

Can you get to heaven by keeping the 10 Commandments? *“Of course not,”* jumps off our lips, *“because we can’t keep them at the level God requires.”* For entrance into heaven, which is his house, God makes the rule: **“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”**

And while all of that is absolutely true, there is another answer and it’s: *“Yes!”* Don’t be shocked. Hear me out. *“If ... and yes, it is an impossible if ... if someone kept the 10 Commandments perfectly, they would be able to enter heaven. They would have kept God’s rule of perfection.”* You’re right, nobody can, but if they could, they would get to heaven.

We know the Jews of Jesus’ day were dead serious about keeping those 10 Commandments. That’s why they developed 613 additional rules to help them keep those all-important 10. They believed, like many today, that keeping the rules earned you favor with God. If you are better than most, or the best you can be, that should be enough to get you into heaven.

In today’s Bible Story from John 5, Jesus is trying to silence those notions and straighten out those false beliefs by helping a man who had been an invalid for 38 years.

Jesus had come to Jerusalem during one of the Big 3 Festivals. All Jewish males were expected to attend Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Near the city gate where the shepherds brought their sheep, Jesus visited a pool called *“The House of Mercy,”* better known as Bethesda.

This pool had 5 colonnades or coverings for **the blind, lame and paralyzed**, who came to the pool for healing. Think of it as a hospital. The Jews believed that from time-to-time, an angel would stir the waters. The first person to get into the water after the angel touched it would be healed of their disease.

Did the waters of Bethesda have healing powers? John’s focus is squarely on Jesus and his healing ability; not on the waters, or their claim to heal.

Jesus visited the pool and one of the patients catches his attention. Jesus learned he’s been disabled for a long time. It’s likely there was a large number of visitors, since people used the Sabbath, their day off, to visit family, relatives and friends who were patients there.

Jesus asks a rather unexpected question: **“Do you want to get well?”** Why else would this man be here? Of course he wanted to get well!

Not knowing who Jesus was, or his power, the man could only share his hopeless situation: **“Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”**

With an 8-word command – **“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk”** Jesus did much more than if he had helped him into the water. Without a single session of physical therapy or months in rehab, Jesus healed the man. This invalid who couldn’t use his legs for 38 years immediately did what he was told. He picked up his old bed, tucked it under his arm and walked down the street, without the slightest limp.

The question Jesus asked the man: **“Do you want to get well?”** didn’t wake up faith in his heart. In this situation, the miracle of healing came before the miracle of faith. Sometimes the gift of faith comes before the gift of healing. Sometimes the gift of faith comes after the gift of healing.

This happened on a Saturday, **the Sabbath**. What difference would it make on what day the man was healed? John explains that the sound you heard was Jewish leaders’ blood coming to a boil: **they said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”**

They could have cared less about the miracle Jesus performed, or his compassion, healing power and mercy. They were looking for anything to pin on Jesus for breaking some law, any law.

Did you know John records only 3 of Jesus' healing miracles in his entire Gospel? The son of the royal official in Capernaum. This man at the pool of Bethesda. The man born blind. 2 of the 3 happened on a Sabbath. Even though it was the designated day for worship and rest, Jesus decided healing the man was more important than letting him continue to suffer. God's Third Commandment was never intended to outlaw work if it involved a kind and caring action towards others. How could the Jewish leaders have missed the true meaning of God's Sabbath law?

For many generations the Jewish teachers and the people they taught were caught up in the lie of work righteousness – do things to get right with God. Work your way to heaven. Their additional 613 laws only made it worse. Jesus had to expose these man-made traditions. That's why he deliberately chose the Sabbath to heal the man.

He wanted to lead them away from thinking they could keep God's Law with outward works. He wanted to lead them to admitting their sin and guilt, and trusting in his forgiveness and pardoning grace.

Instead, they felt it was their duty to enforce the law of Moses **“On the Sabbath you shall do no work.”** Clearly, from their perspective, both the one who did the healing and the one who was healed and now carrying his old bed had done work and broken the law. That's why they asked him: **“Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”**

It's true, God commanded men, women and children to rest on the Sabbath. God rested on the 7th day after 6 straight days of creating. God knew

we'd need a day to rest from the stress of life. With a day of rest, we could appreciate God's activity in our lives. Sometimes, we realize things only when we have to stop and look around us.

### **The man who was healed had no idea who it was.**

By slipping away into the crowd, Jesus gave the healed man a reason to figure out exactly who he was. Once he did, Jesus treats him as a believer. First, he reminds him of the grace he had received: **“See, you are well again.”** His restored health was a gift. Then he goes on to remind him of the grace that restored him: **“Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”**

It seems that man's ruined health had been the consequence of some sin from the past. We can't play God and say things like that, but in his omniscience, Jesus could lay the cause of a person's suffering on a specific sin. In love, Jesus warns every pardoned sinner: *“Don't flirt with willful sinning at the expense of God's grace.”*

At every step of Jesus' life, he kept every Commandment we broke. Jesus transfers his perfection to us by faith. Jesus shed his own blood on the cross as the punishment for our sins. Jesus is our substitute.

All the great stories follow a similar story line.

- *Someone is in distress.* The invalid at the pool of Bethesda. Adam and Eve in the Garden. You and me where our broken commandments damage, ruin or destroy our families, our friendships, our marriages, our careers.
- *Someone needs to be rescued.* The invalid at the pool of Bethesda. Adam and Eve in the Garden. You and me from the sins that damage, ruin or destroy our relationships with God and others.
- *Sometimes in the story, the hero dies.* That's what Jesus did. He's our hero, our substitute. He dies so that by faith in him we will have life