

John 5:1-18

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[0 : 0 0] Our scripture reading this morning is John chapter 5, verse 1 through 18, which is on page 986 of the White Church Bibles. The scripture reading is John chapter 5, verses 1 through 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 in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.

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'd been there a long time, he said, 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'm going, another steps down before me. Jesus said to him, Get up, take 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. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, It's the Sabbath. It's not lawful for you to take up your bed.

[1 : 2 0] But he answered them, The man who healed me, that man 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 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.

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

This was 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Well, I must begin by telling you, I think I've made a fairly exciting discovery this week.

[2 : 4 4] It's actually a discovery that I think is worth our time, and it came from my work and labor in this text.

It's not the kind of discovery that I could throw forward to Mayo Clinic that would help them with glaucoma or open the eyes of the blind. It's not really a discovery that I could bring to the Cleveland Clinic that would enable them to help someone whose ears were unable to hear.

It's not even a discovery I could bring to the University of Chicago School of Medicine and indicate that a severed spine could be mended and an invalid could walk.

It's not that kind of discovery. Actually, though, I think it could be more important than them all.

You'll have to bear with me for probably 25 minutes to get there. I mean, anyone who would make such an audacious claim on a Sunday morning before you ought to be able to try to back it up, and so I will.

[3 : 54] So, this text moves from Jesus in conversation to Jesus the subject of controversy.

In a sense, it's going to open with him asking a question and then providing a cure, but it closes 16 to 18 with two accusations against him.

I suppose it's good to know that Jesus is at this moment in the gospel a controversialist as well as a conversationalist.

He's not only giving life to those who receive his word, there are others who are livid on account of his work. Let me put it to you this way.

The significance of this sign is that Jesus is going to be rejected as well as received. People are going to belittle him as well as believe in him.

[5 : 10] They're going to repudiate him then and now as well as revere him. Jesus is going to be loved on the pages of the world stage, but Jesus is going to be hated and the discovery of the text is this.

John reveals to us two fountainheads of disbelief. That's what emerges by the end. The sign is put forward, but the significance is this.

If you're sitting here today and you have not yet believed in Jesus or received his word, I think I've discovered the fountainheads from which your disbelief springs.

Or if you're sitting here today and you're already a follower of Jesus, but you're trying to speak with your friends and family concerning their rejection of Jesus, here are the hurdles you will need to overcome.

I suppose that if we had the author of the gospel here today for an on-mission together and we called him forward and asked him, John, talk to us a bit about how it is that Jesus had a downside as well as an upside.

[6 : 36] How is it that he would be rejected by people as well as received by people? When in his ministry did it dawn on you that he would be a controversialist, not merely a life-giving conversationalist?

And John, I think, would grab the mic and say to you, well, it's quite easy actually. I remember it well. It was unforgettable. Let me tell you about the day the music died.

And we would sit and listen and he would say, you've got to have some context and then I'll unfold for you that conversation and then I'll tell you the controversy on why people 2,000 years later will still refuse his word.

Take a look at yourself. It's as though the writer of the gospel is here. In verses 1 to 5, he gives you the context of the day the music died.

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 in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.

[7 : 56] In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years.

That's the context of the day we learn that Jesus is to be received and rejected. People often say that the devil's in the details.

And I think that's the case here too. It's easy to skip over that context right into the conversation at verse 6.

But I want to pause. I want to point out three intended words that John would give you on the context.

After this, there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem. He wants you to know that Jesus is going to be a repudiated figure and the moment we knew that, well, it took place back in Jerusalem.

[9 : 08] That's no difficult thing for you and me to know if you've been following along in the series because Jerusalem has been not only the center of religious activity, it was the place where he overturned the temples and all of the money changers.

He wasn't always well received in Jerusalem. It is where Nicodemus came into him in the night thinking to impart something to him and left confused. Yet, all the while, when people who dwelt in Galilee, they received him gladly.

To know that it took place in Jerusalem is significant. But not only that, there was a feast of the Jews. So easy for us to skip over. But the story, not really understood unless you know something about the feast.

You can learn more about the religious feasts of Israel's ancient history by reading Leviticus 23. But there were five annual feasts in number.

Passover, followed by the feast of first fruits, the feast of the weeks, the feast of the trumpets, and then eventually the day of atonement.

[10 : 20] And all of those feasts were built or embedded, you could say, in Genesis 1-like creation language.

All of the feasts run on this weekly cycle cycle of seven in which Leviticus 23 will point out that they culminated in a holy convocation.

The seventh day. The day of rest. The day that God blesses after creation. So all of the feasts are moving to a cessation of work on the day of rest.

Indeed, eight times over in Leviticus 23, when we're learning about the celebration of the feasts, the writer points out over and over again, you shall do no ordinary work.

Eight times. No work done on the day of holy convocation when the feasts are taking place. Indeed, there's a warning that God will quote, destroy the one who does work from among the family of Israel.

[11 : 34] Now, once you know that, then John has already embedded in the context that you are arriving at the moment of Christ's rejection when all of Israel is coming into Jerusalem on one of the great feast days where there is a week-long activity of animal sacrifices and sheep and lambs and pigeons and doves being offered unto God for six days running all leading up to the final day in which they've all been made right with God and now sit and enjoy His rest.

That's why this other indication is interesting. It's at the sheep gate, says John. There was a pool. In fact, archaeologists have indicated to us very clearly on the northeast corner of the city, which I have never seen other than in books, that there are two pools that were the sheep gate so that the herders who were outside of the city would bring their sheep in a sense through these pools that they would in one way be washed before entering in and then purchased by all the people who have arrived from all over the land.

And so you or I would come to the feast and enter into the city not bringing our own sheep but rather going to this corner within the city that was a marketplace.

A marketplace of movement and sound and purchase and sacrifice and then atonement over at the temple and then being made right in a fresh way with God.

that's the context that he puts forward that resulted in a knowledge that Jesus will from this day forward be a controversialist figure.

[13 : 37] You can envision the scene. Jerusalem swelling with people. not just the city center folks but from all over.

The streets probably two to three to four to six times their normal capacity. The density levels are high. And in this particular part of the city for six days men and women and children in tow have been coming and purchasing their sacrifice and walking it across the city mall and up and handing it to the priests who for now a week have been offering sacrifices to God.

The smell of all of those sacrifices going up like an aroma celebrating the fact that God passes over their sins just as he did in Israel's history and just as he provided for them in the past.

We are commemorating once again five times a year that he does it for us today. And now it is the seventh day.

It is the Sabbath. All of the noise of the city has died down. All of the activity has ceased.

[15 : 03] No one is heading home but no one is in motion. A bit like Labor Day. A quiet day in the city.

Jesus makes his way to the place that had been a hub of activity. And the only ones there left yet impure yet not made clean yet unable to stand in the presence of God with sins relieved are those whom the law would indicate have no rightful presence before God stained physically and spiritually and it is manifest in the fact that they are blind and lame and paralyzed and then all of a sudden like a camera at the beginning of a movie the writer of John takes this context where he shows you the fullness of Israel's history and the activity of a city and he comes down and the camera is moving in between the betrayed by God the ones who are insensitive and groaning out to God the ones who are helpless before God and the camera rests on a particular man who has been an invalid for no less than 38 years really is there anything that could be worse than being an invalid for 38 years and you and I are now there with him and John moves from context to a conversation look at verse 6 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

I don't know about you but that strikes me as an odd question I haven't had a left eye that saw anything since I was five years old somebody came up to me and said do you wish you could see out of your left eye I'd be saying what what planet do you live on of course I wish I could see out of my left eye I missed half of all the things you guys take in it'd be like asking a parent do you want your child to always obey you of course it'd be like asking somebody unemployed here today do you want a job Jesus comes before a man who's been an invalid for 38 years and says do you want to be made well so let's just stop on the strangeness of that conversation starter given what we already know we know that Jesus has a way of speaking about physical things that are pregnant with spiritual intent when he talked to

Nicodemus and told him about he had to be born again and Nicodemus inferred only do you have to go into your mother's womb a second time Jesus moved from the material world to the spiritual world and said no you need to be born again in spirit Jesus starts in the world in which we live and connects it to the world that we do not see when he says to the woman at the well give me a drink we learn that he had more in mind than merely water but living water and so we come to this text and we are at least apprised given the reading to this point to think that when he says do you want to be healed or literally do you want to be made well he could actually have in mind although the man does not yet know it do you want to walk and do you want spiritual well-being do you want the gift of life do you want to walk in the land of the living and be made alive in the fullness of your being indeed that's the way it is even as verse 14 makes clear to you later you'll find the same word healed translated well and when

Jesus preaches his second sermon to him he will say see you are well literally the same you are healed and then he says sin no more the wellness of the physical constitution was wedded to the wellness of a spiritual soul Jesus knew both things about the man and the life he wanted to bring would encompass both things indeed the word to be healed has a semantic range like like a rubber band that can be pulled that in the scriptures and in the new testaments can at times mean physical healing and it can also mean spiritual soundness first timothy second timothy titus the one who is well the one who is healed is the one who has found truth and soundness of truth concerning that which they believe and so jesus comes and says to the man do you want to get hold of your own life in a fresh way and he means in the land of the living and in the fullness of your soul of course the man's response indicates that he like you or me could think nothing more than his physical constitution he says sir i have no one to put me into the pool when the water stirred up and while i'm going in another steps down before me there are other textual variants that indicate by filling out the scene that there was a folklore in place that that at times these sheep gates would begin to stir on their own when when the sheep weren't coming through to make someone pure before god but rather an angel came down and dipped his or her wing into the pool and when it rippled those who went down in it was a healing service and what he's indicating here is i got no one to make me well i can't walk therefore i can't get to the water and because i can't get to the water i have been here decade after decade after decade and while people come and purchase their sacrifices and are made right with god and go on with their life i am continually impure i'm continually unclean i have no access to this life or the life to come to which jesus answered him look at it it's stunning verse eight jesus said to him get up take up walk three grammatical imperatives three commands three words that come with genesis one like creative force and jesus says something and it was something get up take up and walk in fact actually if you scan down to verse 14 his sermon to the man on that day came in two parts and it inquired or actually revealed two other commands i mean it was quite it was quite a commanding sermon if you say jesus command to the man was get up take up walk look back and don't sin anymore this idea of see or behold he's going to tell him later when you see what god has done i command you to see what god has done in your life therefore sin no more this is the sermon of jesus in one sense encapsulated for anyone who would come to christ but it's all here it's a word it's a threefold command let me put it to you differently the man is told that if he will follow obey the word of christ it will bring a

[23 : 59] fresh start on his life a little later we're going to get to you because it's going to be the same principle if you will receive the word of christ as a command over your life you will be made well you'll have a fresh start now it's worth pausing on that for a moment will the man take jesus at his word and will you to this point in john's gospel and i just want to step back into the gospel for a moment we've noticed that nearly everyone who has an encounter with jesus seems to come away with a fresh start in their life and they all get a fresh start as they give themselves to his life-giving word i mean john has been so clear about this so nathaniel in chapter one set out with jesus by saying you are the son of god the king of israel and jesus says to him because i gave you a word that i had seen you before you believe in other words you believe on account of my word you will see many more things than this but nathaniel becomes a follower by receiving the word of christ the disciples at the wedding at cana it says they believed and they believed as a consequence of seeing those servants obey the word of christ and the water became wine spilling out with the meaning and the significance of the kingdom of god has come they believed after they saw his word in effect nicodemus himself was given two words from the old testament to believe that he doesn't actually know until perhaps years after hearing the sermon when he's there at the foot of the cross about the serpent being lifted up but if nicodemus is one that will be enjoying the fruits of heaven forevermore he would tell us this morning there came a moment although i heard the sermon years ago that it took effect in my life and i believed the word that he said concerning himself and substitution the woman at the well says that i perceive you are a prophet i believe you have something from god after he had told her all the things concerning herself receptivity to christ comes as a response to the word of christ it was nowhere more clear than last week with the official who wanted his son to be healed in verse 50 where it says the man believed the word that jesus spoke to him and went on his way this is it the receptivity to the word of christ as you read it through the witnesses of christ is your way into the life that christ has and that's where the man is the man now is sitting there on the ground muscles atrophied strength gone and jesus has told him follow my word get up take it up and walk and what happens is he does the conversation gives way to the cure verse 9

and at once the man was healed and he took up his bed and walked he was made well by receiving believing acting upon trusting following the word of christ well let me transition then the context of verses 1 to 5 which gives way to that conversation in 6 to 8 and the cure in 9 now really run fast toward the theme of this message the controversy that follows in other words the third sign done by jesus will have a two fold significance as understood by john you can see the significance in verse 16 and in verse 18 this is why this is why and we'll return to it in a moment but what's happening here is there's a story in play and john allows the story to finish before he tells you what he thinks the significance is the man moves on his way and the controversy because it was on the sabbath he's scolded and then he's questioned who is the man now it's interesting isn't it there's almost an inversion jesus begins with the man asking a question and then moves toward commands that he gives to the man but the religious leaders begin commanding him not to do something but it ends with a question on who did this and there it is all of the movement of the text is now focusing on those who are not going to give themselves to the word of christ and it says it took place on the sabbath so let's move right to the discovery of the week let's move to the two fountainheads of disbelief let's talk for a moment about what keeps you from receiving the word of christ what are the hurdles that all people of that day and this day appeal to for reasons that they don't want to become a christian verse 16 and this is why the jews were persecuting jesus because he was doing these things on the sabbath verse 18 this is why the jews were also seeking all the more to kill him because he was not only breaking the sabbath but even calling god his own father making himself equal to god these are the springs from which disbelief emerges people then and people now don't believe in jesus word because they don't think he is in accord with what the law teaches he is a law breaker we see this he's the ultimate disruptor now maybe for some of you you're like that's why i like jesus he's ready to blow apart all that old stuff but in actual fact if that's why you're coming to jesus because he is a law breaker you haven't yet fully understood jesus because he's going to say no no no no no don't start following me because i'm breaking all that stuff down i actually came to fulfill all that stuff but he is going to argue

that his interpretation of the law and the sabbath is uniquely held by himself he's the final arbiter of what it all means in other words jesus is going to argue that he is a law unto himself in regard to what the word says he's the final arbiter of it and that's what they weren't willing to say he's actually saying here you have misunderstood the sabbath you do not know what it's properly here for we are not meant to rest if that met rest means we're not to be engaged in life giving work they had taken all of the sabbath rest and said no life giving work on this day because God wasn't working and he says you've missed it all when God created the heavens and the earth there was a moment when he ceased from his creative act but he never stopped working indeed the scriptures say he neither slumbers nor sleeps that he's the one who is continually maintaining the world to the power of his word that on the seventh day when

God gets in the big easy chair and puts his feet on the ottoman he's not resting in the sense of not working he's ruling over all that he's created in other words God who brought life is forever sustaining life when you look outside today when you leave God is at work and Jesus says you've missed it all you don't know the word to which you've given yourself put differently he's going to actually imply here that they have neglected life with God for regulations that we keep before God let me just slow down for them rest meant rule keeping rest meant religious ritual rest meant living according to regulation and when you keep the rules and when you perform the ritual and when you live under the regulations

God will accept you and what Jesus says is no that is not the way it works life is not attained by your rule keeping life is attained by giving yourself to the word of Christ who keeps you look at Jesus answer his answer is quite provocative the very back side of verse 17 my father is working until now could it be could it be God is at work here today certainly he is I have prayed this week that he not only would sustain the life giving trees that are beyond this auditorium in the physical sense but that he would create life and cause to grow up within many here today a day of decision and a day of ultimate belief and rest and trust in his word that in one sense that for many of us you have been 38 years or 18 years or 6 years or 57 years as an invalid before

[35 : 56] God not right while everybody else has passed you by with all of their religiosity and all of their ritual and all of their sacrifice and all you really needed was for Jesus to come to put his eyes on you and say give me give me give to me your belief in my word and the overlooked one the impoverished one the blind one the deaf one the lame one will through my word be made right but of course the significance of the sign in the text is that they rejected him Jesus said my father is working until now notice this after the comma this had to be this had to be what made them livid and I am working in other words God God created the world God maintains the world

God began a work God has always been working and guess what the things that God does that's what I do that's the implication God says let there be light by way of command and there was light Jesus says get up take up and go he is life this is what we seen from the very beginning John opens his thing with in the beginning was the word and the word was life and that's what he's saying Jesus has come to give life and so the implication moves far beyond simply people will reject him because he's a rule breaker or Jacob Neusner will actually say in a rabbi talks with Jesus that classic work I'm going to reject him because I don't!

think Jesus is the final arbiter on what the Bible says and that's what people do today you're going to reject him because you won't give yourself to his word over what you perceive to be his word or your own word and Jesus says I am the word I am life and therefore your disbelief ongoing disbelief your inability to receive the word of Christ is no different than those people on that day who say I will not have your word your final interpretation of all that the scriptures say I certainly will not take your word over mine the fountainhead the spring of disbelief comes under the disruptor rule of Christ's word but not only that the fact that he makes his own work out to be the work of the father therefore that he is the son the eternal heir the one who is one with the father

God himself well says John verse 18 this is also why they were seeking all the more to kill him not just because he he he made himself out to be a God claimer equal with God and many people today maybe even some in this room will say I'll tell you why I'm not a Christian I'm not a Christian because I don't believe there's a God and I would have to believe that there's a God and then I would have to subsequently believe that Jesus is that God and I won't have it so the fountainhead of disbelief is here people reject Christ because he makes himself out to be equal with God so if you're religious a Jew here today a Muslim here today a member of any other religious sect I know why you disbelieve because you're not going to take

Jesus word as the ultimate final word on how we relate to God but not only for the religious here if you're irreligious you're not sacred but you're secular you're not a believer in God I know why you don't trust Christ and John is saying you want to know when the music died that day this third sign and it had a two fold significance Jesus is not going to be universally received those are the hurdles of overcoming and the second one making himself out to be God well he'll have to return next week to hear how he's going to respond to it but I would just close today by saying for those who do believe for those who take Christ at his word for those who are willing to say that when he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood as often as you drink it you do so in remembrance of me this bread is my body given for you as often as you eat it you do so in remembrance of me as many as are here today who believe in the word of

[41 : 20] Christ alone to bring you into a right relationship with God and thank God all ritual all religion all rule!

keeping is cast aside and we can come to the waters we can come to the waters and drink our heavenly father I pray that this third sign in John's gospel which became the the day we knew that he would not be universally received would surprisingly yield fruit not in ongoing disbelief in our congregation but in a receptivity and that as we take this meal we would be given life and feed upon Christ who sits at the right hand of

God interceding for us even now in Jesus name amen amen