

# John 4:54-5:3

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, perseverance, and the transformative power of baptism as illustrated by the healing at the pool of Bethesda.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 103:20, Matthew 19:12, John 5:2, John 5:17, Romans 5:5, Hebrews 4:10

**Topics:** "Healing Miracles", "Spiritual Perseverance"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the second miracle of Jesus in Galilee, emphasizing the importance of not overlooking any detail in the Scriptures as they are all inspired by the Holy Spirit. He delves into the significance of the healing at the pool of Bethesda, highlighting how it foreshadows the power of baptism to cleanse sins and make individuals spiritually whole. Chrysostom challenges his audience to reflect on the perseverance of the paralytic man who waited 38 years for healing, contrasting it with the tendency for modern believers to give up quickly on prayer and spiritual pursuits due to slothfulness. He urges listeners to embrace the laborious path of virtue, noting that while vice may offer temporary pleasure, true joy and lasting rewards come from diligently pursuing righteousness.

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## Transcript

This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when He had come out of Judaea into Galilee. After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

1. As in gold mines one skillful in what relates to them would not endure to overlook even the smallest vein as producing much wealth, so in the holy Scriptures it is impossible without loss to pass by one jot or one tittle, we must search into all. For they all are uttered by the Holy Spirit, and nothing useless is written in them.

Consider, for instance, what the Evangelist in this place says, This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when He had come out of Judaea into Galilee. Even the word second he has added not without cause, but to exalt yet more the praise of the Samaritans, by showing that even when a second miracle had been wrought, they who beheld it had not yet reached as high as those who had not seen one.

After this there was a feast of the Jews. What feast? Methinks that of Pentecost. And Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Continually at the feasts He frequents the City, partly that He might appear to feast with them, partly that He might attract the multitude that was free from guile; for during these days especially, the more simply disposed ran together more than at other times.

## John 5:2-3

Now there is at Jerusalem a sheep pool, called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of halt, blind, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

What manner of cure is this? What mystery does it signify to us? For these things are not written carelessly, or without a purpose, but as by a figure and type they show in outline things to come, in order that what was exceedingly strange might not by coming unexpectedly harm among the many the power of faith. What then is it that they show in outline? A Baptism was about to be given, possessing much power, and the greatest of gifts, a Baptism purging all sins, and making men alive instead of dead. These things then are foreshown as in a picture by the pool, and by many other circumstances. And first is given a water which purges the stains of our bodies, and those defilements which are not, but seem to be, as those from touching the dead, those from leprosy, and other similar causes; under the old covenant one may see many things done by water on this account. However, let us now proceed to the matter in hand.

First then, as I before said, He causes defilements of our bodies, and afterwards infirmities of different kinds, to be done away by water. Because God, desiring to bring us nearer to faith in baptism, no longer heals defilements only, but diseases also. For those figures which came nearer [in time] to the reality, both as regarded Baptism, and the Passion, and the rest, were plainer than the more ancient; and as the guards near the person of the prince are more splendid than those before, so was it with the types. And an Angel came down and troubled the water, and endued it with a healing power, that the Jews might learn that much more could the Lord of Angels heal the diseases of the soul. Yet as here it was not simply the nature of the water that healed, (for then this would have always taken place,) but water joined to the operation of the Angel; so in our case, it is not merely the water that works, but when it has received the grace of the Spirit, then it puts away all our sins. Around this pool lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water; but then infirmity was a hindrance to him who desired to be healed, now each has power to approach, for now it is not an Angel that troubles, it is the Lord of Angels who works all. The sick man cannot now say, I have no man; he cannot say, While I am coming another steps down before me; though the whole world should come, the grace is not spent, the power is not exhausted, but remains equally great as it was before. Just as the sun's beams give light every day, yet are not exhausted, nor is their light made less by giving so abundant a supply; so, and much more, the power of the Spirit is in no way lessened by the numbers of those who enjoy it. And this miracle was done in order that men, learning that it is possible by water to heal the diseases of the body, and being exercised in this for a long time, might more easily believe that it can also heal the diseases of the soul.

But why did Jesus, leaving the rest, come to one who was of thirty-eight years standing? And why did He ask him, Will you be made whole? Not that He might learn, that was needless; but that He might show the man's perseverance, and that we might know that it was on this account that He left the others and came to him. What then says he? Yea Lord, he says, but I have no man when the water is troubled to put me into the pool, but while I am coming another steps down before me.

It was that we might learn these circumstances that Jesus asked, Will you be made whole? and said not, Will you that I heal you? (for as yet the man had formed no exalted notions concerning Him,) but Will you be made whole? Astonishing was the perseverance of the paralytic, he was of thirty and eight years standing, and each year hoping to be freed from his disease, he continued in attendance, and withdrew not. Had he not been very persevering, would not the future, if not the past, have been sufficient to lead

him from the spot? Consider, I pray you, how watchful it was likely that the other sick men there would be since the time when the water was troubled was uncertain. The lame and halt indeed might observe it, but how did the blind see? Perhaps they learned it from the clamor which arose.

2. Let us be ashamed then, beloved, let us be ashamed, and groan over our excessive sloth. Thirty and eight years had that man been waiting without obtaining what he desired, and withdrew not. And he had failed not through any carelessness of his own, but through being oppressed and suffering violence from others, and not even thus did he grow dull; while we if we have persisted for ten days to pray for anything and have not obtained it, are too slothful afterwards to employ the same zeal.

And on men we wait for so long a time, warring and enduring hardships and performing servile ministrations, and often at last failing in our expectation, but on our Master, from whom we are sure to obtain a recompense greater than our labors, (for, says the Apostle, Hope makes not ashamed Romans 5:5) on Him we endure not to wait with becoming diligence. What chastisement does this deserve! For even though we could receive nothing from Him, ought we not to deem the very conversing with Him continually the cause of ten thousand blessings?

But continual prayer is a laborious thing. And what that belongs to virtue is not laborious? In truth, says some one, this very point is full of great difficulty, that pleasure is annexed to vice, and labor to virtue. And many, I think, make this a question. What then can be the reason? God gave us at the beginning a life free from care and exempt from labor. We used not the gift aright, but were perverted by doing nothing, and were banished from Paradise. On which account He made our life for the future one of toil, assigning as it were His reasons for this to mankind, and saying, I allowed you at the beginning to lead a life of enjoyment, but you were rendered worse by liberty, wherefore I commanded that henceforth labor and sweat be laid upon you.

And when even this labor did not restrain us, He next gave us a law containing many commandments, imposing it on us like bits and curbs placed upon an unruly horse to restrain his prancings, just as horse breakers do. This is why life is laborious, because not to labor is wont to be our ruin. For our nature cannot bear to be doing nothing, but easily turns aside to wickedness. Let us suppose that the man who is temperate, and he who rightly performs the other virtues, has no need of labor, but that they do all things in their sleep, still how should we have employed our ease?

Would it not have been for pride and boastfulness? But wherefore, says some one, has great pleasure been attached to vice, great labor and toil to virtue? Why, what thanks would you have had, and for what would you have received a reward, if the matter had not been one of difficulty? Even now I can show you many who naturally hate intercourse with women, and avoid conversation with them as impure; shall we then call these chaste, shall we crown these, tell me, and proclaim them victors?

By no means. Chastity is self-restraint, and the mastering pleasures which fight, just as in war the trophies are most honorable when the contest is violent, not when no one raises a hand against us. Many are by their very nature passionless; shall we call these good tempered? Not at all. And so the Lord after naming three manners of the eunuch state, leaves two of them uncrowned, and admits one into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 19:12 But what need, says one, was there of wickedness?

I say this too. What is it then which made wickedness to be? What but our willful negligence? But, says one, there ought to be only good men. Well, what is proper to the good man? Is it to watch and be sober, or to sleep and snore? And why, says one, seemed class="greek">thoughtest thou. "}-> it not good that a

man should act rightly without laboring? You speak words which become the cattle or gluttons, or who make their belly their god. For to prove that these are the words of folly, answer me this.

Suppose there were a king and a general, and while the king was asleep or drunk, the general should endure hardship and erect a trophy, whose would you count the victory to be? Who would enjoy the pleasure of what was done? Do you see that the soul is more especially disposed towards those things for which she has labored? And therefore God has joined labors to virtue, wishing to make us attached to her. For this cause we admire virtue, even although we act not rightly ourselves, while we condemn vice even though it be very pleasant.

And if you say, Why do we not admire those who are good by nature more than those who are so by choice? we reply, Because it is just to prefer him that labors to him that labors not. For why is it that we labor? It is because thou did not bear with moderation the not laboring. Nay more, if one enquire exactly, in other ways also sloth is wont to undo us, and to cause us much trouble. Let us, if you will, shut a man up, only feeding and pampering him, not allowing him to walk nor conducting him forth to work, but let him enjoy table and bed, and be in luxury continually; what could be more wretched than such a life?

But, says one, to work is one thing, to labor is another. Yea, but it was in man's power then to work without labor. And is this, says he, possible? Yea, it is possible; God even desired it, but you endured it not. Therefore He placed you to work in the garden, marking out employment, but joining with it no labor. For had man labored at the beginning, God would not afterwards have put labor by way of punishment. For it is possible to work and not to be wearied, as do the angels.

To prove that they work, hear what David says; You that excel in strength, you that do His word. Psalm 103:20, Septuagint Want of strength causes much labor now, but then it was not so. For he that has entered into His rest, has ceased, says one, from his works, as God from His Hebrews 4:10: not meaning here idleness, but the ceasing from labor. For God works even now, as Christ says, My Father works hitherto, and I work. John 5:17 Wherefore I exhort you that, laying aside all carelessness, you be zealous for virtue.

For the pleasure of wickedness is short, but the pain lasting; of virtue, on the contrary, the joy grows not old, the labor is but for a season. Virtue even before the crowns are distributed animates her workman, and feeds him with hopes; vice even before the time of vengeance punishes him who works for her, wringing and terrifying his conscience, and making it apt to imagine all (evils). Are not these things worse than any labors, than any toils? And if these things were not so, if there were pleasure, what could be more worthless than that pleasure?

For as soon as it appears it flies away, withering and escaping before it has been grasped, whether you speak of the pleasure of beauty, or that of luxury, or that of wealth, for they cease not daily to decay. But when there is besides (for this pleasure) punishment and vengeance, what can be more miserable than those who go after it? Knowing then this, let us endure all for virtue, so shall we enjoy true pleasure, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, now and ever, and world without end. Amen.

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