

Expository Tracts, No. 121.

CHRIST AT BETHESDA.

BEING

THOUGHTS ON JOHN V. 1-15.

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BISHOP J. C. RYLE, D.D.

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CHRIST AT BETHESDA.

JOHN V. 1–15.

1. After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
2. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market, a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.
3. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.
4. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.
5. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.
6. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?
7. The impotent man answered Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.
8. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.
9. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath.
10. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.
11. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.
12. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?
13. And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in that place.
14. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.
15. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole."

WE are taught, for one thing, in this passage, *what misery sin has brought into the world*. We read of a man who had been ill for no less than thirty-eight years! For eight-and-thirty weary summers and winters he had endured pain and infirmity. He had seen others healed at the waters of Bethesda, and going to their homes rejoicing. But for him there had been no healing. Friendless, helpless, and hopeless, he lay near the wonderworking waters, but derived no benefit from them. Year after year passed away, and left him still uncured. No relief or change for the better seemed likely to come, except from the grave.

When we read of cases of sickness like this, we should remember how deeply we ought to hate sin. Sin was the original root, and cause, and fountain of every disease in the world. God did not create man to be full of aches, and pains, and infirmities. These things are the fruits of the Fall. There would have been no sickness, if there had been no sin.

No greater proof can be shown of man's inbred unbelief, than his carelessness about sin. "Fools," says the wise man, "make a mock at sin" (Prov. xiv. 9). Thousands delight in things which are positively evil, and run greedily after that which is downright poison. They love that which God abhors, and dislike that which God loves. They are like the madman, who loves his enemies and hates his friends. Their eyes are blinded. Surely if men would only look at hospitals and infirmaries, and think what havoc sin has made on this earth, they would never take pleasure in sin as they do.

Well may we be told to pray for the coming of God's kingdom! Well may we be told to long for the second advent of Jesus Christ! Then, and not till then, shall there be no more curse on the earth, no more suffering, no more sorrow, and no more sin. Tears shall be wiped from the faces of all who love Christ's appearing, when their Master returns. Weakness and infirmity shall all pass away. Hope deferred shall no longer make hearts sick. There will be no chronic invalids and incurable cases, when Christ has renewed this earth.

We are taught, for another thing, in this passage, *how great is the mercy and compassion of Christ*. He "saw" the poor sufferer lying in the crowd. Neglected, overlooked, and forgotten in the great multitude, he was observed by the all-seeing eye of Christ. "He knew" full well, by His Divine knowledge, how long he had been "in that case," and pitied him. He spoke to him unexpectedly, with words of gracious sympathy. He healed him by miraculous power, at once and without tedious delay, and sent him home rejoicing.

This is just one among many examples of our Lord Jesus Christ's kindness and compassion. He is full of undeserved, unexpected, abounding love towards man. "He delighteth in mercy" (Micah vii. i8). He is far more ready to save than man is to be saved, far more willing to do good than man is to receive it.

No one ever need be afraid of beginning the life of a true Christian, if he feels disposed to begin. Let him not hang back and delay, under the vain idea that Christ is not willing to receive him. Let him come boldly, and trust confidently. He that healed the cripple at Bethesda is still the same.

We are taught, lastly, the *lesson that recovery from sickness ought to impress upon us*. That lesson is contained in the solemn words which our Saviour addressed to the man He had cured: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

Every sickness and sorrow is the voice of God speaking to us. Each has its peculiar message. Happy are they who have an eye to see God's hand, and an ear to hear His voice, in all that happens to them. Nothing in this world happens by chance.

And as it is with sickness, so it is with recovery. Renewed health should send us back to our post in the world with a deeper hatred of sin, a more thorough watchfulness over our own ways, and a more constant purpose of mind to live to God. Far too often the excitement and novelty of returning health tempt us to forget the vows and intentions of the sick-room. There are spiritual dangers attending a recovery! Well would it be for us all after illness to grave these words on our hearts, "Let me sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto me."

Let us leave the passage with grateful hearts, and bless God that we have such a Gospel and such a Saviour as the Bible reveals. Are we ever sick and ill? Let us remember that Christ sees and knows, and can heal if He thinks fit. Are we ever in trouble? Let us hear in our trouble the voice of God, and learn to hate sin more.

