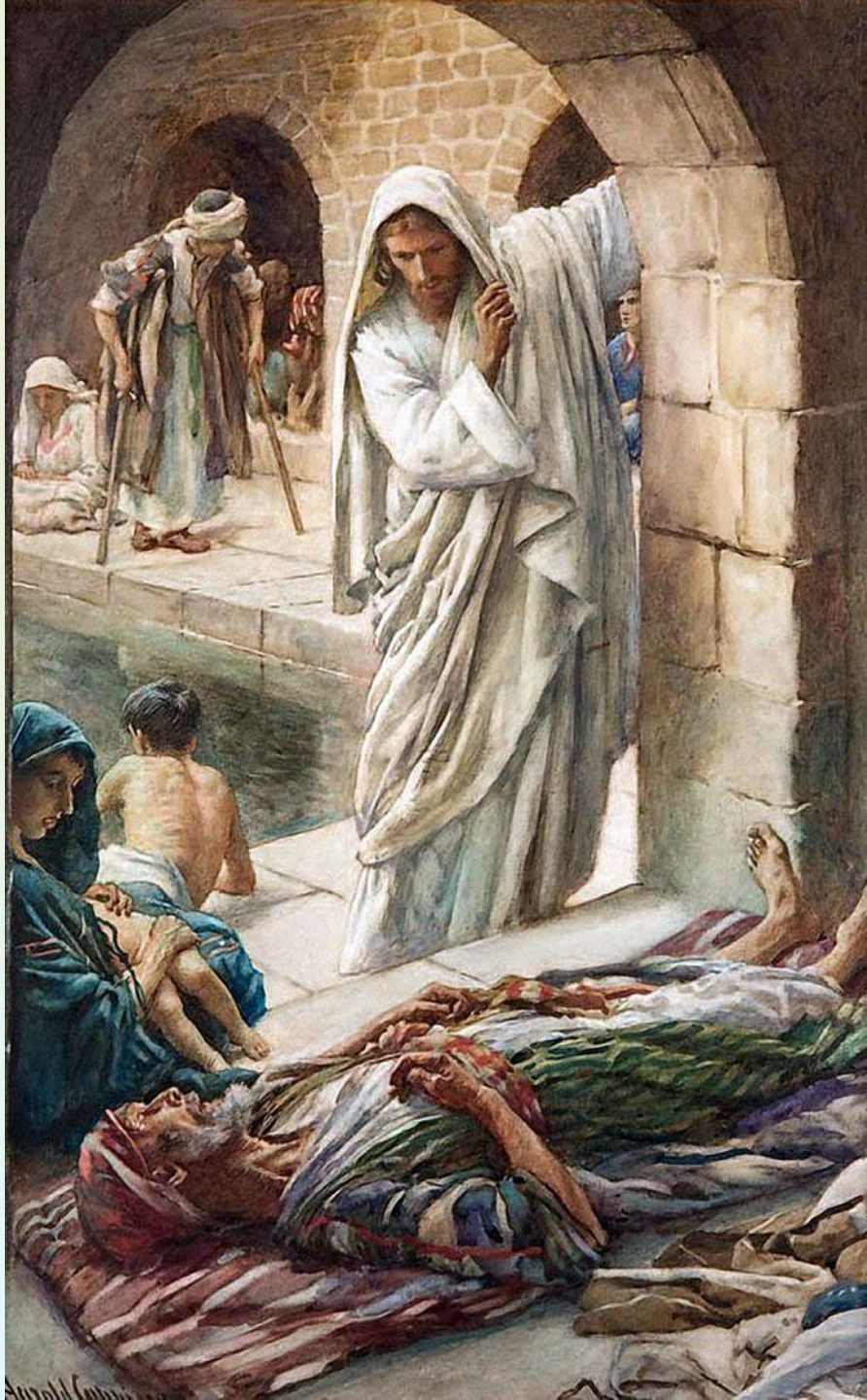


What Do You Really Want? John 5:1-9

*“Jesus Heals the
Lame Man At the
Pool of Bethesda”
by Harold
Copping, 1907*



John Chapter 5 challenges us with several questions that require us to confront who Jesus really is and who we really are.

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

The story of the healing of lame man by the pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-12 is intentionally set parallel to the healing of the blind man in John 9. The fact that the event and the aftermath take up the discussion of the full chapter in both cases is a clue to the importance of these 2 events in John’s Gospel. They are parallel in a number of respects.



“Christ Healing the Sick Man At the Pool of Bethesda” by Carl Bosch [1834-90]

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

The Parallels:

- They take place in Jerusalem
- The healings involve water in contrasting ways.
- One person feels no real need for healing. The other is born blind and desires healing.
- One is guilty of sin, the other is not.
- One is unconcerned about who Jesus is, the other is committed to who Jesus is.
- They both bring the negative attention from Jewish leaders.



“Christ Healing the Sick Man At the Pool of Bethesda” by Carl Bosch [1834-90]

John 5:1-9 [NKJV]

1 After this 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, {NU-Text reads Bethzatha. } having five porches. 3 In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed,* waiting for the moving of the water. 4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.* {NU-Text omits waiting for the moving of the water at the end of Joh 5:3, and all of Joh 5:4. }

5 Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been *in that condition* a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to be made well?”

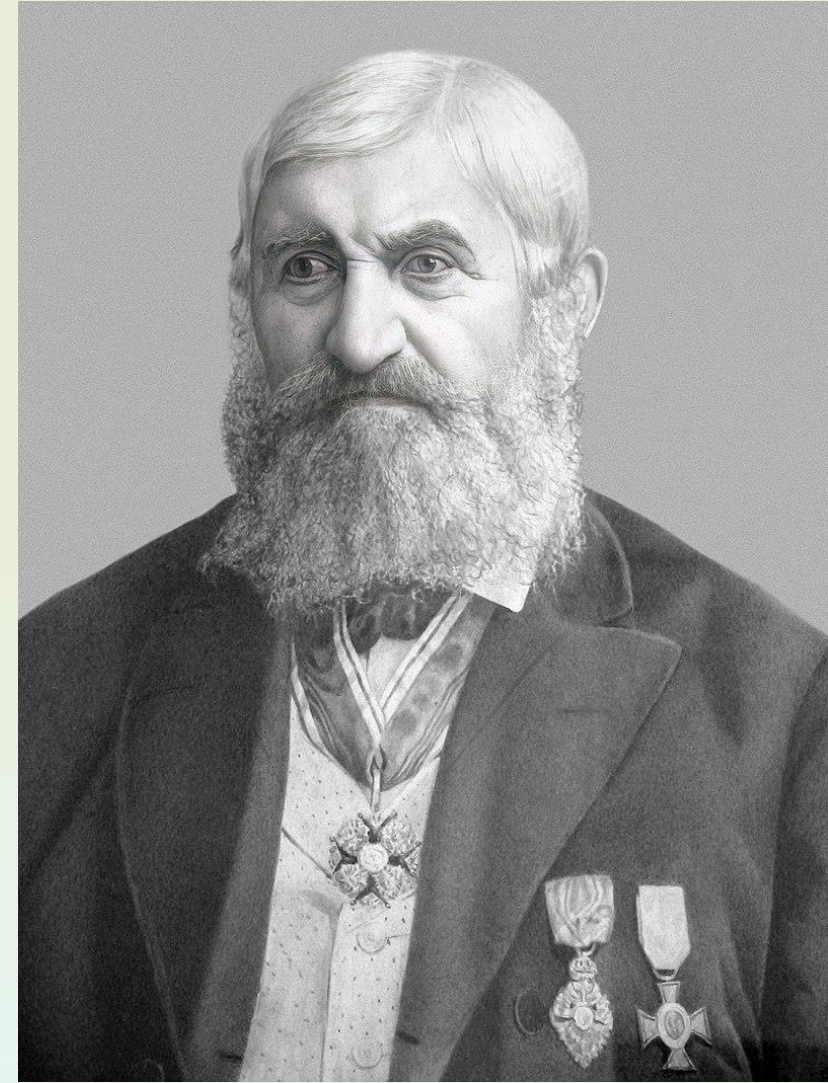
7 The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.”

8 Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.”

9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

Conrad Schick in 1846 at 24 years of age moved to Jerusalem from Germany. He was a young architect, who was also a deeply committed Christian. By the time of his death he had become a celebrated architect, philanthropist, missionary and archeologist. He was responsible for establishing a leper hospital and as well as a medical hospital to treat the people of Jerusalem despite their religion. He was instrumental in discovery of the Hezekiah Tunnel and other important archeological discoveries. By the time of his death he was respected and loved by, Jews, Muslims and Christians living in Jerusalem.

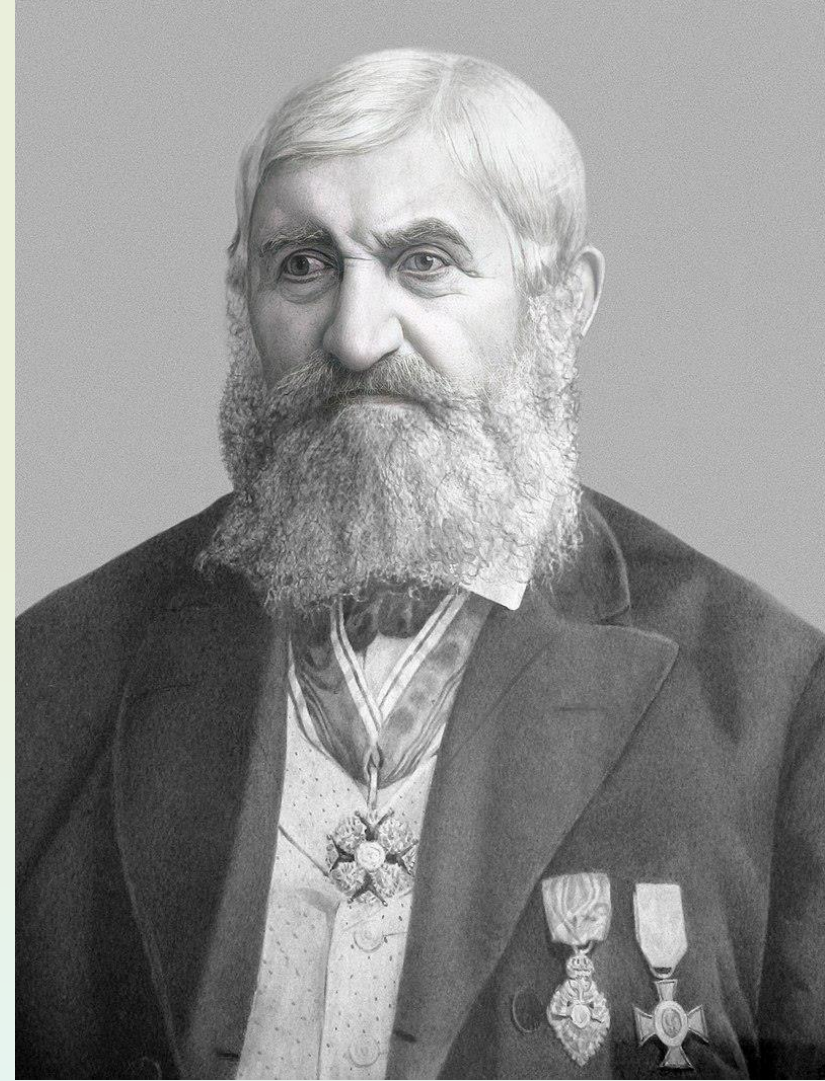


Conrad Schick [1822-1901]

Sept. 19, 2021 -Garrison COG

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

Late in his life he discovered the ruins of a Roman era pool in a northeast Jerusalem neighborhood. At the time most scholars believed the story of the Pool of Bethesda was a fabrication based on a southern pool in Jerusalem, created centuries after the time of Christ. Mr. Schick believed due to the location of this deep cistern [near the location of the “Sheep Gate of Jerusalem”] that it was likely The Pool of Bethesda. Few people took his speculation seriously especially since the structure was said to have 5 porticos which meant to most people that it was a structure shaped like a Pentagram.



Conrad Schick [1822-1901]

Sept. 19, 2021 -Garrison COG

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

This discovery would be the first challenge to the scholarly view that developed in the 1700's of a late 3rd century origin for John's Gospel. But it would have to wait until 1964 for an excavation of the site to prove Mr. Schick correct and indicate that the person who wrote the Gospel of John was a 1st Century Jew who had seen Jerusalem before its destruction in AD 70.



Site of the Pool of Bethesda in 1911

Psalm 37:1-7 [ESV]

- 1 « *Of David.* » Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!
- 2 For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.
- 3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.
- 4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
- 5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.
- 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.
- 7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

It was discovered that the 1st century pool had 2 pools, a deep water cistern which supplied a shallower bathing pool by means of a sluice gate in the dam that separated them. There were 4 Porticos around the exterior and a portico that ran across the top of the dam, hence 5 portico as John described it.



Model of 1st century Jerusalem to scale. The Pool of Bethesda is in the foreground. Originally it was outside the walls but Herod Agrippa extended the walls after the time of Christ and incorporated it within the city before AD 70.

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

Emperor Hadrian [AD 117-38] following in 132 decided to build a new Roman city *Aeolia Capitolina* on the site of Jerusalem with a Temple to Jupiter on the Temple site, This led to the Bar Kokhba [AD 132-34] revolt. Following the revolt he had the site of the Pool of Bethesda made into a temple complex to the gods Asclepius and Serapis.



Model of 1st century Jerusalem to scale. The Pool of Bethesda is in the foreground. Originally it was outside the walls but Herod Agrippa extended the walls after the time of Christ and incorporated it within the city before AD 70.

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

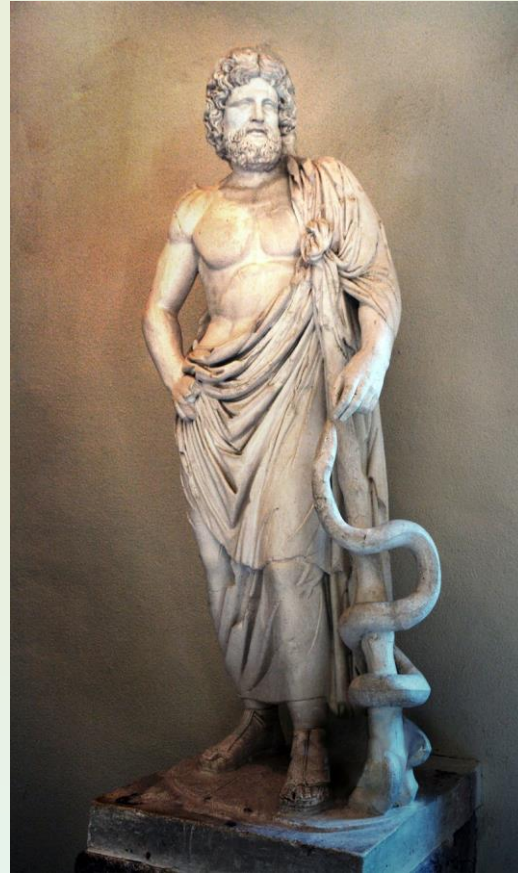
In the process the completely obliterated the 1st century structure making it impossible for any visitor following this time to even envision the structure John describes. This was the 1st challenge to the scholarly consensus of a 3rd century origin for the Gospel of John. The archeology discoveries continue to confirm the authorship of John.



Model of 1st century Jerusalem to scale. The Pool of Bethesda is in the foreground. Originally it was outside the walls but Herod Agrippa extended the walls after the time of Christ and incorporated it within the city before AD 70.

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

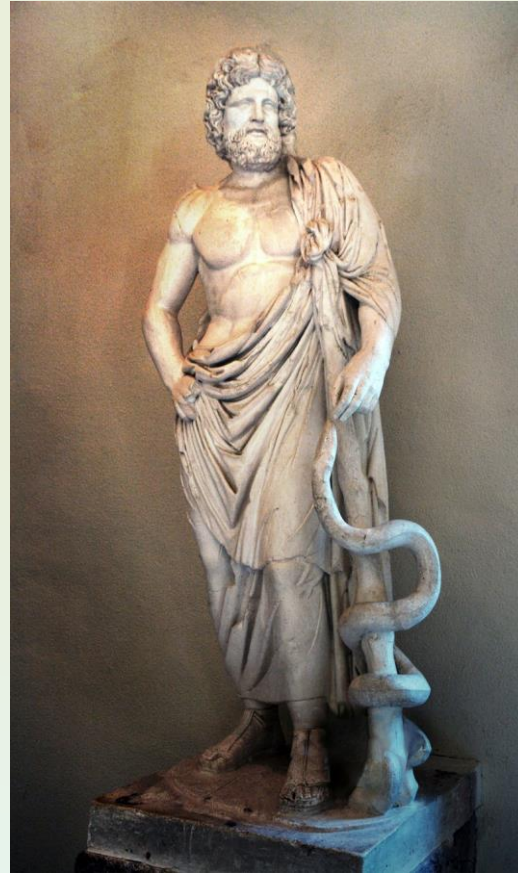
Almost all Asklepion Temple complexes included swimming pools and healing pools. They introduced the Asclepius serpents who were allowed to roam freely through the temple. They probably had a positive effect because they eat large rodents. Serapis was the god of fertility and good fortune. Asclepius was often paired with Serapis or the goddess of luck, Fortuna.



The Greek god Asclepius who was the god of health, healing and medicine. This emergency medical shield includes the “star of life” and the staff of Asclepius. The snake was sacred to the Asclepius cult.

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

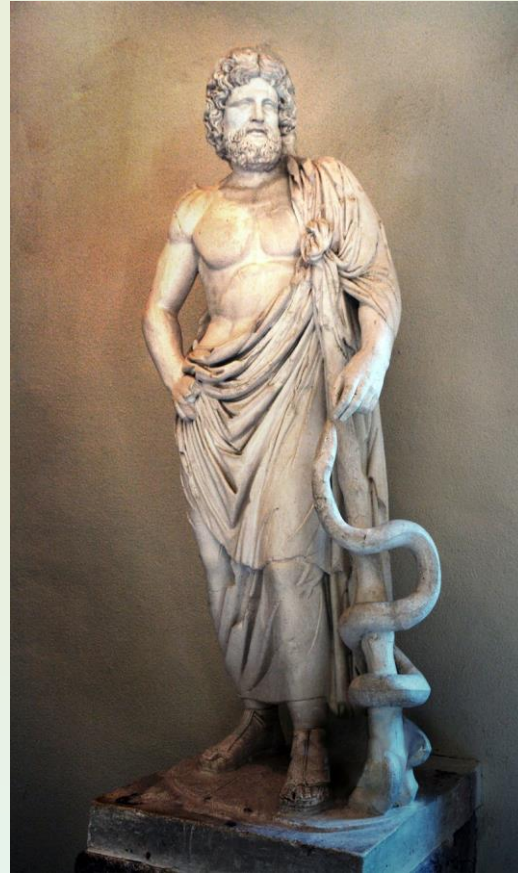
In the century before Christ The Roman detachment in the Fortress Antonia had built by the deep pool, a swimming pool supplied from it with a chapel dedicated to Asclepius and Fortuna. This was covered over by the Pool of Bethesda complex. During the time of Jesus. It must have retained its original symbolism but was likely Judaized to make it acceptable with the angel story.



The Greek god Asclepius who was the god of health, healing and medicine. This emergency medical shield includes the “star of life” and the staff of Asclepius. The snake was sacred to the Asclepius cult.

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

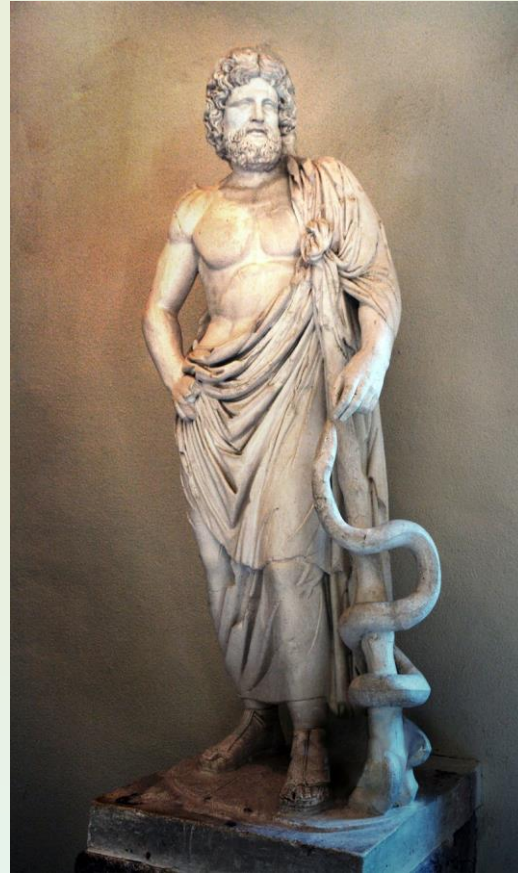
It is not clear if the last part of verse 3 through verse 4 were originally written by John as an explanation of the legend of the pool or added by a later scribe to explain the meaning of verse 7. If so it must have been added shortly after the Gospel was written because Tertullian references it in AD 220. It certainly makes sense of verse 7, but it need not indicate that John believed the legend fact.



The Greek god Asclepius who was the god of health, healing and medicine. This emergency medical shield includes the “star of life” and the staff of Asclepius. The snake was sacred to the Asclepius cult.

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

It is not clear if the last part of verse 3 through verse 4 were originally written by John as an explanation of the legend of the pool or added by a later scribe to explain the meaning of verse 7. If so it must have been added shortly after the Gospel was written because Tertullian references it in AD 220. It certainly makes sense of verse 7, but it need not indicate that John believed the legend fact.

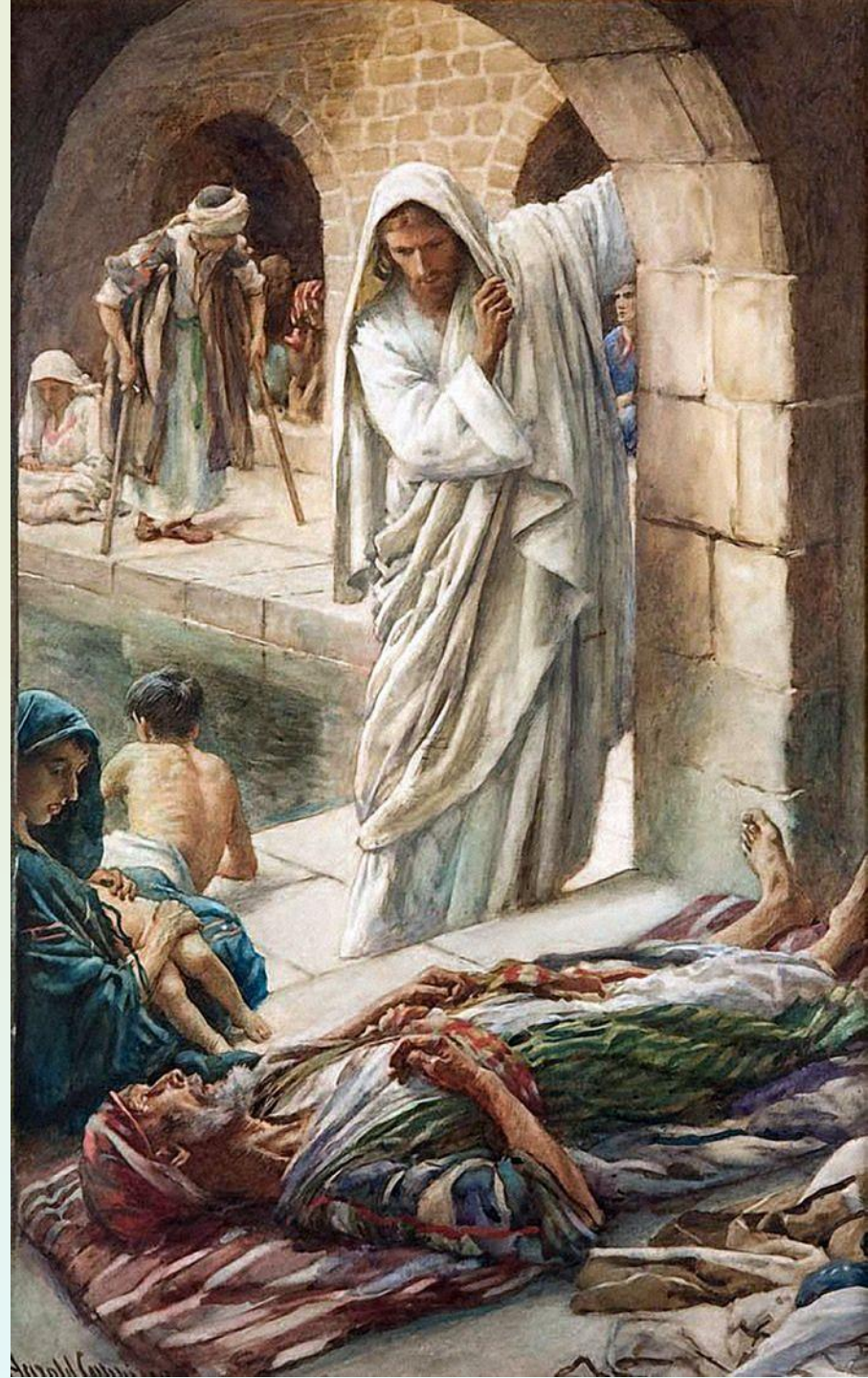


The Greek god Asclepius who was the god of health, healing and medicine. This emergency medical shield includes the “star of life” and the staff of Asclepius. The snake was sacred to the Asclepius cult.

What Do You Really Want?

John 5:1-9

John 5:5-6 tell us some interesting information. This man is not a young man he has been “infirm” for 38 years. The Greek word indicates a physical weakness. He was likely in his late 50s or 60s. Jesus evidently interprets that the infirmity is dependent to some extent on the man’s desire. Jesus’ question clearly indicates this: “Do you want to be healed?” For many years this question has intrigued me, especially when you couple it with Jesus’ later statement to this man in the Temple, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” [5:14]. This man’s “infirmity” was to some extent the result of “sin” or moral failure. When I combine these 2 concepts I am left with some big questions.



What Do You Really Want?

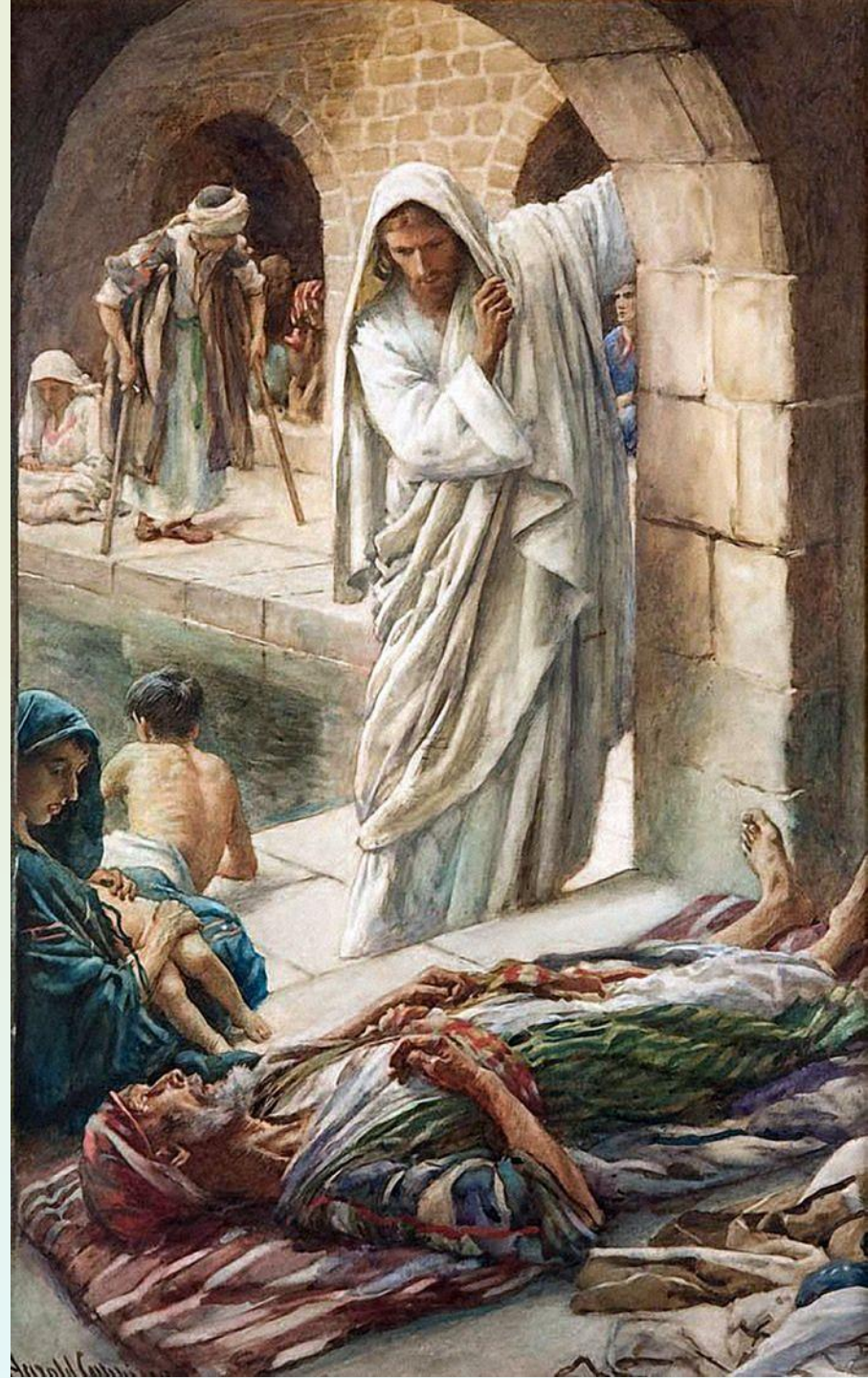
John 5:1-9

I wanted to see if there were similar incidents in the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. I found 2 incidents in the gospels that mirrored this incident by attributing the infirmity to spiritual causes. Almost all other incidents are treated as physical weakness due to disease, injury or birth defect [only the healing and exorcism of the epileptic boy seems to involve both a physical and spiritual infirmity – Matthew 17:14-18; Mark 9:14-27; Luke 9:37-42].

The healing of the Paralytic of Capernaum in Matthew 9:1-7; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26. And the healing of the Woman with the Spirit of Infirmity in Luke 13:10-17. In John 5 and the Paralytic man Jesus blames sinful behavior. In the case of the Woman, he blames her condition on Satan's attack.

Knowing Who Jesus Is – John 5

“Jesus Heals the Lame Man At the Pool of Bethesda” by Harold Copping, 1907



What Do You Really Want?

John 5:1-9

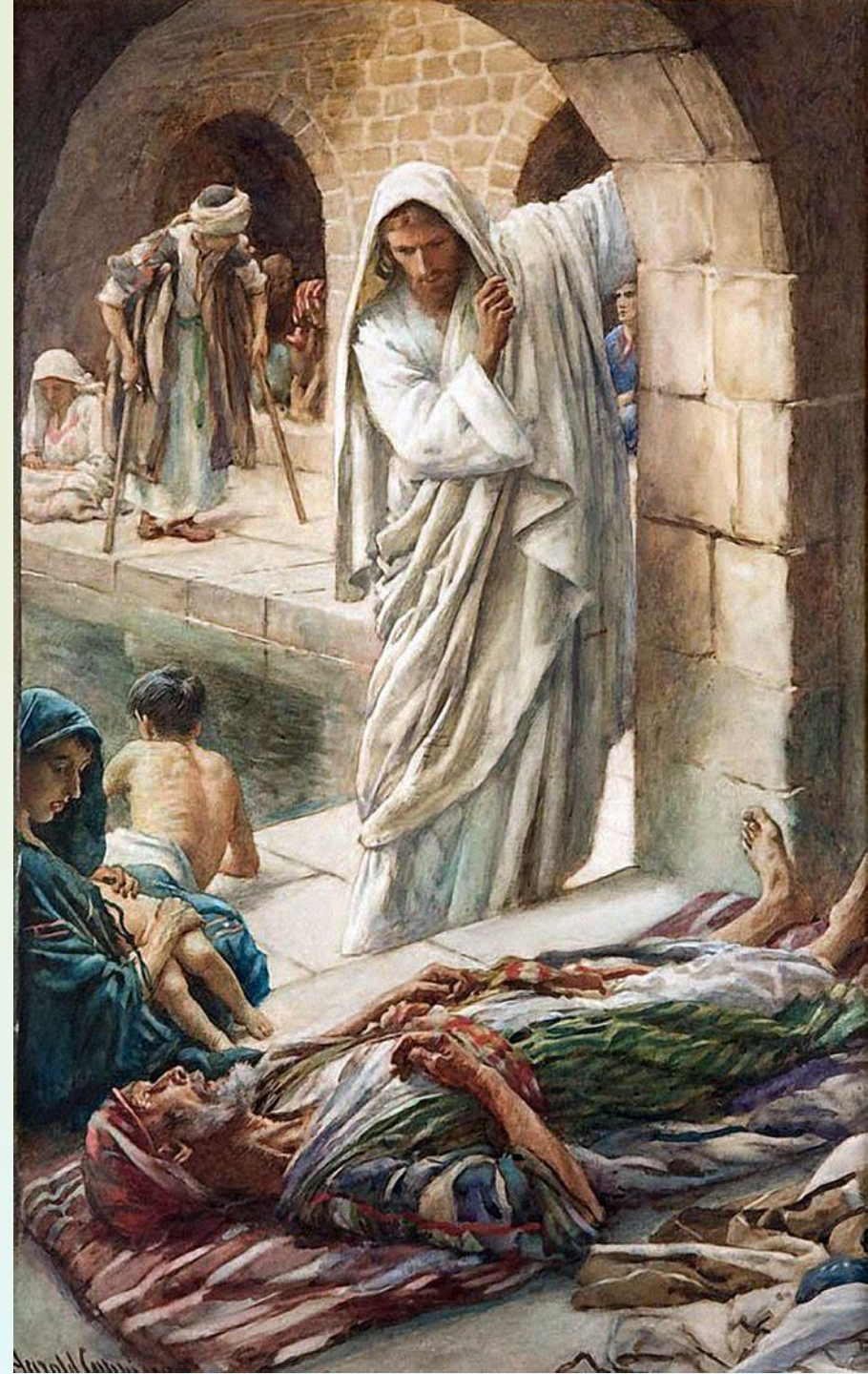
In all three cases Jesus indicates that the illness spiritual or emotional in its cause but manifests as physical weakness. In contrast, Jesus does not blame the blindness of the man in John 9 on moral failure nor spiritual oppression. Jesus does not equate illnesses with spiritual causes in all circumstances.

Is there a disease that would explain these physical manifestations? Mayo Clinic describes a medical condition known as “Conversion Disorder”.

It is a disorder where a person can experience blindness, paralysis, limping, tremors, lameness and other neurological diseases due to emotional or physical distress and or psychological conflict.

Knowing Who Jesus Is – John 5

“Jesus Heals the Lame Man At the Pool of Bethesda” by Harold Copping, 1907



What Do You Really Want?

John 5:1-9

Why would this man wish to remain “infirm” for 38 years. Why would he wallow in this infirmity? Most people suffering from Conversion Disorder recover relatively quickly, especially if they receive psychiatric help.

Reasons a person might choose such physical manifestations:

- A need to expiate our guilt [*real or imagined – a self-inflicted punishment – many soldiers face this with PTSD*].
- A desire for sympathy or attention [*to escape feelings of worthlessness or repercussions for guilt.*]
- Fear of continued abuse or continued perpetration of evil.
- A physical reason for the sense of hopelessness [*a way to cope with the emotional and spiritual pain*].

In 2 cases Jesus identified guilt, in the other spiritual pain.

Knowing Who Jesus Is – John 5



A votive leg given in honor of Asclepius for healing

Garrison COG

What Do You Really Want?

John 5:1-9

This could make sense of the diseases described in these 3 incidents. While most of us do not have physical infirmities due to guilt or abuse we may never the less choose to wallow in our situation rather than commit it to Jesus Christ and allow him to heal us.

The Greek word in verse 6 that is part of Jesus' question means to be made "sound" or "whole".

Jesus without this man's desire sovereignly makes him "sound", but if he is to remain sound, Jesus indicates in verse 14, this man must make a choice. He can continue in his sinful behavior and worse things will happen to him or he can repent and accept the grace Jesus provided him.



A votive leg given in honor of Asclepius for healing

“What Do You Really Want?” John 5:1-9

Sometimes Jesus challenges us about what we really want when we choose to wallow in our circumstances and reject his grace.



“Christ Healing the Sick Man At the Pool of Bethesda” by Carl Bosch [1834-90]