

SEEING JESUS IN JOHN

WEEK EIGHT: JESUS AND THE RULES

READING

FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN, YOU CAN READ THE UNDERLINED PORTIONS ONLY

1 Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. 2 Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. 3 Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. 5 One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?” 7 “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.” 8 Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” 9 Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, 10 so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! The law doesn’t allow you to carry that sleeping mat!” 11 But he replied, “The man who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” 12 “Who said such a thing as that?” they demanded. 13 The man didn’t know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. 14 But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.” 15 Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him. 16 So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. 17 But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” John 5 (NLT)

TEACHING

In this story, Jesus heals a man who had been sick for 38 years; he was lame or paralyzed. The man is hanging out by this specific pool because people believed that an angel would come and stir its water giving the pool healing power for whoever could get in first. But this seems a little far-fetched, plus this man had no way to get into the water—what hope for healing did he have? Last week, we learned that Jesus is the living water. This sick man didn’t need the water in the pool. He needed the living water in Jesus! Jesus gives the man three commands, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” and the man is healed. For the first time in 38 years, he is healthy and strong! It’s a little bit of a strange story, but the strangest thing is what happens next.

The Jewish religious leaders get angry that the now healed man was carrying his mat. They’re upset because he was breaking one of their rules about work on the Sabbath. There was no rule in the Old Testament prohibiting an innocent activity like carrying one’s bedroll, but the leaders had developed hundreds of extra rules. Jesus came to challenge (and break!) some of those rules because he knew (and wanted them to know!) that salvation wasn’t found in keeping the rules. Trying to keep all those rules to earn God’s love wouldn’t work for them and it won’t work for you and me. We need to place all our trust and hope in who Jesus is and what Jesus did! In this story, Jesus was working for the good of one sick man. With his life and death, Jesus worked for the good of all people. That’s good news!

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RESPONSE

OPENING QUESTION(S):

- What is your least favorite rule at school or at home? Why?

TODDLERS/PRE-K:

- What was wrong with the man by the pool?
- What did Jesus do for that man?

CHILDREN:

- Who did Jesus heal in this story?
- Why were the leaders upset?
- Why did Jesus come to challenge the rules?

TEENAGERS:

- What do you find most interesting about this story?
- Why did Jesus come to challenge the rules?
- Why can't keeping the rules give us salvation?

ADULTS:

- Are you more a rule keeper or rule breaker?
- How can rule breaking be a path to rejecting Jesus? How can rule keeping be a path to rejecting Jesus?

PRAYER

God, Thank you for sending Jesus to show us that we can't keep the rules. Keep my heart from trusting in my ability to keep the rules. Help me to obey your commands out of delight and not out of duty. Give me the grace to love listening to and following you. Jesus, thank you for keeping the rules perfectly in my place and for taking the punishment for all my rule breaking mistakes and my selfish rule keeping efforts. I trust in your work, not mine! In Jesus' name, Amen.

NEXT LEVEL (ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL TEACHING)

You may have noticed that verse 4 is missing. If not, go back and look again. Verse 4 introduces the idea that an angel would come and stir the waters giving them healing power. That verse is not found in the original manuscripts; it was added later. So, some translations do not include it. Don't get too hung up on that – it doesn't change the overall accuracy or message of this account. Most likely there were people who believed in this superstitious source of healing. We don't know if anyone was actually ever healed that way. Either way, the story makes it clear that the real hope for healing is in Jesus. This story also reminds us that physical sickness isn't the worst thing that can happen to us (verse 14). Thankfully, Jesus came to heal our bodies and our spirits!