



image from Hope Gallery

CARL HEINRICH BLOCH PAINTING AND VIDEO SUMMARY

Report Prepared for Dr. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

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Carl Bloch is one of the painters I aspire to paint like so this was a wonderful topic for me to have as an assignment. I am an illustration major and have viewed Bloch's painting, "Christ Healing the Sick at Bethesda," several times as part of my personal studies. It is a privilege to be able to view the original painting and an opportunity that I have very much enjoyed.

From a technical standpoint the painting has strong value contrast, brush strokes, detail and has anatomically correct figures. Bloch has a strong command of the painterly skills. But most importantly for me, he is a masterful story teller. He directs our focus on Christ but then adds other figures in to provoke more probing thought. For instance, there is a figure in the far left, back in the shadows, just behind the lower half of Christ's robe. An invalid with badged hands that he uses to walk on. I wonder about him. He looks as if he is following Christ. Is he just curious? Does he sense something about Christ that makes him come forward? Does he ask to be healed after he sees the healing of the lame man? What is the story of this man hidden in the shadows.

Then there is the man in full light, with the red headdress, in the center of the painting. I see his positioning behind the pillar with Christ on the other side as significant. The pillar, for me, represents the distance that we put between ourselves and Christ. This man is so close to Christ,

he can hear the noise of excitement from others that Christ's presence brings with him, he may even hear the Lord's words to the lame man. Yet he doesn't even look around the corner. The man seems almost indifferent to his surroundings. Or does he feel hopeless? That is what Carl Bloch does with this painting, adds stories within the story, making it a possibility that we might find ourselves in one of those "others" he has portrayed. Of course we don't know if such characters really existed around Bethesda as Bloch has portrayed but he gives depth to the viewers, if they are searching. Just as the messages of Christ do for those who seek.

When viewing the video I was struck by the love Bloch must have had for the Savior. Being a painter myself I don't feel you can paint that many paintings (23 in this series on Christ's life and they were the ones that he did after the first ones burned) on a particular subject without having some feelings for it. Then to see the moments he has chosen to depict adding to my opinion that he revered Christ. When they showed painting after painting in the video I have to say that I was literally moved to tears. I felt a great tribute had been given by this man and it strengthened my own testimony of Christ and has clarified my desires to paint in a like manner.