

John 5.1-18 / COB / 03.23.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Good morning! I need your help this morning. I am hoping we can figure something out, and I need your enthusiastic cooperation. I am going to make a series of statements and then ask whether you agree or not, and what I hope you will do for me is give a hearty “Yes!” if you agree or “No!” if you don’t. We do this with the children, so let’s see if you are as good at it! Ready?
- Based on the teaching of the Bible, we should gather together to honor God; do you agree, yes or no?
 - Because the Bible teaches we should worship in song, our worship services should include music; do you agree, yes or no?
 - Since the early church taught the Bible during their gatherings, we should too; do you agree, yes or no?
 - Because Paul taught that our worship services should be orderly, we should not engage in distracting or disruptive behavior during our worship service; do you agree, yes or no?
 - Because we worship God in this room, we should never allow children to run or play games in here, even on other days of the week; do you agree, yes or no?
 - Because we gather to honor God, we should insist that everyone wear their best clothes on Sundays; do you agree, yes or no?
- † I hope you can see a pattern. We want to obey all that God teaches us in the Bible. But where the Bible is not explicit, we should be a little more flexible about how people respond.
- For some, dressing up is a vital part of honoring God on Sunday. For others, it is not. I think both views are within the explicit teaching of the Bible, so we should not look down on each other based on how we dress.
 - We want our children to learn to respect God by joining us in praying, singing, and learning. And we want them always to respect the sanctuary enough to take care not to harm it. But it is ok if we have our family fellowship games in here or if the youth group uses this room in their games.
 - Let’s pray and we will see how our passage addresses this question today...

[Slide 2: 5.1-3] John 5.1-3 [4]: After this [sometime after Jesus healed the boy in Capernaum without even seeing him] there was a Jewish feast, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool called Bethzatha in Aramaic, which has five covered walkways. A great number of sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed people were lying in these walkways.

- † How many of you have a Bible in your hand that has words for v.4? Most modern English translations leave out the second half of v.3 and all of v.4, because of the manuscript evidence.
- The earliest and most accurate manuscripts do not have that text [vv.3b-4]. That variant starts appearing in later centuries. What probably happened was some scribe wrote a note in the margin, and a later scribe who was making a copy included that note in the text, and as more copies were made in later years, the extra text continued to be copied. So we disregard that as not being an original part of the Bible revelation.

- † On a positive note, John says “there is a pool,” not “there was,” and there are Greek grammatical reasons to believe this indicates that he wrote this gospel before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. You will hear skeptical scholars say that John must have written this gospel much later, but the internal evidence suggests he wrote in the first few decades after Christ’s resurrection.

- † Coming back to v.1, John is not specific about the timing. Jesus did the miracle in Galilee, healing the boy in Capernaum while he stood twenty miles away in Cana. Some time passed after that before this feast, but John doesn’t tell us how much time or what Jesus was doing during that time.
 - John also does not specify which feast, so which feast must not be important for us to know; we just need to know that Jesus had this reason to go to Jerusalem. Remember, for several feasts, the Mosaic Law required that all Jewish men go worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.

- † **[Slide 3: temple map]** Let me highlight this map for you. This is Jerusalem in Jesus’ day. Here is the City of David, which is a hill sloping up to the temple mount. This is the massive temple mount, where Solomon built the first temple; Herod had added to the temple mount by Jesus’ day. There is a little rift between hills here and then over here on the other hill is the new city, which also was walled in. There were people living up here on the north end too.
 - On the north side of the Temple mount, there was a gate where sheep were brought for sacrifice. Near there were two pools.
 - The name of the pool is not very important, but it looks like the earliest texts read that the Hebrew or Aramaic name was Bethzatha, with Bethesda being a Greek form of that name.
 - In any case, today we will see several pictures of the ruins, but you will notice it is hard to see what is original and what was later Roman construction. The Romans built quite a complex here, after they destroyed the city in AD70.
 - **[Slide 4: picture]** There is a lovely chapel sitting there today, St. Anne’s, which has amazing acoustics. There is perfect pitch with a slight reverberation. Our group sang some hymns in there *a cappella*, and strangers enthusiastically joined in or at least stopped to listen. It was fun.

- † John mentions a pool, but it really was twin pools. All around them and between them were five covered walkways – your Bible might call them colonnades, porticoes, or porches – basically there was a roof supported by pillars, all around and between the two pools, so it was a shaded place to sit, with protection from the weather. We see here that people with all sorts of physical ailments would gather here. There was a reason besides the shade, as we will see in a moment.

- [Slide 5: 5.5-9a]** John 5.5-9a: Now a man was there who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and when he realized that the man had been disabled a long time already, he said to him, “Do you want to become well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. While I am trying to get into the water, someone else goes down there before me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk.” Immediately the man was healed, and he picked up his mat and started walking.

- † So we have a fellow who is lame enough that he cannot move around quickly, certainly he cannot get up and walk. And he has suffered with this disability for thirty-eight years.

- † When Jesus asks him if he wants to be well, the man does not realize that Jesus actually could offer him healing. He misunderstands what Jesus is implying and thus grumbles about his situation.
 - It seems evident that people believed in a folk tradition that when the water was stirred up by the breeze, the first one into the pool might get healed. This essentially is what the later added text in vv.3b-4 said too, except that it specified an angel was stirring the water, so perhaps that was part of the folk tradition.
 - So when Jesus asks if he wants to be well, the man takes it as chiding for not getting into the pool fast enough for the miracle, and he grumbles about not having anyone to help him, and how frustrating it is that someone else always beats him to the water.
- † **[Slide 6: 5.8-9]** The man had a mat of straw on which he could recline, something lightweight and easily carried. Jesus told him to stand up, pick up the mat, and walk about.
- † Immediately the man was healed! Note the healing was immediate, it was at Christ's declaration, and it had nothing to do with this man's worthiness. As we will see, he doesn't even know who Jesus is! He has no evident faith and in fact is superstitious, he did not ask for healing, nor did he give money to the ministry. Jesus is not limited by our limitations.
 - The only factor in this healing is Jesus deciding to heal him. That is enough: the voice of Christ is the same voice of God that created the universe. A split second decision by Jesus is infinitely more helpful than thirty-eight years pursuing superstition.
 - Also, in v.14, Jesus will tell him that he has been healed, the form of the verb implying that the healing has been thorough and permanent, as well as immediate.
- † When LeeAnn and I first became friends, we read a book together by Chuck Swindoll. It is called *Flying Closer to the Flame*, and it was Swindoll's exploration of how the Holy Spirit works in our lives today. In the chapter on healing, this super-conservative pastor admitted that if God wants to heal miraculously today, who was Swindoll to deny him the ability? But he argued we should expect miraculous healings today to follow the biblical pattern.
 - We will not see a gifted healer in control of his own gift offering to heal everyone in the room if only they will be good enough, faithful enough, prayerful enough, or charitable enough. We will see God choose whom to heal and it will be done completely, instantly, and without us needing to be worthy. We never could be worthy anyway!

[Slide 7: 5.9b-13] John 5.9b-13: (Now that day was a Sabbath.) So the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and you are not permitted to carry your mat." But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your mat and walk'?" But the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped out, since there was a crowd in that place.

- † The Sabbath was sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. This healing took place on a Saturday.
 - The Old Testament prohibited doing work for your job on the Sabbath, it was to be a day for God and rest. But Jewish custom had made all kinds of activities forbidden, including taking anything from one place to another.
 - It is still like this for orthodox Jews today in Israel: e.g., on the Sabbath, they can ride an elevator, but not push the buttons... so if you are rich you live in a building with a Sabbath

elevator that simply stops at every floor on the Sabbath; and if you are poor then you take the stairs or sit there hoping someone will come push the button for you.

- We might laugh at this, but we have groups in Christianity who tend to be legalistic like this. It is important to distinguish between a rule God has given us and a rule we have made for ourselves. Some of our own rules can be helpful. They might even help us be careful to obey God's rules, which is what the Jewish customs were designed to do, but we should be careful that they do not become their own burden to faith instead of an encouragement to faith.

† **[Slide 8: Exodus 34]** The disabled man actually was not breaking the Mosaic Law of the Bible. He was breaking the rules of man created by the religious leaders. I want to show you what God had said about this issue.

- Exodus 34.21 [NIV]: "Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest." People were to rest one out of every seven days, even when there was important work to do! Some of us need to reflect on that!
- **[Slide 9: Jeremiah]** Jeremiah 17.21-22 [NIV]: "This is what the LORD says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors." The emphasis here is on work, but there might be some question as to what a load is. We will see that specified next.
- **[Slide 10: Nehemiah]** Nehemiah 13.15-17 [NIV]: "In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. People from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is this wicked thing you are doing-- desecrating the Sabbath day?'"
- So it seems that what God forbid was to carry stuff for work, to sell. God did not forbid carrying your mat if you were just healed and able to carry it for the first time in thirty-eight years!

† **[Slide 11: 5.9b-13]** I am sure some religious leaders made rules honestly trying to help. Whoever made this one did not understand God's revelation in the Old Testament. Indeed, there were many, many rules about the Sabbath; it was kind of a fixation for the religious leaders.

- But look at their hearts as evidenced by their reaction to learning of the man's healing. Remember, John sometimes refers to the religious leaders simply as the Jews, so even if that is what your translation says, we are talking about the Jewish religious leaders. Are they excited for this man who was healed after thirty-eight years of disability? Are they excited that God has done a miracle in their midst? No. All they care about is finding out who instructed this man to break their Sabbath rules!
- No doubt they thought teaching someone to break the rules was even worse than just breaking them. They need to go find this troublemaker! But at this point, the man has no idea who healed him, and Jesus has slipped away in the crowd.

[Slide 12: 5.14] John 5.14: After this Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "Look, you have become well. Don't sin any more, lest anything worse happen to you."

† Whoa! Jesus says sinning can lead to illness, disability, or even worse things!

- **[Slide 13: 9.1-3]** Now, we know not all illness or disability is caused by sin. John 9.1-3 [NET] says, “Now as Jesus was passing by, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who committed the sin that caused him to be born blind, this man or his parents?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but he was born blind so that the acts of God may be revealed through what happens to him.’” So there are other reasons for illness and disability than our own specific sins.
- **[Slide 14: 5.14]** But in v.5.14, Jesus says that our acts of sin can cause such things to happen to us! Even though we cannot lose our salvation – even though we are forgiven in advance if we trust that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins on the cross – there are many negative effects of personal sins even for the believer. The Bible says sin can result in earthly human consequences such as jail, earthly corrective action from God [Psalm 39.11], deception of the mind and hardening of the heart [Hebrews 3.13], spiritual bondage to sin [John 8.34; Romans 6.16-18], a loss of heavenly treasure [2 Corinthians 5.10; 1 Timothy 6.18-19], negative effects on other people, and physical illness [John 5.14].

[Slide 15: 5.15-16] John 5.15-16: The man went away and informed the Jewish leaders that Jesus was the one who had made him well. Now because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began persecuting him.

- † The man either is not too bright or not too kind, since he went and reported to the religious leaders who had healed him.
- † You see that Jesus was doing “these things” plural on the Sabbath. This was not the first time Jesus had broken their Sabbath conventions, and it would not be the last. The gospel accounts record several instances of Jesus doing on the Sabbath things the religious leaders thought were wrong. So they began to persecute him.

[Slide 16: 5.17-18] John 5.17-18: So he [Jesus] told them, “My Father is working until now, and I too am working.” For this reason the Jewish leaders were trying even harder to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was also calling God his own Father, thus making himself equal with God.

- † The verb translated “he told them” in v.17 is in a form that suggests a solemn or legal utterance. At some point, Jesus appeared before them to formally answer their opposition to his ministry.
- † But this time at least, he does not argue with the incorrectness of their customs. Instead, he makes a statement about his identity. Jesus says that his Father has been working from creation until this moment, so he, Jesus, also is working.
 - How do the Jewish leaders take this? V.18 says they believed he was calling God his own Father and thus making himself equal with God, so they became determined to kill him.
 - The Jews would say “our father” like we do in the Lord’s Prayer, but only Jesus made this a personal relationship. Also, Jesus justifies his activity on the Sabbath with God’s activity. The Jewish leaders correctly saw what Jesus was implying: that he and God were equal in some way.
 - This is even more serious than violating the Sabbath: in their minds, this was blasphemy, speaking ill of God, and thus Jesus deserved death.

- † There are two implications to what Jesus is saying. The first implication is that Jesus really is the divine Son of God. We understand from this gospel that God is Triune: God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each distinct from the others, yet all in such unity and of the same essence as to be one God. So we see that what Jesus is saying here is true and not cause for alarm, certainly not blasphemy.
 - The Jewish religious leaders did not realize that the Messiah would have to be both divine and human to fulfill all the promises God had made through the prophets. Even if they had realized it, they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah.
 - It is a sad observation of this tale that instead of inspiring faith in them, Jesus' miracles hardened their hearts against him.

- † The second implication is about the Sabbath. The Sabbath law was based on the revelation that God himself rested on the seventh day of creation.
 - **[Slide 17: Exodus]** Exodus 20:9-11 [NIV]: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."
 - But Jesus points out that God is always working in some sense, else the whole universe would fall apart. Even the Jewish religious leaders would admit in other writings that it is God who gives, sustains, or takes life; God who controls the boundaries of physics and biochemistry that hold the universe together; God who restrains evil. So God apparently can rest from his work without being idle.
 - And if God the Father can rest without being idle, so can the Son of God. He can focus on God the Father and experience the rest of God, and thus not violate the Law by doing a professional job, even as he continues to do what is good and right, like healing people and teaching people about God and the Law.

- † **[Slide 18: Sabbath essentials]** So, should we adjust our concept of the Sabbath? I bet if we each wrote a paragraph or two about the Sabbath, we would get at least twenty different views. Here are some essentials we should consider:
 - First, note that as Christians, we do not celebrate the Jewish Sabbath, which is from Friday dusk to Saturday dusk. We gather to worship on Sunday, in remembrance of the resurrection of Christ which occurred on a Sunday morning.
 - Second, note that observing the Sabbath is never specified for Christians in the New Testament. In fact, Paul wrote to the Colossians that they should not let anyone judge them by whether or not they celebrated the Sabbath [2:16].
 - Third, in the original law, God desired for people to have one day off from their jobs out of every seven days; one purpose for that day off was to rest so we could recover from the work week just past and to get ready for the work week to come; another purpose was so that we could have some undistracted time focused on God.

- So, if we take one day off from work each week and we ensure that we get some rest and focused worship time during that day, would we not satisfy the essence of God's original Sabbath plan for people?
- If we satisfy those standards, then we can relax about other things. It is ok to have fun on the Sabbath, even to do something strenuous like sports. It is ok to serve in the church or help someone in need, even to help an animal in need. Which day we take for this is not that important, except that most churches meet on Sunday mornings and we are called to be in fellowship together for worship.
- I genuinely believe we should take days off for our own health and to honor God. But we should be careful not to get legalistic about how the details play out for ourselves or for others.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 19:]** Jesus has the power to offer instant, complete, and permanent healing. Jesus can heal us regardless of our worthiness, because we never could be worthy enough of his attention and care.
 - We are always tainted with sin. We can get better, less tainted than before, but we are always tainted, and thus in our own right never worthy of salvation or healing. That's why grace is important. Grace is unmerited favor. God saves us even though we are not worthy; Jesus heals us even though we are not worthy. That is part of their unconditional love for us.
 - Sinfulness does not prevent Jesus from being able to answer our prayers. But sin can cause us illness and sin might result in Jesus allowing our illness to continue until we turn to him in repentance. These are two reasons we should seek to obey God's commands in Scripture.
- † Jesus has the power to heal anyone, of anything, at any time. He has this power because of who he is: the divine Son of God. Jesus is just as much God as God the Father or the Holy Spirit.
 - Also, as we have seen already in this gospel, God the Father has placed the whole universe under the authority of the Son of God.
 - On earth, Jesus is the ultimate human representative of God the Father, because he is the perfect image of God, and so God has declared him to be his eternal king.
 - A second reason we seek to obey God's commands is that we want to follow our king, and become like him so we become the images and representatives of God that he created us and saved us to be.
- † Jesus honored the Sabbath, but he knew he could get rest and honor God while still serving God and helping people on that day.
 - We honor Jesus' resurrection by having our worship service on Sunday, and we know we can get rest and honor the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, while still serving them and helping people on this day.
 - Let's pray...