

THE HEALING AT BETHESDA

Rev. Donald L. Rose

Lesson: John 5:1-15

You have just heard the story of the man at the pool of Bethesda. Let us look at two things in this story. The first is the fact that an angel came and stirred the waters of this pool and gave it a special power. The second is the Lord's saying, "Take up your bed and walk," for that saying comes into the story three times, and it seems to have a very interesting story behind it.

If we think of this special pool as being like the Lord's Word, it is most interesting to think of an angel stirring the water sometimes, and this having a powerful effect on the people who come to the pool. The Writings tell us that there are people who don't think the Word is very special and have no idea how really wonderful it is. This is in the book *Heaven and Hell* (no. 310). It is in a chapter of that book about the Word. There are many chapters in that book, one about how angels are dressed, one about children in heaven, one about worship in heaven, one about heavenly happiness, and so forth. And one chapter is about how the Word joins people to heaven. It shows that one of the amazing uses of the Word is to bring those who are in heaven and those who are in the world close together, even when they do not know they are close together.

Are angels close to babies? The babies don't know it, but the angels are very close. "Their angels always behold the face" of their heavenly father. We have times when we feel we just know the angels are near when, for example, a little child is laughing happily, or when a little child has a look of trust and peace on his or her face,

Just as there are certain times when the angels seem especially close, it is said that the angel came down at certain times and stirred the waters of that pool. You may have noticed that there are times when the stories of the Word fill you with joy more than at other times. Do you notice that when someone opens the Word before worship, this is done in a very reverent way? The Word is holy, and it is open to heaven. As we turn our minds to what it says, there are angels close to us. You will find that at certain times, and it is not always, something in the Word stirs you with great delight; and as you grow up, you will find that at times something of the Word that you have known for years is stirred in your mind in a way that moves you very deeply. Indeed, it not only moves and delights you, it has a way of uplifting and healing your spirit. We may think of this quality of the Word when we read the story of a pool, which at times was stirred by the presence of an angel.

Now let's look at the saying, "Take up your bed and walk." Our story takes place in the city of Jerusalem, for the Lord had at last come to Jerusalem for a feast. Before this, He had been doing amazing things in another place called Galilee. The rulers in Jerusalem had been hearing stories about Him, and they finally decided to send some special men all the way to where the Lord was (and that was almost a hundred miles).

They came into a crowded house where the Lord was in Galilee. And we bear in mind as we think of the story that Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem were sitting there and listening (see Luke 5:17).

As they were sitting there, they saw that some men had opened a hole in the roof above them and were lowering down on a bed (like a mattress) a friend of theirs who was sick. Everyone watched and listened to see whether the Lord would make the man well. To their surprise, the Lord spoke to the man and said that the man's sins were forgiven.

Nobody in the room said anything, but you can be sure that those scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem were thinking something. They were thinking to themselves that Jesus had no right to say such words. For "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21).

Although they did not speak, the Lord knew that was the thing they were thinking. They were complaining in their minds that He should not speak as if He had the power of forgiving sins. Then the Lord broke the silence and told them He knew what they were thinking, and then He said that to *prove* He did, indeed, have the power that only God has, He would tell the man to rise, take up his bed and walk. And then He said, "Rise up and walk." And that man who had been lying there got up, picked up the mattress he was lying on and walked. And it is said that all of the people "were amazed, and glorified God." They were filled with wonder and said, "We have seen strange things today."

No one would forget the day the Lord proved His power, not just over sickness, but also over evil, when He said, "Rise up and walk," Especially would those men from Jerusalem remember this, and they would tell it to other men when they reported back to Jerusalem.

And so now in our story, people in Jerusalem saw a man walking along carrying his bed (or mattress). They stopped him and said that it wasn't allowed to carry something on the Sabbath day. But he answered that the One Who made him well had said to him, "Take up your bed and walk." That saying must have rung a bell in their minds, for they immediately said to the man, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'? Was this not the Man they had heard of who claimed to have power over sickness and evil?"

Yes, it was. And then we read that the Lord found the man in the temple. There are only two places in the Word where we read of the Lord “finding” a man, and in this case he was found in the church or temple. We can well imagine that the man had come there to give thanks to God for healing his sickness. But there was more than just sickness. In the temple there he stood with the possibility of living a new life, Jesus found him there and said to him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.”