

John: 5:1–18

From Catena Aurea:

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.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Evang. l. iv. c. 10) After the miracle in Galilee, He returns to Jerusalem: After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxvi. 1) The feast of Pentecost. Jesus always went up to Jerusalem at the time of the feasts, that it might be seen that He was not an enemy to, but an observer of, the Law. And it gave Him the opportunity of impressing the simple multitude by miracles and teaching: as great numbers used then to collect from the neighbouring towns.

Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep-market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxvi. 1) This pool was one among many types of that baptism, which was to purge away sin. First God enjoined water for the cleansing from the filth of the body, and from those defilements, which were not real, but legal, e. g. those from death, or leprosy, and the like. Afterwards infirmities were healed by water, as we read: In these (the porches) lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. This was a nearer approximation to the gift of baptism, when not only defilements are cleansed, but sicknesses healed. Types are of various ranks, just as in a court, some officers are nearer to the prince, others farther off. The water, however, did not heal by virtue of its own natural properties, (for if so the effect would have followed uniformly,) but by the descent of an Angel: For an Angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water. In the same way, in Baptism, water does not act simply as water, but receives first the grace of the Holy Spirit, by means of which it cleanses us from all our sins. And the Angel troubled the water, and imparted a healing virtue to it, in order to prefigure to the Jews that far greater power of the Lord of the Angels, of healing the diseases of the soul. But then their infirmities prevented their applying the cure; for it follows, Whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. But now every one may attain this blessing, for it is not an Angel which troubleth the water, but the Lord of Angels, which worketh every where. Though the whole world come, grace fails not, but remains as full as ever; like the sun's rays which give light all day, and every day, and yet are not spent. The sun's light is not diminished by this bountiful expenditure: no more is the influence of the Holy Spirit by the largeness of its outpourings. Not more than one could be cured at the pool; God's design being to put before men's minds, and oblige them to dwell upon, the healing power of water; that from the effect of water on the body, they might believe more readily its power on the soul.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. c. 1) It was a greater act in Christ, to heal the diseases of the soul, than the sicknesses of the perishable body. But as the soul itself did not know its Restorer, as it had eyes in the flesh to discern visible things, but not in the heart wherewith to know God; our Lord performed cures which could be seen, that He might afterwards work cures which could not be seen. He went to the place, where lay a multitude of sick, out of whom He chose one to heal: And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxiii. 1, 2) He did not, however, proceed immediately to heal him, but first tried by conversation to bring him into a believing state of mind. Not that He required faith in the first instance, as He did from the blind man, saying, Believe ye that I am able to do this? (Matt. 9:28) for the lame man could not well know who He was. Persons who in different ways had had the means of knowing Him, were asked this question, and properly so. But there were some who did not and could not know Him yet, but would be made to know Him by His miracles afterwards. And in their case the demand for faith is reserved till after those miracles have taken place: When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been a long time in that case, He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? He does not ask this question for His own information, (this were unnecessary,) but to bring to light the great patience of the man, who for thirty and eight years had sat year after year by the place, in the hope of being cured; which sufficiently explains why Christ passed by the others, and went to him. And He does not say, Dost thou wish Me to heal thee? for the man had not as yet any idea that He was so great a Person. Nor on the other hand did the lame man suspect any mockery in the question, to make him take offence, and say, Hast thou come to vex me, by asking me if I would be made whole; but he answered mildly, 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. He had no idea as yet that the Person who put this question to him would heal him, but thought that Christ might probably be of use in putting him into the water. But Christ's word is sufficient, Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. c. 7) Three distinct biddings. Rise, however, is not a command, but the conferring of the cure. Two commands were given upon his cure, take up thy bed, and walk.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxvi. 1, 2) Behold the richness of the Divine Wisdom. He not only heals, but bids him carry his bed also. This was to shew the cure was really miraculous, and not a mere effect of the imagination; for the man's limbs must have become quite sound and compact, to allow him to take up his bed. The impotent man again did not deride and say, The Angel cometh down, and troubleth the water, and he only cureth one each time; dost Thou, who art a mere man, think that Thou canst do more than

an Angel? On the contrary, he heard, believed Him who bade him, and was made whole: And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxvii. 2) This was wonderful, but what follows more so. As yet he had no opposition to face. It is made more wonderful when we see him obeying Christ afterwards in spite of the rage and railing of the Jews: And on the same day was the sabbath. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day, it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. c. 10) They did not charge our Lord with healing on the sabbath, for He would have replied that if an ox or an ass of theirs had fallen into a pit, would not they have taken it out on the sabbath day: but they addressed the man as he was carrying his bed, as if to say, Even if the healing could not be delayed, why enjoin the work? He shields himself under the authority of his Healer: He that made me whole, the Same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk: meaning, Why should not I receive a command, if I received a cure from Him?

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxvii. 2) Had he been inclined to deal treacherously, he might have said, If it is a crime, accuse Him Who commanded it, and I will lay down my bed. And he would have concealed his cure, knowing, as he did, that their real cause of offence was not the breaking of the Sabbath, but the miracle. But he neither concealed it, nor asked for pardon, but boldly confessed the cure. They then ask spitefully; What man is that who said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk. They do not say, Who is it, who made thee whole? but only mention the offence. It follows, And he that was healed wist not who it was, for Jesus had conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in that place. This He had done first, because the man who had been made whole, was the best witness of the cure, and could give his testimony with less suspicion in our Lord's absence; and secondly, that the fury of men might not be excited more than was necessary. For the mere sight of the object of envy, is no small incentive to envy. For these reasons He departed, and left them to examine the fact for themselves. Some are of opinion, that this is the same with the one who had the palsy, whom Matthew mentions. But he is not. For the latter had many to wait upon, and carry him, whereas this man had none. And the place where the miracle was performed, is different.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. c. 1) Judging on low and human notions of this miracle, it is not at all a striking display of power, and only a moderate one of goodness. Of so many, who lay sick, only one was healed; though, had He chosen, He could have restored them all by a single word. How must we account for this? By supposing that His power and goodness were asserted more for imparting a knowledge of eternal

salvation to the soul, than working a temporal cure on the body. That which received the temporal cure was certain to decay at last, when death arrived: whereas the soul which believed passed into life eternal. The pool and the water seem to me to signify the Jewish people: for John in the Apocalypse obviously uses water to express people. (Rev. 17:15.)

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. c. 2) The water then, i. e. the people, was enclosed within five porches, i. e. the five books of Moses. But those books only betrayed the impotent, and did not recover them; that is to say, the Law convicted the sinner, but did not absolve him.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. c. 3) So then Christ came to the Jewish people, and by means of mighty works, and profitable lessons, troubled the sinners, i. e. the water, and the stirring continued till He brought on His own passion. But He troubled the water, unknown to the world. For had they known Him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. 11) But the troubling of the water came on all at once, and it was not seen who troubled it. Again, to go down into the troubled water, is to believe humbly on our Lord's passion. Only one was healed, to signify the unity of the Church: whoever came afterwards was not healed, to signify that whoever is out of this unity cannot be healed. Wo to them who hate unity, and raise sects. Again, he who was healed had had his infirmity thirty and eight years: this being a number which belongs to sickness, rather than to health. The number forty has a sacred character with us, and is significative of perfection. For the Law was given in Ten Commandments, and was to be preached throughout the whole world, which consists of four parts; and four multiplied into ten, make up the number forty. And the Law too is fulfilled by the Gospel, which is written in four books. So then if the number forty possesses the perfectness of the Law, and nothing fulfils the Law, except the twofold precept of love, why wonder at the impotence of him, who was two less than forty? Some man was necessary for his recovery; but it was a man who was God. He found the man falling short by the number two, and therefore gave two commandments, to fill up the deficiency. For the two precepts of our Lord signify love; the love of God being first in order of command, the love of our neighbour, in order of performance. Take up thy bed, our Lord saith, meaning, When thou wert impotent, thy neighbour carried thee; now thou art made whole, carry thy neighbour. And walk; but whither, except to the Lord thy God.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. c. 9) Carry him then with whom thou walkest, that thou mayest come to Him with Whom thou desirest to abide. As yet however he wist not who Jesus was; just as we too believe in Him though we see Him not. Jesus again does not wish to be seen, but conveys Himself out of the crowd. It is in a kind of solitude of the mind, that God is seen: the crowd is noisy; this vision requires stillness.

5:14–18

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.

16. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

17. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

18. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxvii) The man, when healed, did not proceed to the market place, or give himself up to pleasure or vain glory, but, which was a great mark of religion, went to the temple: Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. c. 11) The Lord Jesus saw him both in the crowd, and in the temple. The impotent man does not recognise Jesus in the crowd; but in the temple, being a sacred place, he does.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxviii. 1) Here we learn in the first place, that his disease was the consequence of his sins. We are apt to bear with great indifference the diseases of our souls; but, should the body suffer ever so little hurt, we have recourse to the most energetic remedies. Wherefore God punishes the body for the offences of the soul. Secondly, we learn, that there is really a Hell. Thirdly, that it is a place of lasting and infinite punishment. Some say indeed, Because we have corrupted ourselves for a short time, shall we be tormented eternally? But see how long this man was tormented for his sins. Sin is not to be measured by length of time, but by the nature of the sin itself. And besides this we learn, that if, after undergoing a heavy punishment for our sins, we fall into them again, we shall incur another and a heavier punishment still: and justly; for one, who has undergone punishment, and has not been made better by it, proves himself to be a hardened person, and a despiser; and, as such, deserving of still greater torments. Nor let it embolden us, that we do not see all punished for their offences here: for if men do not suffer for their offences here, it is only a sign that their punishment will be the greater hereafter. Our diseases however do not always arise from sins; but only most commonly so. For some spring from other lax habits: some are sent for the sake of trial, as Job's were. But why does Christ make mention of this

palsied man's sins? Some say, because he had been an accuser of Christ. And shall we say the same of the man afflicted with the palsy? For he too was told, Thy sins are forgiven thee? (Matt. 9:2) The truth is, Christ does not find fault with the man here for his past sins, but only warns him against future. In healing others, however, He makes no mention of sins at all: so that it would seem to be the case that the diseases of these men had arisen from their sins; whereas those of the others had come from natural causes only. Or perhaps through these, He admonishes all the rest. Or he may have admonished this man, knowing his great patience of mind, and that he would bear an admonition. It is a disclosure too of His divinity, for He implies in saying, Sin no more, that He knew what sins He had committed.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xviii. c. 12) Now that the man had seen Jesus, and knew Him to be the author of his recovery, he was not slow in preaching Him to others: The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him whole.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxviii. 2) He was not so insensible to the benefit, and the advice he had received, as to have any malignant aim in speaking this news. Had it been done to disparage Christ, he could have concealed the cure, and put forward the offence. But he does not mention Jesus's saying, Take up thy bed, which was an offence in the eyes of the Jews; but told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him whole.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. c. 13) This announcement enraged them, And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, because He had done these things on the sabbath day. A plain bodily work had been done before their eyes, distinct from the healing of the man's body, and which could not have been necessary, even if healing was; viz. the carrying of the bed. Wherefore our Lord openly says, that the sacrament of the Sabbath, the sign of observing one day out of seven, was only a temporary institution, which had attained its fulfilment in Him: But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work: as if He said, Do not suppose that My Father rested on the Sabbath in such a sense, as that from that time forth, He has ceased from working; for He worketh up to this time, though without labour, and so work I. God's resting means only that He made no other creature, after the creation. The Scripture calls it rest, to remind us of the rest we shall enjoy after a life of good works here. And as God only when He had made man in His own image and similitude, and finished all His works, and seen that they were very good, rested on the seventh day: so do thou expect no rest, except thou return to the likeness in which thou wert made, but which thou hast lost by sin; i. e. unless thou doest good works.

AUGUSTINE. (iv. Super Gen. ad litteram [c. xi.]) It may be said then, that the observance of the sabbath was imposed on the Jews, as the shadow of something to come; viz. that spiritual rest, which God, by the figure of His own rest promised to all who should perform good works.

AUGUSTINE. There will be a sabbath of the world, when the six ages, i. e. the six days, as it were, of the world, have passed: then will come that rest which is promised to the saints.

AUGUSTINE. (iv. Gen. ad lit. c. xi.) The mystery of which rest the Lord Jesus Himself scaled by His burial: for He rested in His sepulchre on the sabbath, having on the sixth day finished all His work, inasmuch as He said, It is finished. (c. 19) What wonder then that God, to prefigure the day on which Christ was to rest in the grave, rested one day from His works, afterwards to carry on the work of governing the world. We may consider too that God, when He rested, rested from the work of creation simply, i. e. made no more new kinds of creatures: but that from that time till now, He has been carrying on the government of those creatures. For His power, as respects the government of heaven and earth, and all the things that He had made, did not cease on the seventh day: they would have perished immediately, without His government: because the power of the Creator is that on which the existence of every creature depends. If it ceased to govern, every species of creation would cease to exist: and all nature would go to nothing. For the world is not like a building, which stands after the architect has left it; it could not stand the twinkling of an eye, if God withdrew His governing hand. Therefore when our Lord says, My Father worketh hitherto, he means the continuation of the work; the holding together, and governing of the creation. It might have been different, had He said, Worketh even now. This would not have conveyed the sense of continuing. As it is we find it, Until now; i. e. from the time of the creation downwards.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. s. 15) He says then, as it were, to the Jews, Why think ye that I should not work on the sabbath? The sabbath day was instituted as a typed of Me. Ye observe the works of God: by Me all things were made. The Father made light, but He spoke, that it might be made. If He spoke, then He made it by the Word; and I am His Word. My Father worked when He made the world, and He worketh until now, governing the world: and as He made the world by Me, when He made it, so He governs it, by Me, now He governs it.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxviii. 2) Christ defended His disciples, by putting forward the example of their fellow-servant David: but He defends Himself by a reference to the Father. We may observe too that He does not defend Himself as man, nor yet purely as God, but sometimes as one, sometimes as the other; wishing both to be believed, both the dispensation of His humiliation, and the dignity of His Godhead;

wherefore He shews His equality to the Father, both by calling Him His Father emphatically, (My Father,) and by declaring that He doeth the same things, that the Father doth, (And I work.) Therefore, it follows, the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was His Father.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. s. 16) i. e. not in the secondary sense in which it is true of all of us, but as implying equality. For we all of us say to God, Our Father, Which art in heaven. (Matt. 6) And the Jews say, Thou art our Father. (Isaiah 63:16) They were not angry then because He called God His Father, but because He called Him so in a sense different from men.

AUGUSTINE. (de Con. Ev. l. iv. c. x) The words, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work, suppose Him to be equal to the Father. This being understood, it followed from the Father's working, that the Son worked: inasmuch as the Father doth nothing without the Son.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxviii. s. 3) Were He not the Son by nature, and of the same substance, this defence would be worse than the former accusation made. For no prefect could clear Himself from a transgression of the king's law, by urging that the king broke it also. But, on the supposition of the Son's equality to the Father, the defence is valid. It then follows, that as the Father worked on the Sabbath without doing wrong: the Son could do so likewise.

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. s. 16) So, the Jews understood what the Arians do not. For the Arians say that the Son is not equal to the Father, and hence sprang up that heresy which afflicts the Church.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xxxviii. 3) Those however who are not well-disposed to this doctrine, do not admit that Christ made Himself equal to the Father, but only that the Jews thought He did. But let us consider what has gone before. That the Jews persecuted Christ, and that He broke the sabbath, and said that God was His Father, is unquestionably true. That which immediately follows then from these premises, viz. His making Himself equal with God, is true also.

HILARY. (vii. de Trin. c. 15) The Evangelist here explains why the Jews wished to kill Him.

CHRYSOSTOM. And again, had it been that our Lord Himself did not mean this, but that the Jews misunderstood Him, He would not have overlooked their mistake. Nor would the Evangelist have omitted to remark upon it, as he does upon our Lord's speech, Destroy this temple. (c. 2.)

AUGUSTINE. (Tr. xvii. s. 16) The Jews however did not understand from our Lord that He was the Son of God, but only that He was equal with God; though Christ gave this as the result of His being the Son of God. It is from not seeing this, while they saw at the same time that equality was asserted, that they charged Him with making Himself equal with God: the truth being, that He did not make Himself equal, but the Father had begotten Him equal.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

5:1 Jesus Went to Jerusalem for the Passover

Christ Always Went to Jerusalem for Passover.

Irenaeus: One can examine the Gospels to ascertain how often after his baptism the Lord went up, at the time of the Passover, to Jerusalem, in accordance with what was the practice of the Jews from every land, and every year, that they should assemble at this period in Jerusalem and there celebrate the feast of the Passover. First of all, after he had made the water wine at Cana of Galilee, he went up to the festival day of the Passover.... Afterwards he went up, the second time, to observe the festival day of the Passover in Jerusalem. On this occasion he cured the paralytic man who had lain beside the pool thirty-eight years.... Then, when he had raised Lazarus from the dead and plots were formed against him by the Pharisees, he withdrew to a city called Ephraim. And from that place, as it is written, "He came to Bethany six days before the Passover," and going up from Bethany to Jerusalem, he there ate the Passover and suffered on the day following. Now, that these three occasions of the Passover are not included within one year, every person whatever must acknowledge. Against Heresies 2.22.3.

5:2 A Pool with Five Porticoes

Agitated by Christ.

Augustine: That pool and that water, in my opinion, signified the people of the Jews. For the Apocalypse of John clearly indicates to us that peoples are suggested by the name of waters. When many waters were shown to him and he asked what they were, he received the answer that they were peoples. Therefore that water, that is, that people was shut in by the five books of Moses as by five porticoes.

But those books brought forth sick people; they did not heal. For the law convicted sinners; it did not absolve them.... What happened, then, that they, who could not be healed in the porticoes, were healed in that agitated water? For, suddenly, the water was seen to be agitated, but he by whom it was agitated was not seen. You may believe that this used to happen by an angel's power but still not without some significant symbolic meaning. After the agitation of the water, the one who was able to thrust himself in, and he alone, was healed. Whoever thrust himself in after him did so without effect.

What, then, does this mean, except that Christ came to the Jewish people, and by doing great things, by teaching useful things, he agitated sinners, agitating the water by his presence and stirring it up in preparation for his passion? But he agitated while being hidden. "For if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory." Therefore to descend into the agitated water is to believe humbly in the Lord's passion. Tractates on the Gospel of John 17.2.1–3.3.

5:3 A Multitude of Invalids

The Cure of Baptism Foreshadowed.

Chrysostom: What kind of a cure is this? What mystery does it signify to us?... What is it that is shown in outline? A baptism was about to be given that possessed much power. It was the greatest of gifts, a baptism purging all sins and making people alive instead of dead. These things then are foreshown as in a picture by the pool.... And this miracle was done so that those [at the pool] who had learned over and over for such a long time how it is possible to heal the diseases of the body by water might more easily believe that water can also heal the diseases of the soul. Homilies on the Gospel of John 36.1.

5:4 An Angel of the Lord Stirred the Waters

The Water at the Pool and the Water of Baptism.

Chromatius of Aquileia: That water [at the pool of Bethesda] was moved once a year; this water of the church's baptism is always ready to be moved. That water was moved only in one place; this water is moved throughout the entire world. Then an angel descended; now it is the Holy Spirit. Then it was the grace of the angel; now it is the mystery of the Trinity. That water cured only once in a year; this water saves people every day. That water healed the body; this water heals both body and soul. That water healed a person's health; this heals from sin. There, the body was only healed of its infirmities; here, body and soul are freed from sin. There, many who were weary lay sick at that water because it only cured one

person a year. No one will be left lying sick here where the waters of baptism are, if they resolve to come and be healed. Sermon 14.

For Them an Angel Descended, for You the Holy Spirit.

Ambrose: No one was healed before the angel had descended. Because of those who did not believe, the water was troubled as a sign that the angel had descended. They had a sign, you have faith; for them an angel descended, for you the Holy Spirit; for them the creation was troubled, for you Christ himself, the Lord of creation, worked. Then, one was healed, now all are made whole.... For that pool was as a type so that you might believe that the power of God descends upon this font. On the Mysteries 4.22–23.

The Angel Declared the Descent of the Holy Spirit.

Ambrose: What did the angel declare in this type but the descent of the Holy Spirit, which was to come to pass in our day and should consecrate the waters when invoked by the prayers of the priest? That angel, then, was a herald of the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as by means of the grace of the Spirit medicine was to be applied to our infirmities of soul and mind. The Spirit, then, has the same ministers as God the Father and Christ. He fills all things, possesses all things, works all and in all in the same manner as God the Father and the Son work. On the Holy Spirit 1.8.88.

5:5 Ill for Thirty-eight Years

The Perseverance of the Paralytic.

Chrysostom: The perseverance of the paralytic was astonishing. He was thirty-eight years old, and each year he hoped to be freed from his disease. He lay there waiting, never giving up. If he had not persevered as much as he did, wouldn't his future prospects, let alone the past, have been enough to discourage him from staying around that place? Consider how alert the other sick people there would be, since no one knew for sure when the waters would be troubled. The lame and the limping could observe it, but how would a blind man? Maybe he learned it from the clamor that arose. Let us be ashamed then, beloved, let us be ashamed and groan over our excessive laziness. That man had been waiting thirty-eight years without obtaining what he desired, and he still did not withdraw. And he failed, not through any carelessness of his own but through being oppressed and suffering violence from others. And still he did not give up. We ... might persist in prayer for something for ten days or so, and if we have not obtained it, we are too lazy afterwards to employ the same energy [as he did]. And yet, we will wait forever on our

fellow human beings, fighting and enduring hardships, performing menial labor, all for the chance of something that in the end fails to meet our expectations. But when it comes to our Master, from whom we are sure to obtain a reward greater than our labors ... we exercise no such diligence in waiting on him.... For even if we receive nothing from him, isn't the very fact that we are able to converse with him continually the cause of ten thousand blessings? Homilies on the Gospel of John 36.1–2.

5:6 Do You Want to Be Healed?

Jesus' Modesty and the City's Callousness.

Amphilochius of Iconium: Jesus asked, "Do you want to be made whole?" See his modesty here. He does not say, "Do you desire that I heal you," for he did not want to make himself appear as someone great by making an announcement, as it were, of his miracles. And the [lame] man says, "I desire," but "I do not have a man" [to help me]; for where there is no love, there is not even one person [to offer help]. And so, I also ask for this reason, [Jesus says]: not only so that you should know of my plan to make whole those who are sick, but also so that you might see the cruelty of those of the city who were well, because not only did no one give their hand to help you to the streams but they even treated you like an enemy when you asked [for help]. Oration 9.

Jesus' Question Conveys the Power to Heal.

Cyril of Alexandria: There is clear evidence of the great goodness of Christ in that he does not wait for entreaties from the sick but anticipates their request with his own loving kindness. See how he runs to the one who is lying down and how compassionate he is to one who was sick with no one to comfort him. But the inquiry as to whether he would like to be relieved from his infirmity was not that of one asking out of ignorance what was obvious, but of one stirring up an increased desire and diligent entreaty. The question as to whether he wanted to obtain what he longed for is huge. It has the kind of force and expression that conveys that Jesus has the power to give and is now ready to do so, only waiting for the request of the one who will receive this grace. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.5.

5:7 No One to Help

Christ Provides a Sympathetic Ear, and More.

Chrysostom: What can be more pitiable than these words? What more sad than these circumstances? Do you see a heart crushed through an extended illness? Do you see all the pain and violence he suffered

subdued? He utters no blasphemy. He does not curse the day of his birth or get angry at the question, “Will you be healed?” ... Instead, he replies gently and with great mildness, “Yes, Lord.” And yet, he did not know who it was that asked him, let alone that he would heal him. Rather, he still mildly relates all the circumstances, asking for nothing further as though he were speaking to a physician and merely wanted to tell the story of his sufferings. Perhaps he hoped that Christ might be of some use to him in putting him into the water and hoped to stir up some sympathy with his words.

Some are of the opinion that this is the same incident that Matthew records of the one who was “lying on a bed.” But he is not since.... that paralytic man had many to wait upon and carry him, whereas this man had not a single one.... The places too were different: one was cured in a house, the other by the pool. Homilies on the Gospel of John 37.1–2.

5:8 Rise, Take Up Your Bed, and Walk

“Rise” Confers the Cure.

Augustine: There are three distinct commands. “Rise, take up your bed, and walk.” “Rise,” however, is not a command but the conferring of the cure. Two commands were given upon his cure: “take up your bed, and walk.” Tractates on the Gospel of John 17.7.

The Completeness of the Cure.

Ephrem the Syrian: Was it not enough to say, “Rise up and go”? For was it not a miracle that the one who could not turn about on his bed could rise up easily and go? Yet to show that he had given him a full healing, he also made him carry his bed—and not like the sick who return [to health] little by little. [Our Lord said], “Take up your bed and go.” And even if he remained silent, his bed would cry out. Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron 13.2.

5:9 He Took Up His Bed and Walked

Itinerary of Love.

Augustine: What significance is there, then, in the bed, I ask you? What, except that that sick man was carried on the bed, but when healed, he carries the bed? What was said by the apostle? “Bear your burdens, each for the other, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Now the law of Christ is love, and love is not fulfilled unless we bear our burdens, each for the other. “Bearing with one another,” he says,

“in love, eager to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” When you were sick, your neighbor was carrying you. You have been healed; carry your neighbor. So you will fulfill, O man, what was lacking to you.

“Take up,” therefore, “your bed.” But when you have taken it up, do not stay; “walk.” In loving your neighbor, in being concerned about your neighbor, you are taking a trip. Where are you taking a trip to except to the Lord God, to him whom we ought to love with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind? For, we have not yet reached the Lord, but we have our neighbor with us. Therefore carry him with whom you are walking that you may reach him with whom you long to stay. Therefore “take up your bed, and walk.” Tractates on the Gospel of John 17.9.2–3.

5:10 Unlawful to Carry a Burden on the Sabbath

Sabbath Laws No Longer in Effect.

Cyril of Alexandria: Jesus does not pray to relieve the patient’s sickness in case he [Jesus] should seem to be like one of the holy prophets. Rather, as the Lord of powers, he commands with authority that it be so. He tells him to go home rejoicing, to take his bed on his shoulders, to be a memento to those who would see the might of the one who had healed him. And so the man does as he is asked and by obedience and faith gains the threefold longed for grace.... Christ heals the man on the sabbath, and when healed immediately enjoins him to break through the custom of the law. He induces him to walk on the sabbath, and this while carrying his bed, although God clearly cries aloud by one of the holy prophets, “Neither carry a burden out of your house on the sabbath day.” And no one, I suppose, who is sober-minded would say the man was then a despiser or unruly in the face of the divine commands. They would instead see that, as in a type, Christ was making known to the Jews that they should be healed by obedience and faith in the last times of the world (for this is what I think “the sabbath” signifies, being the last day of the week). But once they have received healing through faith and are remodeled into a new life, it was necessary that the old letter of the law should become of no effect and that the typical worship in shadows and empty Jewish customs should be rejected. Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.5.

Carrying, Not Healing, Is the Problem.

Augustine: They did not charge our Lord with healing on the sabbath since he would have replied that if an ox or an ass of theirs had fallen into a pit, would they not have taken it out on the sabbath day. Rather, they addressed the man as he was carrying his bed, as if to say: Even if the healing could not be delayed,

why command the work?... He shields himself under the authority of his healer: The one who made me whole is the one who said to me, "Take up your bed, and walk," meaning: Why should I not receive a command if I also received a cure from him? Tractates on the Gospel of John 17.10.

5:11 Take Up Your Bed and Walk

A Bold Confession of Cure.

Chrysostom: Had he been inclined to deception, he might have said, "I am not doing this on my own but at the request of another. If it is a crime, accuse the one who commanded it, and I will lay down my bed." In this way, he would have concealed his cure, knowing, as he did, that the real cause of their offense was not the breaking of the sabbath but the curing of his illness. But he neither concealed it nor asked for pardon. Instead he boldly confessed the cure. This is how he acted. But consider how unfairly they acted. They do not say, Who is it who made you whole? Rather, they keep bringing up the seeming transgression. Homilies on the Gospel of John 37.2.

5:12 Who Told You to Do This?

5:13 Jesus Had Withdrawn

Jesus Withdraws, Leaving a Perfect Witness.

Chrysostom: He did this first of all because the man who had been made whole was the best witness of the cure and could give his testimony with less suspicion in our Lord's absence. His second reason for doing so was so that the fury of people might not be excited more than was necessary. For the mere sight of the object of envy is no small incentive to envy. For these reasons he departed and left them to examine the fact for themselves. Homilies on the Gospel of John 37.2.

A Modest Miracle by Human Standards.

Augustine: If we judge this miracle on the basis of low and human standards, it is not at all a striking display of power, and it is only a moderate display of goodness. Of so many who lay sick, only one was healed; although, had he chosen to do so, our Lord could have restored them all by a single word. How should we account for this? We might suppose that his power and goodness were asserted more for imparting knowledge of eternal salvation to the soul than for working a temporal cure on the body.... That

which received the temporal cure was certain to decay at some point when death arrived, whereas the soul that believed passed into eternal life. Tractates on the Gospel of John 17.1.

5:14 Jesus' Admonition

Pedagogical Punishment of the Body.

Chrysostom: Here we learn in the first place that his disease was the consequence of his sins. Second, we learn that there is really a hell; third, that it is a place of lasting and infinite punishment.... But someone might ask, "Do all diseases proceed from sin?" Not all, but most do. Some proceed from different kinds of loose living, since gluttony, intemperance and sloth produce similar sufferings.... But why is it that in the case of these paralytics Christ mentions their sins?... I know that some slander this paralytic, asserting that he was an accuser of Christ and that therefore this speech was addressed to him. But what about the paralytic in Matthew who heard nearly the same words? For Christ also told him, "Your sins are forgiven you." And so it is clear that this man was not addressed in this way because of what they allege.... Rather, Jesus was securing him against future sins.

In healing others, however, he makes no mention of sins at all. And so, it would seem to be the case that the diseases of these men had arisen from their sins, whereas those of the others had come from natural causes only. Or perhaps through these, Jesus is admonishing everybody else.... Or he may have admonished this man, knowing his great patience of mind, anticipating that he would bear an admonition, keeping him healthy both by the benefit of the healing and the fear of future ills.... It is also a disclosure too of his divinity, for he implies in saying, "Sin no more," that he knew what sins he had formerly committed. Homilies on the Gospel of John 38.1–2.

Healed to a New Life in God.

Gregory of Nazianzus: Yesterday you were flung upon a bed, exhausted and paralyzed, and you had no one to put you into the pool when the water should be troubled. Today you have him who is in one person man and God, or rather God and man. You were raised up from your bed, or rather you took up your bed and publicly acknowledged the benefit. Do not again be thrown on your bed by sinning.... But as you now are, so walk, mindful of the command.... Sin no more lest a worse thing happen to you if you prove yourself to be evil after the blessing you have received. On Holy Baptism, Oration 40.33.

5:16 The Jews Persecuted Jesus Because He Violated the Sabbath

Jewish Elders Also Healed on the Sabbath.

Irenaeus: The Jewish elders were unwilling to be subject to the law of God, which was to prepare them for the coming of Christ. But they even blamed the Lord for healing on the Sabbath days, which the law did not prohibit. For they did themselves, in one sense, perform acts of healing upon the Sabbath day, when they circumcised a man [on that day]. But they did not blame themselves for transgressing the command of God through tradition and the previously mentioned pharisaical law. Nor did they condemn themselves for not keeping the commandment of the law, which is the love of God. Against Heresies 4.12.1.

5:17 Jesus and the Father Still Working

Divine Precedent in the Father.

Hilary of Poitiers: He refers to the charge of violating the sabbath, brought against him. My Father works up to this time, and I work. He means that he had a precedent for claiming the right he did, and that what he did was in reality his Father's doing who acted in the Son. And to quiet the jealousy that had been raised, because by the use of his Father's name he had made himself equal with God, and to assert the excellence of his birth and nature, he says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do." On the Trinity 7.17.

The Father Works in Christ While Christ Works.

Hilary of Poitiers: Their anger was so kindled against him that they wanted to kill him, because he did his works on the sabbath. But let us see also what the Lord answered: "My Father is still working, and I also am working." ... He speaks that we may recognize in him the power of the Father's nature employing the nature that has that power to work on the sabbath. The Father works in him while he works. Without doubt, then, Jesus works along with the working of the Father.... We must regard Jesus as referring to that very work of the Father's which he was then doing since it implies the working of the Father at the very time of his words.... If the Father works and the Son works, no union exists between them that merges them into a single person. On the Trinity 9.44.

The Father and Son Are of the Same Essence.

Athanasius: The word still shows [the Son's] eternal existence in the Father as the Word. For it is proper to the Word to do the Father's works and not to be external to him.... He is either seen to be the efficient cause of things that he himself has brought about, or he has no power to cause anything at all.... For none of the things that are brought to be is an efficient cause, but all things were made through the Word who would not have brought anything into being if he himself were numbered among the creatures.... For by the Word, the things that were not have come into existence. And if through him [i.e., the Son] the [Father] creates and makes, [the Son] is not himself of things created and made. Rather, he is the Word of the Creator God and is known, from the Father's works which he himself works, to be "in the Father and the Father in him" ... because the Son's essence is proper to the Father, and he is in all points like his Father. Discourses Against the Arians 2.16.20–22.

The Son Equal to God.

Augustine: Here he has already indicated that he is equal to God. "My Father," he says, "is working until now, and I too am working." Their literal-minded understanding of the sabbath is disturbed. They imagined that it was because the Lord was tired that he rested, in order to do no more work. They hear, "My Father is working until now," and they are disturbed. But then he adds, "And I too am working," making himself equal to God, and again they are disturbed. Sermon 125.6.

How Did God Rest on the Seventh Day?

Augustine: How can both be true when it says that God rested on the seventh day from all his works which he had made, and what he himself through whom they were made says in the gospel, "My Father is working until now; and I myself am working." ... The Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered only at the precise time he willed, underlined the mystery of this [Genesis] rest by his burial. It was of course on the day of the Sabbath that he rested in the tomb, and he had the whole of that day as a kind of holy vacation, after he had finished all his works on the sixth day, that is, Preparation Day ... when he said, "It is finished; and bowing his head he surrendered his spirit." So why should we be surprised if God wished to point forward to this day on which Christ would rest in the grave, before proceeding from then on to work the unfolding of the ages, in order to verify these other words too, "My Father is working until now?"

God can be understood to have rested from establishing different kinds of creatures, because he did not now establish any new kinds any more. But he rested like this in such a way as to continue from then on

and up till now to operate the management of the things that were then set in place, not as though at least on that seventh day his power was withheld from the government of heaven and earth and of all the things he had established. If that had been done, they would immediately have collapsed into nothingness. It is the creator's power, after all, and the virtuosity, the skill and tenacity of the almighty, that causes every created thing to subsist. If this tenacious virtuosity ceased for one moment to rule and direct the things that have been created, their various species would at once cease to exist, and every nature would collapse into nothingness. It is not, you see, like a mason building houses; when he has finished he goes away, and his work goes on standing when he has stopped working on it and gone away. No, the world will not be able to go on standing for a single moment if God withdraws from it his controlling hand.

Indeed, the very expression employed by the Lord, "My Father is working until now," points to the continuousness of his work by which he holds together and manages the whole of creation. It could, you see, have been understood differently if he had said, "and is now working," where we would not have to take the work as being continuous. But by saying "until now," he forces us to understand it in the other sense as meaning, that is, from the time when he had worked at the original establishment of all things. On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis 4.11[.21]–12 [.23].

The Father Continues the Work of Creation Through the Son.

Augustine: Therefore it is as if he said to the Jews, "Why do you expect that I should not work on the sabbath? The sabbath day was ordained for you as a sign about me. You observe the works of God: I was there when they were made. They were all made by me.... The Father made the light, but he spoke that there should be light. If he spoke, it was by his Word that he made it. I was his Word, and I am [his Word]. The world was made by me in those works, and the world is also ruled by me in those works. My Father worked when he made the world, and he still works while he rules the world. Therefore, just as it was by me that he created when he made the world, so it is by me that he rules when he rules." Tractates on the Gospel of John 17.15.

5:18 Making Himself Equal to God

The Reason for Hostility

Ambrose: The Evangelist testifies that in calling himself God's own Son, Jesus made himself equal to God. For the Jews are not presented as saying, "For this cause we sought to kill him." Rather, the Evangelist,

speaking for himself, says, “For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him.” Moreover, he has discovered the cause, [in saying] that the Jews were stirred with desire to slay him because, when as God he broke the sabbath and also claimed God as his own Father, Jesus ascribed to himself not only the majesty of divine authority in breaking the sabbath but also, in speaking of his Father, the right pertaining to eternal equality. On the Christian Faith 2.8.68.

A Lesser Being Could Not Break the Sabbath Law with Impunity.

Chrysostom: If he had not been the very Son and of the same essence, the defense he offered here would have been worse than the charge. For no viceroy could clear himself from altering a royal law by asserting that the king also broke the law. Not only would he not escape, but he would even increase the weight of the charge against him. But in this instance, since the dignity is equal, the defense is valid. And so he says, in effect, “Absolve me from the same charges from which you absolve God.” Homilies on the Gospel of John 38.2.

Jews Understand What Arians Do Not.

Augustine: So, the Jews understood what the Arians do not. For the Arians say that the Son is not equal to the Father, and hence sprang up that heresy that afflicts the church. Tractates on the Gospel of John 17.16.

They Knew What Christ Was Claiming.

Chrysostom: But those who do not want to receive these words with a reasonable mind assert that Christ did not make himself equal to God, but only that the Jews thought he did. Come then and let us go over what was said from the beginning. Did the Jews persecute him or not? It is clear to everyone that they did. Did they persecute him for this or something else? Again, it was for this. Did he then break the sabbath or not? No one can have anything to say against the fact that he did. Did he call God his Father, or did he not call him so? This is true too. Then the rest also follows. To call God his Father, to break the sabbath and to be persecuted by the Jews for these things does not belong to the realm of false imagination but is actual fact. This means that his making himself equal to God was a declaration that is true as well. Homilies on the Gospel of John 38.3.

The Evangelist Would Not Have Been Silent if the Jews Were Wrong.

Chrysostom: If Jesus had not wished to establish his equality and the Jews had made such a supposition without reason, Jesus would not have allowed their minds to be deceived. He would have corrected them. The Evangelist also would not have remained silent but would have plainly said that the Jews thought this but that Jesus did not actually make himself equal to God, which is what [John] had done elsewhere. Homilies on the Gospel of John 38.3.

The Flesh Seen, but Not the Word.

Augustine: In one sense the Jews were right [about their indignation], because a man dared to make himself equal to God. But they were also wrong because they did not understand that it was God in the man. They saw the flesh, but they did not know God. They looked on the dwelling place, but they did not know the dweller. That flesh was a temple; God dwelt within it. Therefore Jesus did not equate his flesh to the Father. It was not the form of the servant that he compared to the Lord—not what he became for us, but what he was when he made us. Tractates on the Gospel of John 18.2.1.