

When Jesus gives a warning sign

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[0 : 00] your righteousness. Now, we're going to continue together in John chapter 5, this time from verse 16 to verse number 30.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense, Jesus said to them, My father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working. For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him.

Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. Jesus gave them this answer, Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself. He can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him. Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. I will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.

Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge, because he is the Son of Man.

[2 : 19] Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just.

For I seek not to please myself, but him who sent me. Amen. So, here we are with Jesus healing this invalid. And I think what we can discover from this sign is it's really important that we learn to judge the significance of signs. We are constantly seeing signs and adverts. Many we walk past without giving them a glance. That's probably true of the signs in this building. We probably think, well, they've been there for ages. We've probably read the information. It doesn't apply to us. But we also know, don't we, there are times when signs are vitally important, when failing to read and heed can be a disaster. Last Thursday would be one such example, Cameron Toll Roundabout at the end of the day. Despite the fact that on the far end of the Cameron Toll Roundabout there is the low bridge warning sign and the flashing lights. There was yet another lorry driver who managed to get stuck.

His load was too high. He didn't read the signs. Maybe he didn't think they applied to him. And if you were on the road that Thursday, you will know just how painful that afternoon and evening was.

But I guess we're also very much aware too of physical warning signs. We've been told over and over again, haven't we, about COVID. If we have any symptoms, we need to take the test. We need to self-isolate so that we might avoid the spread of the virus, creating a more serious health situation.

[4 : 30] Early warning signs are important. Well, today's sign finds Jesus, in a sense, giving to us, as he gave to the invalid, an early warning sign. In that failing to see who Jesus is, and failing to look to him for spiritual healing, brings eternal disaster.

So, let's get to the sign. And let's think about the setting for the sign. So, if you've got your Bibles, John chapter 5, the first three verses, two aspects in terms of setting to consider. First of all, where it's happening. And we're told it's at this pool called Bethesda near the Sheep Gate. So, this is in Jerusalem. It was a pool fed by a couple of reservoirs known as Solomon's Pools.

But then, as well as that regular supply, there was evidently a more intermittent supply that would come from underground that would cause the bubbling, which the folks kind of superstitiously thought, this must be an angel moving the water. This is the time to get in and be healed. Probably quite similar to our hot springs. So, that's where it's happening. But we also discover that this pool is a place of desperate need, don't we? It sounds to us in many ways like an outdoor hospital ward, except there's no medicine, and there's no staff, and there's no immediate sense of where help is going to come from. The last time Jesus was at a Jewish festival that we have in John chapter 2, the focus is on his words and his actions at the temple. But here, it's not the temple. Jesus deliberately places himself among these sufferers, and in particular, comes to this one man. Because it becomes clear, as we see in the conversation, that his physical need, his physical suffering, reflects a greater and a deeper spiritual need. And Jesus wants to meet with them and talk with them. So, that's where it happens. But it's also important in terms of the setting to notice when this takes place. Because chapter 5 is the beginning of what's recognized as growing hostility, conflict, and opposition towards Jesus, in particular from the religious leaders, but also for many who enjoyed coming to watch his signs as he begins to teach, and they recognize his claims, people turn away or turn against him. We read that in verse 18 as an example. For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him, because he was calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. This sign is going to give us the beginnings of that insight into why there is so much hatred towards Jesus. Why does rejection towards Jesus grow? Because you think, so on one level, he is the most loving and compassionate and merciful man. He's doing these wonderful miracles, but people are hating him. So, why is that?

And the point that John is bringing out, and Jesus brings out in his words, is that Jesus signs, both his words and his actions are too bold, too radical, too massive, for them to be ignored.

[7 : 56] These are the equivalent of a huge roadside billboard and a great big neon sign, so that to take Jesus on his own terms is really challenging for the people.

Jesus doesn't leave us with the option of saying, well, Jesus is a nice man. He was a good man. He was a good moral teacher, even a powerful man. If we take that impression of Jesus, we're simply not hearing him correctly. I think C.S. Lewis summed it up brilliantly in a quote you'll see up on the screen.

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse. For Lewis, Jesus is either liar, lunatic, or Lord.

We can helpfully add another L as well, because sometimes you'll hear people say, yeah, but Jesus is just a legend, just a myth created by his first followers. But again, we can reject that, because no Jewish person who has any reverence for God is ever going to make up the idea that there is a man walking around claiming himself to be God. The religious Jews wanted Jesus killed for that very reason. And no Jewish person would ever have the expectation that a Savior would come and die and then rise again in the middle of history. There is nothing that had them ready for that. And so again, Jesus needs to be heard clearly in his own words as the Son of God. And that's why there's such a radical reaction against Jesus, but also why he is worshipped by others. Now, before we move on, it's worth us just stopping and thinking about this beautiful portrait of our Savior Jesus.

He doesn't stay on the sidelines. He doesn't stay at a distance, but rather he moves towards needy and helpless and suffering. We all need to remember that. As the people of God, we need to remember this is our God. This is the compassion and the mercy that he would have for us. But we also need to remember he is our prime example. Perhaps one of the ways that this passage might challenge us, it might challenge us to say, where is the equivalent of Bethesda in my community? Where are the needy and the hurting and the lonely and the isolated and the suffering? And how can I, how can we bring the love of God in Christ to them? But we also see in the fact that Jesus homes in, in particular, on this invalid, is that Jesus' main focus, while he does deal with the physical, his main focus is on his spiritual need, his eternal need, how he is with his God. And it's really important for us to understand that it is good for us to, to care and to show mercy and to do justice. That's what God wants from us. But ultimately, the best way for us to care for needy and suffering people in our families, friends, friends, community, is to share with them the good news of Jesus, is to say, come see a man, come see Jesus. That's what ultimately is going to make the difference. So that's the setting for the sign. Let's now move on to the sign itself in verses 4 to 9.

Again, we see in the signs that John chooses to record, remember he says there's many, but he chose seven in particular, there's a focus on

[12:01] Jesus meeting with another individual here, and we're given insight into his life. Verse 5, one who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. Now, historians tell us the average life expectancy of a first century Jew is around about 40. So we can assume that he has spent, at very least, most of his adult life in this situation of suffering. And here he finds himself in the company of fellow sufferers. If you were here last week, you'll perhaps recognize how this is a totally different kind of a person from last week. Last week, we were thinking about a royal official. Really stark contrast, as John likes to draw. The official was rich, but this man's going to be poor. The official was powerful, but this invalid is powerless. The official would be respected, but most likely this invalid is going to be ignored, passed by, perhaps even despised. Two things to focus on. Let's notice Jesus' question, and let's notice Jesus' command. Let's put them in the foreground, but recognizing in the background evidence of this man's spiritual blindness. So Jesus' question, which I guess when we read it, perhaps sounds like the classic no-brainer, doesn't it? When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he'd been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, do you want to get well? So taking it as read that Jesus isn't just trying to frustrate someone, we need to ask, why is he asking that question?

And I think what we can assume is that Jesus is wanting to push and to probe and to get to the spiritual beyond just the physical. Perhaps probing him to make him ask a question, well, who is this man who's talking to me, and what kind of wellness might he be able to provide? What kind of help might this man be able to provide? It's an intriguing question. It's like when Jesus in chapter 4 was with the Samaritan woman, and he talked about living water. And she's wondering how that's possible, and she ends with, well, give me that water. I think there is an invitation from Jesus to this man to probe and to consider, who is Jesus? Let's ask some more questions.

There's also, I think, a pointer. He is taking attention from the waiting for the bubbles in a pool to encourage the man to look to Jesus. Look to Jesus, recognizing he is the Savior of the world. There is in this question an invitation. But we see the man's blindness, spiritually speaking. Verse 7, Sir, the invalid replied. Perhaps we could say the invalid grumbled. I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me. He complains. He doesn't ask further questions. He says, I got no help. But remember, who's standing in front of him? It's Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. But he's spiritually blind to that reality.

The one person in the world who could help him in every way possible. And it's like he doesn't give him a second thought. Wait, wait, that seems crazy. It's Jesus. Come on. But then we think about our own blindness, spiritually speaking. Till we think of the times in our own lives where, yeah, we know Jesus says, I've come to give life and life to the full and promises, not just joy for now, but eternally.

[16:00] And we're busy trying to find joy and pleasure and happiness in things that Jesus has created, and we're ignoring the one who created them all. Perhaps we find ourselves longing to be free of guilt and shame, and Jesus says, I've come to take your guilt and shame. But we pass him by, and we live in the mire and in the darkness, and we don't see that in Jesus there is hope. When we think about worship, as we're made to be worshipers, we're looking for something or someone to build our life on. How often do we choose small things, temporary, physical things, rather than looking to Jesus, our Creator and Savior? He's right there.

But so many times we find ourselves, even as Christians, looking right past him, looking right past him. We're not so different from this guy. That's Jesus' question, but there's also a command, a command in verse 8, then Jesus said to him, get up, pick up your mats and walk.

And at once the man was cured. He picked up his mat and walked. It's a voice of authority, isn't it? He says to him, get up. One of the things that becomes clear in the conversation as it comes between Jesus and the religious leaders, and as John records it, is this happening on the Sabbath, Sabbath. And so there is going to be a controversy about how to understand the Sabbath, what does it mean to work and to rest. And Jesus, with his voice of authority, is saying, never mind the religious leader's rules. You listen to me. You get up. And he responds to that voice of authority. It's also a voice of power, isn't it? Anybody else on that day said to the invalid, do you know what you need to do?

You need to get up. He would still have been lying there. But when Jesus, the Son of God, says, get up, take up your mat, there is instant healing. What should we learn from that? What should we learn as we think about the voice of Jesus in this story? Shouldn't we learn that above all, his is the voice to listen to? Not the voice of culture that would say, the answers lie within you, you be you. That's not the answer. We don't listen to the voice of empty religion. Here are the practices you need to perform. Here are the seven steps. And if you can achieve a certain measure, then God may be happy with you. That's not the voice that we listen to. We listen to Jesus. Listen to Jesus in verse 24.

[18 : 52] Very truly, I tell you, whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but is crossed over from death to life. How much hope and power and grace and salvation is in each of those statements? To believe that God the Father sent Jesus the Son to die on the cross for our sins is to pass from death to life. It's to know that God will not judge us because he judged his own Son. Before we move from the same, isn't it also a helpful picture of the gospel for us? What have we got here? We have a man in misery and in need, but he is completely unable to help himself. And that speaks to our condition spiritually. Without Christ, we are dead. We are by nature

God's enemies and we are unable of ourselves to do anything about that. And that's bad news and that's somber news, but that's not the end of the story because there is good news in the coming of Jesus.

Our spiritual inability is met by his supernatural ability. It's met by his saving grace and love, his death and resurrection, bringing healing and new life. Verse 21, Jesus says, for just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Here is an invitation for those who aren't Christians to come to Jesus, to cry out to him for this mercy in your need, knowing that he is pleased to save, he is pleased to give new life.

We also learn from this man how not to respond to God's mercy in Jesus. So he picks up his mats and he's walking down the road, but it's a Sabbath and the religious leaders jump on him and say, how come you're doing this? It's forbidden by our law. Verse 11, the man replied, the man who made me well said to me, pick up your mat and walk. Now we need to recognize this is not worship. This is him just trying to avoid blame. I'm not the problem, go find the guy that did this to me. He doesn't even try and find out Jesus' name. Verse 15, having met with Jesus again at the temple, and Jesus issuing him a solemn warning, what we'll think about momentarily, the man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who'd made him well. Again, he's not saying to the leaders, look, you need to worship him the same way I am. No, he's reporting on Jesus.

[22 : 09] This is a man who seems content with the physical healing that he's received without ever dealing with his sin without coming to Jesus to find forgiveness. He's so different to the Samaritan woman we read about last week, who told everybody about who Jesus was. Could this be the Messiah?

Could this be the Savior? This guy might have a clue who Jesus is. And he's profoundly disinterested, so it seems. In this sign, we can say Jesus is holding out a welcome to the man, an invitation to see the greatness of Jesus, the power of Jesus, the love and the mercy of Jesus.

But he also holds out a warning sign of the urgent need to deal with sin, of the urgent need to worship Jesus as Lord and King. The man just misses it.

That takes us to the significance of this sign. Why does John choose this sign? What's he drawing our attention to? Well, it's the beginning of really driving home in a powerful way. First of all, the identity of Jesus, but also beginning to reveal the rejection of Jesus and the consequences of that rejection too. So, we go to verses 9 and 10. We can think about Jesus' identity through the controversy over the Sabbath. So, once the man was cured, he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath. So, the Jewish leaders said to the man who'd been healed, it is the Sabbath. The law forbids you to carry your mat.

The Sabbath was instituted, given by God from the beginning at creation. And throughout the Old Testament, the understanding that Sabbath rest was a rest from one's normal work, an invitation from God to enter into His rest, to trust Him as Lord, to worship Him as King. But the rabbis, by Jesus' day, those religious teachers, they had added 39 extra regulations about what constituted work.

[24 : 32] And you see in the Gospels, Jesus coming up against that time and time and time again, man-made religion. So, the question then becomes in this side, who is right in understanding the

Sabbath?

And even more profoundly, who has authority to say what can and can't be done on this Sabbath? Well, here it is Jesus. When Jesus comes, He says in Mark chapter 2, as Lord of the Sabbath, and what's happening here is this, there's this storm of opposition beginning to build up against Jesus, but He will continue to affirm that He is the Son of God. And the way He does it is here in relation to the Sabbath. So, verse 17, in His defense, Jesus said to them. So, it's as if Jesus has now been put on trial by the religious leaders, and He says to them, My Father is always at work to this very day. So, let's stop there. Jesus is talking about God the Father. So, God the Father rested from creation, we're told, beginning of Genesis 2. But God doesn't stop sustaining the world. God doesn't stop ruling the world by His providence. If He did, the whole universe would collapse and cease to exist. Is God breaking the Sabbath? Is the question Jesus is bringing to them

And then He says, My Father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working. Jesus is, and they get this, He's saying, I am equal with God the Father, and I must continue doing the work of God, showing mercy, bringing salvation. That's why Jesus refuses to stop doing miracles on the Sabbath. He's not going to stop building His kingdom and saving lives.

So, the Sabbath discussion is not some sort of abstract, kind of pointless sort of conversation just for religious folks. It gives Jesus a chance to say, I am God. And the response, they tried all the more to kill Him. They don't want to worship Him. They understand what He's claiming, but they reject and resist it, so they want to kill Him. Again, it becomes really clear that His claims are too big to ignore or pass by. Earlier, we have seen His disciples, and then others, see His glory and believe. But sadly, John is reminding us, many people don't believe. In fact, many people choose to hate Jesus. He came as the light of the world, but people love darkness more than they love the light, want to get rid of the light. It's becoming really clear as Jesus is sharing His identity that we can't just have the signs of Jesus. We can't just have a small view of Jesus where He can help us in our trouble, perhaps. He can show up when we need Him. No, He must be Lord and God.

So, that's the first significance about His identity from the Sabbath controversy. But then, let's also think about the rejection of Jesus, and let's think about the warning about sin that He brings.

[28 : 19] Again, the second meeting is like an early warning sign. Listen to what He says to the man in verse 14. Later, Jesus found Him at the temple and said to him, See, you are well again. Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you. To the man, He says, You are physically healthy.

I have done a miracle, a miracle of mercy. But Jesus in love says to Him, You need to heed this sign and understand that for you all is not well spiritually. Just think about what Jesus is saying for a moment. Jesus is saying to the man, Your 38 years of disability are a warning sign that something far, far worse would come to Him if He didn't deal with His sin by trusting in Jesus. Jesus' voice of power and authority He's just seen can bring life and transformation. 38 years of suffering ended in a moment. So, again, if we'd stopped here, what a lovely, happily ever after moment. We could perhaps imagine the man going back to his family, finding a job, finding a job. All is well, but all is not well, because all is not well spiritually.

So, Jesus sounds that loving warning, Stop sinning, or else something worse may happen. And Jesus in His conversation with the religious leaders who oppose Him begin to reveal what that something worse would be, verse 28 and 29. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves. When all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out.

The power and the authority of Jesus' voice when He comes as the judge at the end of time. Those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. Jesus brings teaching about eternal condemnation. Jesus, the most loving man who ever lived, spoke more about hell and judgment than any other person in the Bible.

And in this story and in this sign, there is a glimmer of what eternal judgment will be like. We can say that at least it is far, far worse than a lifetime of physical suffering and disability and desperate need.

[31 : 08] We know that eternal judgment is about the loss of any goodness from God. The loss of the love of God. Every good gift we have right now comes from God, but when that is removed and all we have is the just judgment of God for all eternity, that's a solemn thing.

That's a desperately serious thing. And so Jesus sounds this loving warning. And as we think about that, in the invalid's life, we turn it to our own life. Do we see, do we see why He chooses to focus not on the physical need, but on eternal and spiritual need? Something we all need to reflect on, as

challenging as it can be, to reflect on eternal realities.

So as we come to a close, we understand from this man that signs can save lives, but only if we pay attention to them. One of the, I guess, the tragic byproducts of our summer heat wave. We read in the news, didn't we, record numbers of deaths in Scottish waters. And the same was true in Australia. And they have a lot more people in the water, a lot more coastline, and so they tried to figure it out. And so they did studies. They surveyed people who went to beaches, and they discovered only 45% of people attending Australian beaches were reading the signs.

And we know that Australia is a more dangerous place to be in the water than Scotland. There are riptides, and there are submerged rocks, and there's sharks. But people would ignore, people would be overconfident. A sign can save a life, but only if we pay attention. Jesus gives to the man and gives to us a powerful sign, a sign that in hearing the voice of Jesus, in knowing His identity, in trusting His saving work. There is forgiveness. There is eternal life to be found in Him. But the opposite is also true.

To reject Him, or to ignore the significance of His claims, to refuse to trust Him, ultimately brings judgment. And so let's heed the sign. Let's respond with faith that we would all find life in Him.

[33 : 50] Let's have a moment of silence where we can reflect and where we can pray. I'll close in prayer, and then we will sing our last hymn.

Lord, will you remind us, will you impress upon us, will you impress upon us the eternal significance of being right with you through trusting in Jesus and His work on the cross.

May you impress upon our hearts the needs of our family and our friends, our colleagues, our communities, our city, our communities, our city, as we think about those who are near and dear to us.

Lord, may you compel us to pray and to love, to speak and to act, longing that many would hear the sign and respond in faith to receive Jesus as Lord. Amen.

Now, our closing hymn, which again helps us to reflect on the great mercy of Jesus that we see so clearly at the cross, is His mercy is more. And again, we'll stand together to sing.

[35 : 40] Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you, Jesus. If we learn more than enough or if we learn more than any other questions, our minds help are.

Of the might be the same may be the same, sin of being we learn more than maybe the other now
And be an away I'm yelling more than ever.

Thrown into a sea where the bottom are sharp. Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more.

Praise the Lord, His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new every morn. Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more.

[36 : 54] What patience would wait as we constantly roam? A father so tender is calling us home.

He welcomes the weakest, the feeblest, the born. Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more.

Praise the Lord, His mercy is more. Stronger than darkness, new every morn.

Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more. What riches of kindness He lavished on us.

His blood was the payment, His life was the cost. We stood near the debt we could never afford.

[38 : 06] What sins, they are many, His mercy is more. Praise the Lord, His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new every morn. Stronger than darkness, new every morn. Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more. What sins, they are many, His mercy is more.

Praise the Lord, His mercy is more. Praise the Lord, His mercy is more. Lord, His mercy is more.

Lord, His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new every morn. Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more.

Amen. And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

[39 : 15] Amen.

. Thank you.