

(1) 'A God given work'

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Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[0 : 00] The reading is from John chapter 5, which can be found on page 1073 in the Bibles. John chapter 5, beginning to read at verse 1.

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 paralysed. 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 step 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. 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.

[1 : 21] 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Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.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 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 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.

So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, the son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the father doing. For whatever the father does, that the son does likewise.

[2 : 35] For the father loves the son, and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.

For as the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the son gives life to whom he will. The father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the son, that all may honour the son, just as they honour the father.

Whoever does not honour the son, does not honour the father who sent him. Thanks, thank you very much indeed for reading, and let me add my welcome to you to Grace Church.

It's very good to see you with us. Welcome, especially if you're here for the first time. And many, I can see you who are back from holidays, so welcome back to you as well. Now, today we start a new series of talks, looking at this central section of John's Gospel, chapters 5 to 10 through the autumn.

You may know that John's Gospel falls into three sections, arranged around the miracles or signs, as John calls them, in his Gospel. And today we start this middle section, which begins and ends with Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath.

[3 : 51] It's a section in which Jesus explains the work that he has come to do, namely, that he does the work of God, of giving life, and of judging.

So, look down at chapter 5, which is read to us just now, and we've just seen, haven't we, how Jesus heals a man who has been an invalid for 38 years, and he does so on the Sabbath.

And then Jesus explains in verses 21 and 22, the work that he has come to do, the work of giving life and judging. Verse 21, For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son

gives life to whom he will.

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son. Well, now turn on a few pages to John chapter 9, to the end of the section.

And here in John chapter 9 is a man born blind, and he too is healed on the Sabbath. You can see that at the bottom of the page in verse 14.

[5 : 04] Now, it's a Sabbath day, when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. But then at the end of the chapter, again Jesus explains the work that he's come to do.

Verse 39, For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.

So the work that Jesus has come to do, this work of both giving life and judging, is at the very heart of this central section of John's Gospel. Jesus will teach us what he has come to do and why. Jesus will show us how he gives life, and the nature of the life that he brings. Jesus will demonstrate the reality of judgment, and the reasons for judgment.

And alongside that, we will see the response of those, both those who believe in Jesus, and accept his teaching, as well as why it is, despite the urgency of Jesus' teaching, and the clarity of his teaching, why it is that others reject him.

[6 : 12] And at the heart of this whole section is the identity of Jesus, the claim that Jesus is God in the flesh, that he is equal with God. And so that is where we begin today, in John 5, verses 1 to 23.

But of course that claim, the claim that Jesus is equal with God, is a claim from which our own culture cannot run away fast enough.

The popular author, A.N. Wilson, put it like this in a recent interview. Jesus' rage, at the activities of the money changers in the temple, would have been nothing, compared to his rage, at the activities of the Christians, who have made him into a God.

With tiresome predictability, every Easter, seems to herald some new television documentary, which rubbishes the Christian claim, that Jesus was God on earth.

They argue that Jesus was simply a wandering teacher, with a charismatic personality, who attracted the crowds. But then in the years after his death, the church came to believe, only then, that he was God.

[7 : 31] In other words, Christians have made the whole thing up. Which is why John chapter 5 is such a great chapter for us, because we see so very clearly, that Jesus teaches us, that he was equal with God.

We see Jesus teaching, that he is exclusive, that he alone, is God in the flesh. That he alone is the one, before whom every knee will bow, one day.

And clearly understanding that in our culture, with this increasing hostility, to such claims, could not be more important. clearly it's important, if we're to argue the case ourselves, against sceptical friends or colleagues.

But it's important too, if we are to stand firm for Jesus. Because I take it, once we have truly grasped who he is, then we'll do anything for him, however costly.

Whereas, of course, if our view of Jesus, is a kind of, a sort of tin pot Jesus, a Jesus who is simply, one religious leader amongst many, then we'll have a tin pot faith, and we won't be bothered, to stand firm for him.

[8 : 50] So let's look at the chapter, you'll see on the, notice sheets, above the notices rather, there's an outline, and do make notes on that, if you find that helpful. First of all, Jesus Christ, equal with God.

Jesus Christ, equal with God. Verses 1 to 18. Now, if we're in any doubt, about the humanity of Jesus, John introduces us, to the most extraordinary scene, as Jesus goes to Jerusalem, in verses 2 to 6.

Have a look with me, at verses 2 to 6. 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 paralysed. 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, do you want to be healed?

I don't know if you can, picture the scene, it's like a sort of, first world war, field hospital, isn't it? With the lame, the blind, and the paralysed, lying next to this pool, which allegedly, had healing properties.

[10:05] And do you notice, the enormous compassion, of Jesus Christ, as verse 6, he approaches this man, and says, do you want to be healed? Imagine having been paralysed, since 1969, those of you, who are older, than 38.

Those of us, I should say, who are older, than 38. And then verse 8, Jesus says to him, get up, take up your bed, and walk.

And at once, the man is cured. He picks up his mat, and walks. It is in his own right, the most wonderful, of miracles. However, many of us will know, from our previous studies, in John's Gospel, that Jesus' miracles, or signs, as John calls them, are like signposts, which always point away, to themselves, to something else.

So just as, if you were to drive up the M11, on your way to Cambridge, you wouldn't stop, would you, when you saw that blue motorway sign, at the next to the motorway, saying, Cambridge, 20 miles. No, you would point in the direction, the sign was telling you to go.

And in the same way, we need to ask the question, what is this sign, pointing to? What is this miracle, of Jesus pointing to? Because the importance, of the miracle for John, is not so much, that the man was healed, though he was, and what a wonderful thing, that he was, but actually, that it tells us something, about Jesus.

[11:38] It points to who Jesus, is. And that becomes clear, in the next few verses, where the healing debate, where the healing, sparks a debate, with the Jews, about the use of the Sabbath.

Let's pick it up, at verse 9. Now that day, was the Sabbath. So the Jews, said to the man, who had been healed, is it the Sabbath, and is it not lawful, for you to take up, your bed?

Sorry, I'll read it again. It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful, for you to take up, your bed. Well, it's a damning indictment, isn't it, of that religious mindset, which is more concerned, with keeping its own rules, and with exercising, its own power, than with pleasing God.

But then look on, to verse 16, where the issue, becomes even clearer. 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 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.

[13:01] Now what is so interesting, of course, is that Jesus, could easily have waited, to heal this man. After all, he's been, an invalid for 38 years, waiting an extra day, surely, would make very little difference.

So it seems that Jesus, deliberately, provokes a confrontation, with the religious authorities, so that they will realise, who he is. And so rather than saying to them, look, you've misunderstood, the Old Testament regulations, about the Sabbath, which they had, he says something, far more provocative.

He claims equality, with God. Now there would be nothing unusual, about a Jew, calling God father. The point John is making, is that the Jews recognised, that Jesus was using this title, in a particularly exclusive, and personal way.

He doesn't say, our father, as they would have done, rather, verse 17, he says, my father. And those who hear Jesus, saying that, are not naive.

They know, that Jesus is calling God, his own father, in a particularly unique way, verse 18. Indeed, that he is making himself, equal, with God.

[14:20] After all, the logic is clear, isn't it? Verse 17, God works 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You may know, the child's prayer, calls at the end of the day, and it goes like this.

It's not very profound. Thank you, God, for mummies, and daddies, and cats, and goldfish, and little brothers, and sisters. God, please do look after yourself, because if anything went wrong with you, we'd all be in trouble.

It's great, it's great, isn't it? It understands the point, that Jesus is making here, that, if God were to stop, for one moment, from sustaining the world, then it would collapse.

And Jesus, Jesus makes the same point, about himself. He applies the same logic, to himself. The exemptions, the Sabbath rule, which allow God, to keep on working, Jesus applies to himself, verse 17, my father is working, until now, and I am working.

They get the point? He is claiming, to be equal with God, and so they seek to kill him. Malcolm Muggeridge, was a journalist, who, at first, opposed Jesus, but then came to believe, in Jesus Christ, having read for himself, the accounts of Jesus, in the New Testament.

[15 : 41] And he wrote this, in his autobiography. I understood, that Jesus Christ, could not be turned, into just a great man, without diminishing him, to the point, that Christianity, became too trivial, to be taken seriously.

He was either God, or he was nothing. So the next time, someone says to you, well of course, Jesus never actually, claimed to be God, did he?

Then this would be, a great place to bring them. And notice verse 18, that he defended people then, just as it does now. They want to kill Jesus. But at least, they see the issue.

At least they see, the issue with Jesus is, his identity. Is he God in the flesh, or is he not? I take it, that if Christians, had been prepared, simply to call Jesus, a great man, or just another philosopher, or a prophet, there would be no controversy, about him.

He would be revered, by everyone. But no, Christians have always insisted, that Jesus Christ, is God in the flesh. And this is the reason, because Jesus taught, that he was God, in the flesh, and equal, with God.

[17 : 09] So that is our first point, this morning. Jesus Christ, equal, with God. Let's then go on, to our second point. Jesus Christ, fully reveals God.

So Jesus Christ, fully reveals God. Have a look, at verse 19. So Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing, of his own accord, but only what he sees, the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does, likewise. Now we're going to see, these verses give us, a remarkable insight, into what God is like, as Jesus says, that he does, what God the Father does.

Now the Bible is consistent, in its teaching, there's only one God, unlike in Hinduism, for example, there aren't a whole, multitude of gods. Jesus isn't here, a rival God, or a competing God, there is only one God.

However, unlike, say, Judaism, or Islam, the Bible also reveals, God to be in three persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

[18 : 20] One God, in three persons, each one equally with God, but with different roles, to play, in the world. And what we see, in these verses, is how the relationship, between God the Father, and God the Son, works.

So have a look again, at verse 19, whatever the Father does, the Son does. Jesus doesn't act, independently of the Father. He does, what the Father does, like Father, like Son.

Years ago, it was the case, wasn't it, in our own country. If your father was a butcher, for example, you'd do an apprenticeship, and you'd be a butcher yourself. And that is, the relationship, says Jesus, between me and God.

What my Father does, I do as well. And the reason, is there in verse 20, it is that the Father, loves the Son, and shows him, all he does.

Let me take you, on a journey, through the television archives, of the late 1970s, and early 1980s. I wonder if you remember, the game show, Mr. and Mrs.

[19 : 34] If you do, you'll remember that, couples competed, against each other, and they took it in turns, to be asked questions, that revealed, amongst other things, the state of their marriage. So the husband, would first of all, be taken into a, soundproof box, little room.

Meanwhile, the wife, would be asked questions, such as, what's his favourite band? And being in the 1970s, he might say, the Bee Gees, or something like that. Where's his favourite, holiday destination?

At Tenerife, and so on. Well, the husband, would then be released, from his soundproof box, brought back on stage, and he would have to answer, those same questions, for himself.

And it's always, very revealing, whether she had a clue, really, about what her husband, thought, and vice versa. We'll have a look, at verse 20.

The father loves the son, and shows him, and shows him, and shows him, all he does. And that's why, verse 19, the son does, what the father does. You see, it's this perfect relationship, between God the father, and God the son, that guarantees, that Jesus does, what the father does.

[20 : 49] Jesus is claiming, isn't he, that his understanding, of God the father, was complete, unlimited, undistorted, born of an extraordinary, intimacy with the father, father, and therefore, he does, what God the father does.

Which is what he goes on to say, if you look at it, in verses 21, and 22, verse 21. For as the father, raises the dead, and gives them life, so also the son, gives life, to whom he will.

The father, judges no one, but has given, all judgments, to the son. Now we'll learn much more, about Jesus' work, in the weeks ahead, but notice for now, that Jesus does, God's work, of giving life.

Clearly not just, physical life, but life in its fullest sense. Life with God, both in this world, and also, the next. But he also does, God's work of judging, verse 22.

I still remember, the surprise it was for me, when I understood, that on the judgment day, it is Jesus Christ, who will be, the judge. Jesus' work, is to do God's work, of giving life, and judging.

[22 : 08] In other words, Jesus is no mere, ordinary human being, to whom subsequent generations, have granted divine status, but rather, he is the one, on whom, the eternal destiny, of every person, hangs.

Jesus. And it must follow, mustn't it, that therefore, the life of Jesus, is the perfect revelation, of God. You and I, obviously cannot see God, but what happens, in Jesus?

Well, God has come amongst us. Jesus sees, what the Father is doing, he translates that, into action, in what he does. As we look at Jesus, therefore, we are seeing God, at work, in our world. As we listen, to Jesus, we are hearing, the very voice, of God, himself. Just turn on, a few pages, to John chapter 14, on page 1086, where we get, a very similar idea.

John chapter 14, verse 6. Jesus says, to him, that's to one of his disciples, I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

[23 : 33] No one comes to the Father, except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on, you do know him, and have seen him.

Can you see there, Jesus says, that if you, to know him, is to know God the Father. Because Jesus fully reveals, what God is like. Well, that's not quite good enough, for Philip, who then asks, in verse 8, Lord, show us the Father, and it's enough for us.

Jesus said to him, have I been with you so long, and still you do not know me, Philip? Whoever of you, has seen me, has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father?

Jesus is saying, that to have seen Jesus, is to have seen God. To know Jesus, is to know God. What he does, is what God the Father does.

And that of course, is a wonderful thing, isn't it? Because it spells an end, to the endless search, for the truth about God, and the reality of God. How do I find out, what God is like?

[24 : 41] Not by, not through dreams, or looking within, or climbing up a mountain. I don't experience God, by chasing after, endless religious experiences, or going on a pilgrimage.

If I want to know, what God is like, I go to Jesus. Because the staggering fact, is that as we look at Jesus, through the pages, of the New Testament, we are seeing, God in the flesh.

I remember someone saying, who had been on one of the, Christianity Explore courses, that we run, that their experience, of reading through, Mark's Gospel, was meeting, Jesus Christ, in the flesh, and therefore, meeting God in the flesh.

And therefore, of course, it means, doesn't it, we can have real confidence, as Christians. We do know God, we can trust the words of Jesus, for they are the words of God, himself.

But you say, why is it that God wants us to know, this and be sure of this, this morning? Well, it is so, that Jesus may be honoured. After all, that is why God has entrusted, life giving, and judgment to Jesus.

[25 : 49] Verse 23, that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son, does not honour the Father, who sent him.

And the way to honour God, according to Jesus, is to honour Jesus. If you dishonour Jesus, if you reject him, if you push him aside, then you are doing the same, to God.

Ignore Jesus, and we ignore the God, who made us. Bow the knee to Jesus, and accept him as Lord, and we are honouring, and glorifying, for God, if you made us.

Now, I take it, the implications of that, for other religious systems, for example, could not be clearer. But I hope too, we can see that if we're Christians, we can have great confidence, we ought to have great confidence, in the uniqueness, of Jesus.

He is not simply, another founder, of a world religion. He is God in the flesh. Confidence, that if we know Jesus, and believe in him, that we know, the living God.

[27 : 02] But I take it too, this is also a truth, we need to make sure, we contend for, and proclaim, and defend, in our post-Christian, culture. You may know, that the leader, of the Episcopal Church, in the United States, has already, has already denied this.

She denies, the exclusive claims, of Jesus. It's not true, she says, that Jesus, is the only way to God. Many people, can be ways, to God, she says.

And I take it, that increasingly, that will be the issue, in our country, as well. Jesus Christ, is no tin pot deity, he is the one, who has an exclusive, identity.

He is God, in the flesh. He holds, exclusive power, as the one, who gives life. He has an exclusive, authority, as the one, before whom, every knee, will bow.

And he is the one, to whom, exclusive honor, must be given. And I take it, that to contend, for this Jesus, at work, or with friends, or a tennis club, or golf club, or wherever it is, or with family, is a costly thing to do.

[28 : 22] And I take it, that to speak, of this Jesus, rather than just, sort of generally, and vaguely, speaking of church, or religion, or faith, is a costly thing, to do.

Which is why, of course, we need to be, absolutely convinced, of what Jesus, teaches here.

Otherwise, we'll find, the cost, is too great. Well, let's pray together, shall we?

He was even calling God, his own equal, making himself, equal, with God. Heavenly Father, we praise you, for this, wonderful relationship, that we see here, between you, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you, for the great confidence, it gives us, that as we see Jesus, in action, so to speak, so we are, see the living God, himself, acting in his world.

And that as we, listen to Jesus, so we, hear the voice, presence, of the living God. We pray, Heavenly Father, you'd help us to believe that, more and more.

[29 : 42] Please help us to encourage, one another, in it. And please help us to, contend, for it, and to proclaim it. And we ask it, for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen.