission of verse 4?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Variations in the Bible should never cause us great concern for the veracity of the Bible. In fact, the presence of these variations should give us more confidence in the truthfulness of the Bible because you would expect for variations to have occurred as the Bible was copied over the course of several centuries. The absence of variants in this case would lead us to conclude that someone threw away all the manuscripts that did not agree with their favorite manuscript. In taking these variations into account, it is often helpful to read more than one translation of the Bible. This will help you see the variations in the Bible’s manuscripts. Another good principle is to avoid drawing theological conclusions from statements which may or may not have been part of the original text of the Bible. For example, verse 4 in this passage describes an angel descending to stir up the waters in the pool of Bethesda. It would be wrong to draw conclusions about how angels work in the Bible based on what we read in this verse.

## 2. OVERLOOKING JESUS’S WORK

### ■ JOHN 5:10–12

Q: *What drew the attention of the Pharisees in this passage?*

Q: *Why is the response of the Pharisees so callous?*

Although they had witnessed the healing of a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years, the Jewish leaders were more concerned with the breaking of the Sabbath law. The Sabbath law was a part of the covenant God made with Moses. Thus, the Sabbath law certainly was an important concern among the Jewish people, but the Jewish leaders appear to have elevated it above even the health and wellness of their own people. This healing performed by Jesus should have been an obvious indication that God had worked supernaturally in the man’s life, but the Jewish leaders overlooked the obvious work of God because they were more concerned with their traditions. By their rigidity in keeping the Sabbath law, they effectively placed God in a box where they could put limits upon

how He would act in any situation. But God will never stay within the limits we place upon Him, and we are in danger of overlooking how God is at work in our lives and in the world if we persist in making tradition a binding authority over Him.

Q: *How can you avoid placing God in a box?*

Q: *How can you balance prioritizing people over traditions?*

**APPLICATION** – God has a way of busting out of the artificial limits we place on Him. At the same time, we can always depend on Him to act in a manner that is consistent with His character. The key is for our view of God to be shaped by Scripture, because Scripture is where God has revealed Himself to us most fully. If the Jewish leaders had questioned their understanding of Sabbath and sought to ground it in the Old Testament rather than their tradition, they would have seen that the Bible does not prohibit picking up one’s mat on the Sabbath. That prohibition came from their own traditions. This week identify some of your basic beliefs about God and how He has ordered His creation. Tie these beliefs to Scripture so that you can defend what you believe about God to others. In our current context, one of the most important areas we need to focus on is Christian morality because this is the area our culture finds most abrasive and challenges us on most frequently. If you struggle to defend your beliefs with Scripture, then it is possible that you are boxing God in with tradition and personal preferences rather than allowing Him to act in accordance with His own character.

### 3. OVERLOOKING JESUS HIMSELF

#### ■ JOHN 5:13–17

Q: *How did the man respond to being healed by Jesus?*

Q: *What was the man’s response when he learned it was Jesus who healed him?*

As tragic as it would be to miss Jesus’s work in the lives of others, it is even more tragic to miss Jesus Himself. But that is what happens to the man in this passage, a development not expected by the reader. We expect the

person receiving healing to receive Christ as well, but that does not appear to be the case in this instance. If we are anticipating the man would become an ardent follower of Christ, we may tend to give him the benefit of the doubt when reading his actions, but the text gives little warrant for this approach. He never thanked Jesus for healing him. He apparently made no attempt to even form a casual acquaintance with the man who had healed him. Furthermore, upon learning Jesus's identity, he callously turned over the information to the Jewish opposition. When the story of this man is compared to the story of the blind man in John 9, there is a clear contrast between their respective relationships to Jesus.

Since we are not told explicitly that the man had little interest in becoming a follower of Christ, we are also not told why that appears to have been the case. Based on what we do know of him, it is possible that he was overcome with worldly interests. He was initially consumed with being healed from his infirmity. After he was healed, his interests did not transfer to Jesus but to the additional worldly interests that were now open to him because he could move freely. Love of the world, whether in a sick person or a healthy person, leaves no room for the love of Christ.

❓: *Why are you praying for God to heal you from the illness you are suffering?*

❓: *If God did heal you, how could you glorify Him the most after being freed from that disease?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Whether in times of sickness or times of health, becoming consumed with physical and/or worldly concerns diminishes the value of Christ. Do not misunderstand the point being made here. God is concerned about the trials and hardships we face, both spiritual and physical. It is right for us to take physical health concerns to God in prayer. But if our goal in being healed is the freedom to pursue worldly matters that would pull us away from God, we are no better off if God heals us than if He does not. If you are sick and praying for healing, ask yourself the hard question concerning what you would use your health for if God were to grant it. If you are well and praying for continued health, ask yourself how you will continue to glorify God in both wellness and sickness.

❓: *What did Jesus say when reengaging the healed man in the temple?*

❓: *How are Jesus's words consistent with the claim that Jesus has paid the penalty for all our sin?*

Jesus's words to the man are challenging to understand, for several reasons. They appear to be aimed solely at the man's sense of self-preservation rather than any sense of accountability toward God. They could also suggest that we bear the judgment of our sins through earthly turmoil rather than Him bearing the penalty of our sins on the cross. Finally, Jesus's words insinuate that suffering is the result of sin, but there are certainly instances in which suffering does not stem from sin and others in which sin does not lead to suffering. How can Jesus justify making this correlation?

The difficulty posed by these words, however, is due to Jesus addressing sin in a manner less familiar to us rather than any inherent theological difficulty. Both the Old and the New Testaments provide examples of people suffering as a direct result of their sin (Numbers 12:10; Acts 5:5, 10). Our sins certainly continue to adversely affect us regardless of how those sins are wrapped up in Jesus's atoning death. We need not take Jesus's words as an absolute in this instance. Finally, it is possible that the words "nothing worse" may not be pointing to further ailments but to the final judgment.

Q: *How do Jesus's words deter us from continuing in sin?*

Q: *How do Jesus's words encourage us to pursue holiness?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In His death and resurrection, Jesus paid the full penalty of our sins and credited us with the full extent of His righteousness. The Bible never suggests, however, that our justification from sin means we should no longer be concerned about the continuation of sin in our lives and in the world around us. Personal holiness glorifies God and frees us to serve God and others. Commit yourself this week to rooting out a sin you frequently struggle with. Begin with God's grace. Ask Him to convict you of the sin you need to fight and give you the power to fight against it. Consider enlisting others in your fight against sin. Accountability partners can help you through prayer and words of encouragement.

## NEXT STEPS

We are often our own biggest obstacle to seeing God work in our lives and in the world around us. We tend to get wrapped up with our own challenges and traditions to the point that we are blind to what God is doing in the world. This week commit to taking actions to step beyond yourself to see God working. Read a short biography of a Christian figure from the past to see how God was at work in their lives. Consider reserving some time to volunteer



at a ministry addressing the needs of others such as a shelter or a crisis pregnancy center. Seeing God work often requires us to move beyond our normal routines and the things we have grown comfortable doing.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

God, you are at work every day in my life and in the world around me. Make me aware of how you are at work in our world.

Father, I have become consumed with worldliness to the point that I cannot see how you are working. Help me to step out of myself so that I can see beyond my current circumstances to what you are doing.

Father, forgive me for making tradition more important than you.

Lord, keep me from the sins that are ruining my life.

