

John 5

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[0:00] Amen. God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you. May the words that I speak be your words proclaimed clearly to those gathered here today.

! Amen. Amen. I'm going to do something that's generally bad practice when starting a sermon. I'm going to issue a few disclaimers. Nobody really wants to hear you apologize for what you're about to say. That's not what I'm doing at all. But the text that we're studying today marks a new section in our study of John.

Therefore, some of the ideas we're going to proclaim today are incomplete. They're a beginning. Jesus will finish many of his thoughts through his upcoming ministry as we study.

The second disclaimer is, I am going to be making some statements that sound exceptionally harsh when they're first heard.

[1:20] Especially in the areas of disability. I want to be exceptionally, exceptionally clear that what I am going to be doing is speaking about the attitude towards the disabled at the time of Christ.

Not at all my personal feelings on the subject. And we'll handle that more when we get to that section. But if I say something shocking, let me get a couple more sentences into the thought before you form your opinion about what I'm saying.

The third thing is, I'm going to sound a little disappointed through this sermon. Because I'm not really happy with the outcome of Jesus' healing.

This should be a story of hope. But the response to him by both the religious leaders of the time and the man that was healed is exceptionally disappointing to me.

This should be an amazing story. If we had Jesus come here today and heal all those that are lame and sick amongst us, our response isn't going to be to kind of shuffle off away from him like the man in our story.

[2:40] This should be a remarkable story. And we need to keep in mind that this is just one of many healings that Jesus did. Maybe we don't have the full story given to us.

But here we find someone whose response to Jesus really isn't what it should be. But here's the point. The aim of the story is not really about the man by the pool.

It is instead about Jesus and the response of the religious leaders to him. So we come to this place by the pool in Jerusalem.

The place with five colonnades or pillars. With two pools. And we see all the invalids together. We see the sick, the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed.

Now if you're looking at your Bible exceptionally close, you'll notice, if you're using our pew Bible, that you go from verse 3 to verse 5.

[4:00] And there's no verse 4 there. Which is interesting. I am not going to bore you with a long talk about manuscript transmission, the translation of scriptures.

But there is a verse present in some translations that reads something like this. That once in a while during a season, an angel stirred the water in the pool, and the one who got into the water first was healed.

I believe that that verse is best left out of this passage. But I believe what scribes did at a later point was explain the superstition that was present at the time.

In other words, what I'm saying is, I don't believe an angel came down and stirred the pool of waters so that the first person in could experience healing.

But I certainly believe that that's what the invalid and the other sick that were gathered there thought was going on. For example, we see in verse 7 that he despaired that he can't be healed because no one will help him get into the pool when that happens.

[5:18] But I don't believe that this is how it operates. Does that really seem how God would work? Stir up the pool and the first one in gets healed?

It doesn't make sense if you think through it because who has the advantage in that situation?

Those who are well. Those who are well. So I've got a bulging disc in my back.

Every once in a while I get a case of sciatica. And I would like to be healed from that. But there are certainly others in the congregation that would need healing more. If God gave, let's say, a golden ticket and one person could get healed, would it be fair that I would be the one that's still under 40, would get to run up and get the healing?

Meanwhile, we have others with higher mobility issues and more severe issues kind of left at the back. God doesn't operate that way. But, in the time of Christ, this superstition was going around. And it kind of makes sense. Everything about this culture was about earning grace. It puts the healing in the hands of the people that are gathered there, not in the hands of God.

[6:38] And when Jesus sees him lying there, he already knows he's been there a long time. The man has been an invalid for 38 years.

Now, I don't believe he was wheeled out to this pool every day, but he's certainly been wheeled out every time they expect the waters to stir. Every season that this angel was supposed to come.

For 38 years. Jesus asked him, Do you want to be healed? The answer is, 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. Now, I'm not going to say that Jesus acts without compassion here.

But it's not mentioned in the story. I think Jesus heals him more to make a point to the religious leaders around him.

[7:49] Now, he might have, and John might have left that out of the account, but that's besides the point. Other points, we see Jesus is moved with great compassion when he sees the suffering in front of him.

So, Jesus heals the man, heals him with his word, heals him without any kind of ritual, without any kind of work.

There's no carrying him to place him in the pool. Matter of fact, here's an interesting point when you think about issues of salvation.

Does the man even ask to be healed? D.A. Carson refers to this man as a dull man, a sullen man, based on his response to Jesus.

And here's what I want you to, where I want you to listen to me really carefully and listen to my full argument before you form your opinion.

[9:01] This man, as a disabled person, was worthless. It sounds very inappropriate to say, but 38 years disabled makes him worthless in the eyes of the culture he lived in.

Now, I'm going to say something else shocking. The last time I preached, I read a prayer done by the Orthodox Jews today about the thanking God that I was not created a woman.

That's how the Orthodox Jews open up their prayers with every day. What is it? I thank you, Lord, that you did not make me a woman, nor a dog, nor a Gentile.

And this is the first time I'd ever heard audible gasps from like six points in the room when I read it out. The Orthodox Jewish view of a disabled person has not changed all that much from the time of Christ.

I was talking to my wife last night before we went to bed. I don't want this to be my shtick where you get up and say, here's this terrible thing in the Bible and here's how the Orthodox Jews have kept it up to this day.

[10:25] But I kind of can't help it because this is a terrible way to treat people and it's amazing and crazy to me that it's carried on to this day.

The Orthodox treatment of someone that is disabled as they would view someone with blemishes is shocking. Does anybody know what it means to sit shiva?

Anybody heard that term before? Yeah. It's a Jewish grieving ritual. This is just one example. And you need a quorum of 10 to do it.

You come and you sit low. In my business, it's actually not odd to have, I've had co-workers call in to sit shiva for their clients.

So one day, you never know, I might go have the opportunity, I kind of hope not, but to sit shiva because it sounds really like an awful experience. You basically fast for a week.

[11:27] You sit in low benches. Ten people sit and gather. You say prayers two to three times a day. But you need this quorum of 10 in order for it to be kosher and valid.

Or the soul supposedly doesn't find rest. The soul kind of hangs there supposedly and you help it to the afterlife. It's a very odd thing. A disabled person doesn't count as a man.

A disabled person is not allowed to make up that quorum of 10. So to this day, Jewish people argue about it. I'll read you one example from one rabbi trying to argue and think through this issue.

Now imagine that you, dear reader, are a rabbi and a deaf congregant of yours died. During a shiva visit you attend. Several of the deceased families and friends who are also deaf take part in the mourning minyan, that is their liturgy.

So do two Hasidic-looking men from the neighborhood who are kind enough to come at the last minute to ensure that the 10-man quorum is fulfilled. Suddenly, the alarmed Hasids notice that two of the other men are signing to each other.

[12:44] And according to their interpretation of traditional Jewish laws or the Halakha, this service is not kosher. Deaf men cannot be counted.

They must remain silent when the other worshippers respond to the dead man's son during their recitation of the mourner's Kiddish, preparing leave instead. This brings the number of worshippers present down to eight, meaning the mourners could not recite the required prayers communally, something that could only be done with a mignon.

In other words, in Jewish thought, a disabled man is not a whole man. It doesn't count. I pronounce invalid as invalid, but I might as well say invalid.

They view this man as invalid. And that's how this man is being viewed sitting by the pool. 38 years, basically, as a corpse sitting there because he doesn't count in the eyes of the religious leaders.

He has no worth. And again, this makes sense because if their righteousness is all about keeping the law and the things they do and this ritual bath, this man can't do any of that.

[14:01] This man can't even get into the pool. He can't observe their ritual cleanings every day. He can't make it to the synagogue by himself. Kind of explains the soleness that we see in this man.

Let's be very clear. Praise God! We live in an age where compassion is shown to those with disabilities. That we no longer look at deaf people or blind people or paralyzed people as less than. But we need to remember this has not been the historical norm. In Jesus' day, this man had no value. And he asks, so what does this man do now?

He's been paralyzed for 38 years. We don't know what incident caused this to happen. But if this happened at 10, he's 48.

In an age where if you lived to 60, that was a long time. The physical healing is really, how much has it done for him? Start over again when you're a 48-year-old man.

[15:13] 12 years left. It's not time to go learn a trade and start caring for yourself. It reminds me of Nicodemus' question, how can an old man be born again?

This is the story of a man who was given a miraculous demonstration of God's love and he left physically healed but the physical healing really doesn't do him much good. And I'm sorry, I don't really see the evidence of a spiritual awakening.

I could be wrong and I pray that later on in his life he came to Christ. But as far as what we see in this page, I still see spiritual blindness.

Christ did him a favor but I don't think he helped him that much. Because if he didn't turn to Christ, he left physically healed but nothing had changed.

He's as hopeless as he was when Jesus found him. By all accounts, he seems to be spiritually dead. Maybe he's even worse off because Jesus is now in his rear view mirror.

[16:29] You might say, what evidence do I have of his resistance to Christ? There's a few things we see in the account that makes me really doubt that there was a heart change. He doesn't even bother to ask who Jesus is the first time.

I'm going to say again the example. If we had somebody here that we cared for as a community for 38 years that was unable to move and we cared for that person consistently for 38 years and somebody came in here and healed him or her with his words, would we let him just walk out?

And we see in verse 15 he rats out Jesus pretty quick to the spiritual leaders. Some commentators think and I tend to agree that this is probably a way for him to sidestep persecution from the religious leaders trying to confront him.

And in this call to sin no more this seems to be a call from Jesus to repent. Now this issue of sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you seems to be a tricky one.

But I think we need to keep in mind a couple things. One is we're going to come to a story in John chapter 9 about a man born blind from birth and the disciples come and ask Jesus who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind.

[18:23] And Jesus' answer is neither sin caused this to happen but this happened so that God's glory could be manifested amongst you.

Jesus here is saying that not every instant of suffering is tied to a particular sin. But I also think it needs to be cleared he doesn't say that I'm trying to think of the best way to word it he's also not saying that no instance of suffering is caused by specific sin.

It appears to me as I read this that this man was in this condition because of his sin. Something had caused him. Certainly you see in 1 John chapter 5 that there is a sin unto death.

So we can see that not all suffering is caused by sin specific sins but some suffering is caused by specific sins. how can you tell the difference between the two?

That's just you can't. You can't. That's an impossible thing for us to judge. It's only Jesus that can make this kind of proclamation. So don't go out and find somebody in suffering and accuse them of sin doing that.

[19:44] It's like basically the worst thing a pastor can do to say that. It's not for us to know. But Jesus gives this man a small mercy as he departs.

It seems that there's an unnamed persistent unconfessed sin in this man's life and he calls him to cut it out. See you are well.

Sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you. What is the something worse? Certainly it can be a physical condition being reinstated.

But I think what Jesus is truly referring to is we see at the end of our reading today worry in verse 29 worry about the resurrection and those that have done evil the resurrection of judgment.

He is more concerned about the resurrection of judgment here. the resurrection of judgment for those who have not heard the voice who have not heard this voice of the son of God and not found life.

[21:04] So that was the introduction to the story. It's a long intro but again the man's not really the point. The religious leader's response to the healing is they literally do not care that the man is healed.

They do not care that this man who has not had peace a day in his life finds physical relief on the Sabbath which to us seems like the most appropriate time to experience healing.

the only thing that they care about is what? That he's carrying his bed on the Sabbath. They're worried about the fact that he picked up his bed.

And there was Jesus' command. Pick up your bed and walk. Man picks up his bed. They say why are you carrying your bed? He says a man told me to pick up my bed.

Right? They don't worry about the fact that he hasn't been able to walk for 38 years. Was Jesus healing on the Sabbath a work?

[22:11] Certainly it is. It's a greater work than you and I can do. And for this account, remember I said this is part of the account, yes, this is an act of mercy.

Jesus handles this in other accounts when he talks about working on the Sabbath. He speaks about works of mercy and works of necessity.

Both are allowed underneath Sabbath law. But Jesus doesn't touch on that part. He jumps into it. He says, yes, this is a work I have done, but it is a work of God the Father.

It is a work of the Father for the Son can do nothing of his own accord. And here we find verse 18, which is a key verse for the whole passage.

this explains the change in tone we're going to see over the next several chapters, and that will lead us to the foot of the cross. 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.

[23:24] And if he was calling God his own Father, he was making himself equal with God. And the religious leaders were not, the religious leaders were not wrong in their understanding of what Jesus was claiming.

In all acts of the Godhead and the affairs of man, all members of the Trinity work in full unity. That's why we worship a three in one God.

And this brings us great hope for those who come to Jesus are now able to find peace with the Father.

Verse 22, For the Father judges no one, but has given 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.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He who does not believe comes into judgment. I'm sorry.

[24 : 46] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. But the Son also stands as judge.

Why is the Father given all judgment to the Son? Because his role as Savior makes him the mediator between man and God. We come to Christ and gain access to the Father.

Christ stands as the God-man, as our representative. But as our Lord, he also becomes the agent of judgment.

What is Christ talking about here? Well, it's also referred to by the Apostle Paul in Philippians. Christ condescends.

In other words, he's incarnate and becomes man, becoming the sacrifice for our sin. But because of this, he also becomes the judge of the world. Philippians 2, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[26 : 25] Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name of his above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And in Romans 14, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. And then Paul reminds us, so then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

God. So Jesus is given the role, or maybe in a simpler language, the job of judgment because he is the Son of Man.

The God-man represents man before the Father because, as the author of Hebrews tells us, only the blood of a man can pay the price for the sins of men.

This is why Jesus took on flesh to be our sacrifice, Christ. And as the God-man, he will also be our judge. So you see, every human that's born will have to come to Christ in one form or the other, for life or for judgment.

[27 : 40] So while the Son does nothing apart from the will of the Father, because of the Incarnation, because he is the only begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, because for us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man, then he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

And here's the tragic irony of this whole passage. The Sabbath was given to provide rest for the people of God. Jesus is God.

He was the one that instituted the Sabbath to provide this rest, yet the religious leaders tried to make this keeping of the Sabbath based on a system of works. How can one rest if he's constantly working?

it doesn't make sense. To the point that this poor man who had suffered for 38 years was completely excluded from any hope.

And when he realizes his first moment of physical rest in almost four decades, they miss the point and try to persecute him. They don't understand that the Lord of the Sabbath had restored the Sabbath to its intended purpose.

[29 : 12] If Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, he did it with the power of God because he had the right to call God his own father, because he was equal with God.

If all this is true, then these Jewish rulers are completely useless, and they understand that their position is in danger.

I'm going to mention this is in my notes, but if Caleb and I, or any other clergy, put down a system of rules in front of you to make it so that you can earn your way to find rest in God, you need to run away as quickly as possible.

Because we become nothing more than religious leaders who point people away from Christ into their own works. I believe it's likely that this man walked away from the grace that was offered by Christ, but I think these religious leaders are more than a little guilty for that decision he made. the religious leaders' account of Jesus left them only two options, and by the way it only leaves you two options.

[30 : 38] You can either turn to Jesus for rest, or you can seek to destroy him. Nearly all those people chose the latter, unbelief has and always will keep sinners away from the rest of God.

Yet your unbelief will not excuse you during the day of judgment. All those who deny that Jesus is Lord will stand before the Son to whom all judgment is given. And I am reminded in closing of the passage in Hebrews, and we won't cover the whole thing, because it's another three sermons worth the material.

But it's one of my favorite passages of Scripture. The author of Hebrews speaks of a rest that is available to the people of God, and those who fail to enter into that rest.

Why do they fail to enter into that rest? Because of their unbelief. Not because of their moral failures. Not because of their failures. Remember, the offer to heal was given to the man by the pool, even when Jesus was fully aware of the sin he had in his life.

The offer of healing was not conditional upon the man's work. It wasn't based on the man's value, because in the eyes of the world around him, he was worthless.

[32 : 05] There was nothing he could do to earn his salvation. The only thing he had to do was believe in the person that was standing right before him, giving him words of hope.

And the author of the Hebrews warns and points out that this has always been the story for the people of Israel, that the majority have always been those who have walked away in unbelief.

The author of Hebrews says, for who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt, led by Moses?

those who walked in the path of miracles that God did before them? And with whom was God angry for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose body fell in the wilderness?

And to whom did he swear that they would not enter God's rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter God's rest because of their unbelief.

[33 : 14] Then, later on, so then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works.

Let us therefore work to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning even the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. As we've seen our account today, Jesus is that one who we come to, the word of God, whom we will give account to one day.

The warning, the strong warning here is, cease from relying on your own works. Believe in him. Apart from that belief in Christ, you will not find rest.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God bless confess our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed.

[34 : 45] Thank you.