

MIRACLE AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA

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Readings: John 5:1-9; Arcana Coelestia 8364

Today we read an account of a miracle which the Lord did on the Sabbath day. He did this miracle in a very special place, near the sheep gate of the city of Jerusalem. The Lord was coming to the city for a feast. Near the gate, He came to a pool of water called Bethesda, which means the “house of mercy”. It was called that because things happened there that were merciful things from the Lord. In this pool, once in awhile, the water was stirred up. The people said an angel of the Lord came down to stir up the waters.

Do you remember what happened? When the waters were stirred up, people went to get into the pool. And the first person who was able to get into the pool would be miraculously healed of any disease he had or if he was blind or lame. But only the first person who came into the pool after the water was disturbed by the angel, would be healed.

Because of this miraculous happening, people had build porches around the pool, perhaps with steps down into it. And on these porches people waited. No one knew exactly when the waters would be stirred up. They had to wait until they saw it happen, and then they would try to get into the pool. Because people were waiting there a long time, some of them had beds, the kind of beds that we might call a pallet, made of rough cloth, perhaps stuffed with straw. A person could lie on that bed and it would give him a little comfort while he waited. Or, if he was crippled and could not move, he could lie on that bed.

Do you remember what happened when the Lord came to this pool? He saw all these people waiting and, especially, He saw a man, lying on a bed, who had had his sickness, for thirty-eight years. That is a long time—thirty-eight years! The Lord knew when He saw him that he had been there a long time. So the Lord said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” (John 5:6). And the man answered and said, “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” (John 5:7).

How sad this seems. Think of this man waiting and watching. Over and over again, he saw that the waters were stirred up, and he tried to get up from his bed and go down into the pool. But because he was sick, he could not move quickly, so someone else would always get into the pool first.

The Lord asked this man, “Do you want to be made well?” And the man really did want to be made well. And so the Lord said simply, “Rise, take up your bed, and walk!” (John 5:8). We may wonder how the man could do this? He was crippled! But as soon as the Lord said, “Rise, take up your bed and walk!” the man felt power coming back into his legs, and he was able to stand up. After thirty-eight years, he could now stand up and walk around! He even had the strength to lift up his bed. It was a miracle!

It was the Sabbath day when this happened. The Lord often did miracles on the Sabbath day even though many people objected and said that was working on the Sabbath day, and He shouldn't do that. But the sicknesses that the Lord healed have a spiritual meaning. When we read about them, the angels with us don't think about someone who is sick or lame—they think about the evils and falsities that people have, which they must be cured of or get rid of before they can come into heaven.

In the story, the man was lying on a bed. Now, the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us that this means somebody who is just resting on his own ideas, his own doctrine. He is depending only on what he thinks in his own mind. You know sometimes we can get into habits of thinking certain ways or doing certain things, and we may not want to change those habits. It's like lying on our bed. Sometimes we lie on our bed in the morning, and we don't want to get up. And that's why the Lord asked the man, "Do you want to be made well?" If the man didn't want to be made well, if he wanted to stay lying on his own bed, than the Lord would not have healed him.

In a similar way, the Lord asks us if we want to change our lives. Do we want to get rid of our evils and learn to follow Him? If we are not willing to change, the Lord won't do it for us. He will not force us to be good. We have to answer the question: "Do you want to be made well?" If we answer yes, then the Lord can do the miracle for us. We do not even have to go into the water. The Lord can just say, "Rise, stand up!" Come up away from the earthly things you are thinking about. Turn your eyes toward heaven. Find out what the I am teaching. Take those old ideas and make them new. Rise. Pick up your bed and walk.

The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that "walking" means living. In fact, we are told that in the spiritual world there are different paths on which people walk. Some of the pathways lead toward hell, and some of the pathways lead toward heaven. When the Lord told the sick man, "Take up your bed and walk," He meant that the man should walk on a path that would lead him toward heaven. And that is what the man did. And that is what we can do when we want to be healed by the Lord and to follow Him to heaven.

It is sometimes hard for us to want to change, to want to be made well by the Lord. But if we do want to be made well, we can turn to the Lord and pray to Him, and say these words:

*Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed;
Save me, and I shall be saved,
For You are my praise (Jeremiah 17:14).*

Amen.