

John 5:1-18

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[0 : 00] It has been previously stated in our study of John's gospel, the purpose for his writing. We need not dig deep or postulate long on the matter because he tells us in John chapter 20, verse 30 and 31.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And that by believing you may have life in his name. John wants his readers to behold the miracle-working Jesus in order to understand him to be God's anointed one.

The Savior of the world as we saw him called by the believers at Sychar a number of weeks ago.

That's the point of all these miracles. We're going to look at one together this morning.

As John labors to do this, to help us believe, he juxtaposes belief in Jesus with rejection of Jesus.

[1 : 09] We see the very first clear instance of strong oppositional resistance to Jesus in today's text.

In broad terms, the Jews of Jesus' day did not want him on his terms, but on their own.

They understood the Messiah to be a military slash political figure. One who was going to come and deliver them from the rule of Rome.

They did not anticipate Jesus' objection to their hypocritical religious systems and traditions. And they would eventually kill him for it.

If we are to have Jesus, and there is no greater reality than this, to know God and to be known by him, then we must have him on his terms.

[2 : 13] On the back of your bulletin, the historic quotation this morning is from a man named William Bates, who once said, Many would depend on Christ's sacrifice, yet will not submit to his scepter.

They would have Christ to pacify their consciences and the world to please their affections. They would have Christ to die for them, but not to live in them.

May it not be so of us this morning. Let's pray before I read the text. Father, help us this day as we take up your word together, this blessed and precious thing, this authoritative, inerrant, sufficient word for us.

As we do this this morning, we want to do so carefully. We want to rightly understand it this day, and we humbly recognize that we need your help to do so.

We know that it's written for your glory and for our good, and so help us to believe its promises and obey its commands and have affection for you, its author.

[3 : 28] We pray, Father, that we would see Christ as he is and accept him on his terms this morning. And we pray this in his name. Amen.

John chapter 5, beginning in verse 1, and I'll read through verse 18. After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now, there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, an Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades or porches.

In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, Do you want to be healed? The sick man answered him, Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going, another steps down before me.

Jesus said to him, Get up, take up your bed, and walk. And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

[4 : 43] So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed. But he answered them, The man who healed me, the man that said to me,

Take up your bed and walk.

They asked him, Who is the man who said to you, Take up your bed and walk? Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, For Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.

Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, See, you are well. Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My father is working until now, and I am working.

This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God.

[5 : 47] Now before I share with you the outline for our study, let's take a brief look at the setting for this text in verses 1-5.

Three things I want to note about it, these five verses. First, just note the location, verses 1 and 2. It's at the time of a feast, and it's not a designated feast.

We're not sure which feast this is exactly. And John's not telling us a tight chronological story here, so we're just not sure which it is.

But because it's a feast, there would have been a lot of people gathered in Jerusalem. He's gone up to Jerusalem. It's up on a hill, and he's at a place called Bethesda, a pool near the Sheep Gate.

It's got these five roofs around it. And in those places, these colonnades, there are multitudes, and we don't know exactly what that number means, but we have to imagine a lot of invalids.

[6 : 53] Blind, lame, paralyzed. People who are there taking shelter under these porches, around this pool, looking for relief to be healed.

And we find amongst this multitude of invalids, one man who had been an invalid for 38 years.

So this is the location of where this is happening. Secondly, notice that there is a multitude. I mentioned this already, and we're going to see down in verse 13, there's a man healed, and he doesn't know who it is that healed him because Jesus had withdrawn.

And John tells us the reason for that, because there was a crowd in the place. Jesus is often not a fan of the crowd.

He's awaiting his time when crowds are going to cry for his crucifixion. And so he escapes the mob. He goes into places, and he ministers to the individual, and then he escapes out of it.

[8 : 03] And the significance of this will come up a bit later. Third thing I want to note about the setting, really just as we're looking at these first verses, you may have noticed, if you're being astute at all this morning, that there is no verse 4 in the text that I read.

Some of your translations may have a verse 4, a little bit at the end of verse 3, and a verse 4. But the ESV, which I read from this morning, does not have a verse 4.

I kind of wish I'd show of hands. How many of you noticed that? The King James Version has a phrase at the end of verse 3, and then a verse 4.

I'm going to read it to you, and we're going to talk a little bit, it's a little bit of an aside, why? Why the exclusion of verse 4 in my reading? So this is from the King James Version 1900, the year 1900.

Verse 3, And these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind halt withered, and here's the addition, waiting for the moving of the water.

[9 : 14] And then verse 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.

Now, I think it's probable, upon your first reading of this, that you even filled those details in. I did, when I read John chapter 5, sat down this week to do it.

In my mind, I knew the explanation for why this healing was able to happen. An angel stirred up the water. That's where this comes from. So we have a little bit of an issue I think we should address.

It's important that we recognize that there's some translations that include it, there's some translations that don't. And I hope, in my briefest of explanations, to give you greater confidence in the word that we have before us.

So first, the labor of looking at old manuscripts and deciding what belongs in the scripture is toiled over.

[10:22] Very intelligent people across the ages, still going on today, do this very careful work. We have an abundance, an embarrassing amount, of ancient manuscripts, over 5,000 of them, whole documents and fragments of documents, more wealth of ancient manuscripts than any other ancient writing at all.

If you have any confidence in any old writing, you should have even more confidence in this text. The very words we have, now you can decide whether or not there's God's words to us, but we have the words.

This is a reliable ancient document. But, sometimes, there's some small discrepancies. The earlier and most reliable of these ancient manuscripts do not include the last little bit of verse 3 and verse 4.

Now you may have it as a footnote, I do, and my friends, I look down, I go, hey, what happened to verse 4? And you can look down at the bottom and it tells you what that would have said.

And so the decision for the ESV was to exclude it altogether. Sometimes you find it in brackets with some footnoting about how it may not have been in earlier manuscripts.

[11:49] But they're doing this really careful work, right, of trying to sort out what does and what doesn't belong. The very best guess of how the end of verse 3 and verse 4 arrived is that it was likely a marginal note.

Somebody wrote off to the side some explanation like a study note off to the side and it's made its way into subsequent copies. We don't know for sure.

But the thing that we should gain our confidence in these texts is that they're doing this very careful work, right? They're not renumbering it.

They're including the footnotes down at the bottom. And no place, no place, of the few discrepancies that there are, no place that there is a discrepancy is any doctrine in conflict.

It doesn't change all the things that we need to believe for life and godliness. We find these things, right, these explanations.

[12:52] So, if you prefer to include the end of verse 3 in chapter 4, it opens up some possibility here that God has provided for the relief of sufferers.

There's a, this miraculous pool, right, that an angel comes down to and stirs the water and the first one in is healed. And perhaps that's what's going on here, right?

If you take the end of verse 3 and verse 4 as God's word, then we must come to that conclusion. If you don't, which I wouldn't, then we're just really not sure.

Maybe that's what's going on here. Or, perhaps, some have said that this pool was fed intermittently, right, by an intermittent spring, so some water would have come and rushed into it. There's some old documents that talk about iron stains within the pool, so maybe it was a mineral-rich pool, and perhaps some superstition had surrounded it.

[13:57] But regardless, John doesn't work out the details because they are not the point of what he's saying. There are sufferers there, clearly, sufferers there, and they're looking for relief from their suffering.

So, now that we have that settling into our minds, I kind of wonder how many of you wouldn't have even noticed that there wasn't a verse before. An outline for the rest of our time together.

We get to gaze at Jesus in these coming moments. We get to look at the risen Christ before his death and following resurrection.

resurrection. In these 17 verses, it's 1-18, but there's 17 verses, remember, John is trying to help us behold Jesus as the Christ, that we would believe in him.

So, first, point number one, we're going to see Jesus as the sympathetic healer, and secondly as the rejected Messiah. So, first, the sympathetic healer.

[15:13] A few things I think that are important for us to notice, verses 6 down and through verse 9. Jesus is omniscient, which means he knows everything.

Jesus is compassionate and Jesus is omnipotent. his sovereign power. So, one at a time.

First, Jesus is omniscient. Notice in verse 6, Jesus sees this man, Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time.

Jesus already knew all the details of this man's life. I don't think we should assume that Jesus knew this by the appearance of the man. There was some way that he gathered some context clues and knew that he had been there a long time.

But John has a fully formed understanding of exactly who Jesus is. Embodied deity. He knows who he is and therefore exactly what he's capable of.

[16:22] He means for us to see a word like new and all of that comes to life in our minds. It would be easy at this point to rush on, to give brief acknowledgement to the fact that Jesus is God and just move on past it.

Of course he knew because he's God. But we will do well to slow down for a moment and consider the fact that Jesus knew. Just to let it settle into our hearts.

Jesus knows you. Singular man amongst a multitude of people. Jesus knows that this man has suffered long.

He's been there looking for relief, the text tells it, for 38 years. In the same way, Jesus knows you. He understands you far better than you understand yourself.

I think I understand myself better than anybody. Jesus knows me way better than I know myself. All of the complications and all of the intricacies of my heart.

[17:39] There is no sin committed that he is not aware of. There is no mingling of intention that he is not able to sort out.

There is no complexity of emotion that he can't unravel. Jesus knows you. He knows you and it is the unsurpassed privilege of the Christian to know him.

Incredible thing. An omniscient Jesus. Knows everything at all times. He knew this man compassion. And he knows you.

And because of his knowledge of this man, he is moved to compassion for him. He asks him a question. A question he already knows the answer to.

Do you want to be healed? He sets the stage for a response. A response here in just a moment.

[18:42] He sets the stage up for him. A compassionate offer of healing to the man. The author of Hebrews says in Hebrews chapter 4 verse 15, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.

The difference between sympathy and empathy. I hear this taught wrong all the time. So here I am. I'm going to set the record straight. If somebody sympathizes with you, it's because they have experienced the thing that you've experienced.

If they empathize with you, you're imagining, you're trying to put yourself in that person's shoes. Often as a pastor, I have to empathize with people.

I haven't experienced everything that you guys have experienced. When you go through particular trials or hurts, I empathize. I think, oh, that must be hard. I have to imagine what it would be like to live in that circumstance and take you to the text with me to show you what it might say.

That's different than sympathy. It's different. Me too. I've also experienced the very same thing. Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses.

[19:55] He is one who is in every respect tempted as we are tempted. That word can also mean difficult circumstance laid upon us.

And then the author of Hebrews says, yet without sin. Jesus understands this man's suffering and he understands ours.

He's omniscient and he is compassionate. So, the man responds to him and we've seen this pattern of misunderstanding.

Jesus says things to people. The response you would hope of the man would be, yes, I do want to be healed. That's why I'm here. But he addresses him, sir, not rabbi. He doesn't know who Jesus is. It's a simple question. Do you want to be healed? And his response is, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. No one to help me. No one to scoop me up and put me in there.

[20:55] And so while he's making the effort on his own, he says, while I am going, another steps down before me. That's where we get this, I think, marginal explanation.

What's going on there in that case? Right? I want to be healed. I'm looking to the pool in order to be healed, but I don't move quick enough, and so I cannot be healed.

And Jesus simply responds to him. There's no expression of faith on this man's part at all. In other places, you see expressed faith.

Right? Prior, we saw an official pleading for his son. He knows who Jesus is. He knows Jesus is performing miracles, and he goes to him, and he pleads, and Jesus heals his son of his illness.

Here we see none of that. A man in a crowd, a man amongst many who were there for relief. The man says, I want to be healed, but I can't be healed, I can't move quick enough, and Jesus simply says to him, get up, take up your bed, and walk.

[22 : 06] And John is careful here. It's not because the man makes some effort to get up and walk that he's healed. Verse 9 says, and at once the man was healed.

This compassionate Christ, this omnipotent Christ, that was that last observation. Right? Jesus is omnipotent. Right?

He can do whatever he desires to do by the word of his power. At once, the man was healed. In other accounts, people marvel at the healing of lame people, and he does one even better. He forgives their sin. He just declares it so.

He commands the waves and the wind. Jesus is omnipotent, and he expresses that here. And we're meant to look at this. This man is healed.

[23 : 05] We're meant to see it and go, this is the Christ. And the point is not our physical healing. That is not the thing that Jesus came to do.

He came to preach the gospel, to live the life that we're required to, to die the death that we deserve because of our failure to do so, to be raised on the third day, to be seated at the right hand of the Father, to call together the church for the glory of God.

Luke 19, 10, Jesus says of himself, the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Observing this miracle, this sympathetic healer, is meant to drive us to think about him as the great healer of the greatest ailment that any of us could ever have.

the sickness, the death that our sin brings. Now, if Jesus is omniscient and compassionate and omnipotent, if he is the sympathetic healer, then why not heal everyone at the pool?

Why not just take care of everybody there? Gather around everybody? He could have just said it. They could have all gotten up and moved. But here again, our study can be helped by the literary structure of John's gospel.

[24 : 33] I hope you don't get tired of hearing about this. We're going to do it the entire time we're in this book. The 17 verses before us are, you guessed it if you've been around, a chiasm.

They're all over. I will be structuring our study of this following this structure all throughout it. Not because I think it's just fun to do, but it's because of what John intended for us to see.

We don't think in these terms. If you're unfamiliar with what I'm talking about, chiasm comes from the Greek letter X. So the idea here is that ideas, words, phrases at the beginning of the text correspond with words, phrases, ideas at the end of the text, and the second one to the second to last, and so on, you can imagine half of an X until it arrives at a central point of the text.

The entire book of John is structured this way, and it has chiasms within it. And the point, as you bring things to the central portion of the passage, it's not that the central thing is always the most important thing, but it's meant to help us, it gives us an interpretive lens to use as we look at the entirety of the chiasm.

So, the central portion of this passage is the very end of verse 9 and verse 10, which just says, now that day was the Sabbath.

[26 : 11] Now that day was the Sabbath, and then verse 10 says, so, the Jew said to the man who had been healed, it is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.

So, we take that, we take that bit of it, that's the way the structure, why did John write it this way? It begins to answer some questions for us. It helps us to look at what is trying to be communicated to us in this text.

Now I do not want to make too little of the fact that Jesus is the sympathetic healer. We should note that, we should pause on that, right? So it's a significant thing that happens here in the life of this man, and we're meant to see Jesus in this way, but that's not the driving point of this passage.

It's not the one thing that we should take away from it. John develops the setting of this story in the first four verses, but omits this important detail.

Now that day was the Sabbath, right? He could have said that at the very beginning, but he holds it back. He holds it back until we're amazed at the healing.

[27 : 18] We're reading and we're going, look at the mercy of this God to this man, and then he drops a bomb at the very center of the text. Now that day was the Sabbath.

Not incredibly significant to us, more than likely, but if you understand in any measure the culture of his day, you would see the significance, and I'm going to try to help you do that here in just a

moment for our second point.

We need to take up this interpretive lens, the rejected Messiah. So we have the sympathetic healer and we also have the rejected Messiah.

Sabbath keeping was a major deal for the Jewish people. Still is among some Jewish communities today.

Now they were right to have some concern for keeping the fourth of the Ten Commandments. This one especially was an outward invisible thing. You could tell whether or not somebody was keeping the Sabbath or not, but they had just entirely misunderstood its purpose.

[28 : 33] You know, back in my days when I wrote papers, a long time ago when I wrote papers, sometimes I would read something that was just so perfectly worded that I just wanted to copy and paste it, but I'm not a plagiarist, so I wouldn't.

I learned about block quoting, which changed my life in writing papers. That's essentially what I get to do in sermons for you. So this is so succinct and so well said, by John MacArthur in his commentary on this.

I'm just going to read you two short paragraphs that helps make this point so very, very clearly. So I'm block quoting John MacArthur, a dear saint that we lost not long ago.

He's talking about the Sabbath here. The Old Testament prohibited working on the Sabbath.

Exodus chapter 31 and chapter 35, but did not specify exactly what kind of work was forbidden.

It seems, however, that one's customary employment was in view. So the thing you did for a living was what was in view. You worked six days and then you rested on a seventh.

[29 : 40] The Israelites were not to participate in their normal week-long occupations on the Sabbath day. But rabbinic tradition went far beyond that, listing 39 forbidden categories of work, including carrying goods.

So what they were doing in an effort, I think a well-intentioned effort, to keep the fourth commandment, the Sabbath keeping commandment, they added on commandments beyond it. Right? They were often called hedge laws. Right? They put extra stuff around it. Let's just be really sure we don't break it by piling up extra laws. Go back to the quote.

The rabbinic prohibitions against carrying loads on the Sabbath was ostensibly based on such passages as Nehemiah chapter 13 verse 15 through 18 and Jeremiah 17 verse 21 through 22. Those passages, however, were aimed at individuals who conducted their ordinary business, their livelihood or occupation on the Sabbath. Thus, they did not apply to the healed man since he did not make his living by carrying his mat.

[30 : 55] End quote. The point being, they had added up a bunch of extra stuff in order to be so careful. And they were just missing the point altogether of what the Sabbath was for.

So, recall, the center of the chiasm, the interpretive lens that we need to employ for these verses, centers on this issue of Sabbath keeping. The Sabbath is understood to be instituted by God in the creation of the world, and this is recorded for us in Genesis chapter 2, verses 1 through 3.

He creates, he speaks into existence in six days, and then he rests on the seventh. He did not do so because he had exhausted his creative energy, and he needed a breather.

So, it would be a gross misunderstanding of God's nature, omnipotent. He does not run out of steam and have to build it back up again.

So, why? What's it communicating to us? What it's communicating is that he had completed the place where he was to dwell with his image bearers.

[32 : 12] I heard it called his cosmic temple, that he was going to fill with his presence and be with his people. His work was to lead to eternal enjoyment, life with him.

But Adam and Eve introduced death onto the stage. The very good thing that God had created became marred by their sin.

And a curse, a curse of death began to reign in his created world. The command to keep the Sabbath was meant to leave its observers looking backward to man's banishment from God's presence and forward to an anticipated restoration of God's presence.

Looking towards that great day when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, a garden remade where God's people will dwell with him. The Sabbath then properly understood and emptied all of the challenges that they found used as an interpretive lens employed in this way should lead us to see that this man's ailment is the result of the curse of the garden.

You see how the central point helps you to go oh how is John recording this for us to see this man who is not whole right? He's not whole because of the curse.

[33 : 47] We'll talk a bit whether it's his sin or sin in general in just a little while. Why? Why is this man ill? Why is he not doing well?

It's because sin is in the world. If you understand the Sabbath rightly and then you use it as that lens you'll see what John is doing for us here.

Jesus' healing of this man is meant to picture for us the great healing he does in the hearts of men as he brings them from death to life to place their faith in him.

To have God's presence to know him and to be known by him. If we understand it this way we'll see that this is what Jesus' healing is driving us to it's so much more than just talking about temporal relief and praise God he does bring us temporal relief but that's not the point it's not our greatest need what he does is directing us it's directing us toward him as the fulfillment of that rest restoration and it's also directing us to the confrontation to the Jewish hypocritical religious systems and traditions so we see them the central part of this saying to the man it's the Sabbath they're not rejoicing in the fact that he's been restored at all how dare you get up take your mat and walk around with it missing the point missing it all together and he simply responds to them well the man who healed me that man said to me take your bed up and walk and so

I did it is what he's saying there and then they go on the hunt for Jesus verse 12 who is the man who said to you take up your bed and walk the healed man doesn't know right again withdrawn there's a crowd in that place Jesus finds him in verse 14 and says to him in the temple see you are well sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you now we are told in John's gospel that temporal sickness and death are not the immediate result of personal sin in one place John chapter 9 verse 1 through 3 as Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth and his!

[36 : 21] disciples asked him rabbi who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind whose fault is it that the man is blind and Jesus says it was not that this man sinned or his parents but that the works of God might be displayed in him a man who's healed from his blindness why was this man blind it wasn't it wasn't a result of a sin but sin in general right the world made a mess because of its brokenness and the curse that followed we're also told in the bible that temporal sickness and death can be the result of personal sin 1st Corinthians chapter 11 Paul's talking about misuse and abuse of taking the Lord's supper!

together way that the church was not loving one another and he says in verse 30 that is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died because of this particular sinfulness so both sin or because of the curse that began by Adam's sin it's not clear but Jesus warning should be sobering he's been made whole temporally healed unrepentant sin unrepentant sin will lead to a fate much worse than being an invalid for 38 years unrepentant sin leads to eternal death a much much greater consequence death suffering separation from God forever unfortunately it would seem the man just doesn't quite get it why would I think this because the man goes away and he tells the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him I'm speculating a bit at that point but it would seem that he would want to protect the Christ from these people looking to persecute him I think this because right after that John says in verse 16 and this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things these miraculous things these wonderful restorative things he was doing these things on the Sabbath they elevated their tradition above Jesus himself they didn't seek to understand him they didn't seek to know what it was he was teaching he was infringing upon their system and they had to stop him we see this first opportunity of that right here in John chapter 5 and so we don't see the confrontation we can see it in some of the other synoptic gospels but here verse 17 we just see a response to them

Jesus says my father is working until now and I am working God has not ceased working he's continuing to be merciful in this world and Jesus says and me too I am the son I am the Christ I am the anointed one and both of us are at work he's the lord of the sabbath he's not breaking the sabbath in their terms doing it on his own and this is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him Jesus makes astounding claims about himself he's going to continue to do that as we press on in our study of John's gospel we have to consider this Jesus on his terms the Scottish pastor John Duncan early 19th century pastor once said Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud or he was himself deluded and self deceived or he was divine there is no getting out of this trilemma that's why I pulled this particular quote I like that word there's no getting out of this trilemma it is inexorable unescapable some of you may have heard this framed probably in C.S.

[41 : 05] Lewis's book mere Christianity as the liar lunatic or lord question who is this Jesus he's either just deceiving mankind the purpose it's what he's up to declaring himself to be God or he was actually crazy or he was true and what he said should be understood as such brief application and then we'll close number one understand your helplessness whether you are in Christ or not this morning like all of us need his mercy and grace like the man at Bethesda we are powerless to fix our sin 38 years of trying won't make us whole our only hope is to repent of our sin turn from it and place our trust in the completed work of Christ secondly be aware of our tendency toward empty religion be aware of our tendency toward it with good intention to obey the

Bible we are so apt to pile on extras to say my obedience to scripture should look exactly like your obedience to scripture and then the call down and be judgmental of others the Bible clearly says some things and I'm not talking about those things I'm talking about the things we add on around it it is possible to know scripture keep traditions and to miss Jesus entirely seek the Lord of the Sabbath who gives to us true rest and lastly and I've said this recently but I'll just say it again bow before the Son of God Jesus is not just a healer of bodies he is the eternal Son equal with the Father who gives life to the dead neutrality is impossible you must answer the question who is Jesus I hope you have already or will for the first time call him Lord let's pray together