

Jesus, Giver of Life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 November 2008

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] Well, please be seated. And I encourage you to open again the Bibles at page 866 to John chapter 5. And let me pray for us.

Lord God, your word brings life and light to us. And so we pray, fulfil that purpose in our hearts and minds and lives. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. We'll probably lose count of how many times we hear those words or sing them in the next month.

We'll hear them piped through in pretty banal fashion in supermarkets and shopping centres, I guess. And we'll sing them hopefully with sincerity at church services and carol services and so on as well.

As I said at the beginning, this is a short series of sermons from different passages in John leading up to Christmas as we think and reflect about light and life that Jesus came to bring.

[1 : 06] In the old city of Jerusalem today, there is one of many centres where there is a pile of ruins. And in this particular one, just to the north of the temple site, next to a crusader period church built about 1100, there is a deep pit which has all sorts of ruins that are a bit hard to make sense of in a way.

But what they've found in this pile of ruins are some pools and porticos or the ruins of porticos that go around, colonnades, a sort of walkway.

For many years, scholars thought that John, when he writes this passage in John 5, was making it up. But there was no such place as the Bethesda pools. But then in more recent years, archaeologists have found a pool with five porticos.

In effect, two pools next to each other, portico all the way around and one across the middle dividing the two pools. And without a doubt, probably, this is the pool of Bethesda that is mentioned here in John 5.

It seems that there was some superstition at the time, or tradition, that people would come here to be healed. That somehow the waters occasionally, periodically, we're not sure how frequently, would stir and bubble up.

[2 : 28] Some, it seems, thought that this was the work of angels. And the first person into the pool would get healed. It could be that the stirring of the pool came from some spring, long since dried up.

There's no spring attached to these pools today. It could be some other source. We're not sure. But that seems to be the context and background as Jesus pays a visit to Jerusalem.

It's an occasion of a feast. And Jesus, being a good Jew, had gone to Jerusalem for whichever festival. This is not named here in John 5. But had gone to Jerusalem for this festival.

We're told that it's by the Sheep Gate. And most likely, that was a gate that had access into the temple area, probably to take sheep for sacrifices.

And these pools were fairly close to the outer wall on the north side of the temple area. There's a group gathered of invalids, the blind, the lame, the paralysed, we're told in verse 3.

[3 : 30] Many of them. And then we're told that Jesus singles out one of them. Not because he came to Jesus, but simply Jesus, really without explanation, chooses him.

One of the men who was there had been ill for 38 years, we're told in verse 5. It doesn't mean necessarily that he'd simply sat under that colonnade for 38 years.

But that he'd been ill for that long. And presumably, regularly, periodically, was there to try to get healing from the waters. When Jesus saw him lying there, presumably his legs are paralysed in some way or other.

Jesus, also we're told, knew that he'd been there a long time. Either a supernatural knowledge or maybe Jesus asked, you know, that man over there, how long has he been around? Or how long has he been sick? Jesus then asks him, do you want to be made well? Some interpret that question as sort of a psychological question. Do you really want to be made well? [4 : 39] Or actually, would you prefer to remain a beggar? Maybe you're earning enough income as a beggar. I'm not sure that it's necessarily pushing the psychological route of, are you really desiring to be made well?

But rather Jesus raising an obvious question, leading up to the healing that he's about to perform. He says, do you want to be made well? And see what his answer is. And then Jesus makes him well. The man's answer to the question comes in verse 7. Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. And while I'm making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me. Again, the context probably is that the first person into the stirred up waters could get healing. And this man never is there. Presumably he's got to crawl because his legs are not working. Is perhaps the idea behind it. And he's got nobody to help him. It's a bit of a grumble, a bit of a complaint in a way. He doesn't strictly answer the question.

[5 : 42] Although by implication, presumably, he does want to get well. It's a bit pitiful though. A bit of a grumble. A bit of a grumble. And then Jesus says to him in verse 8.

Stand up. Take your mat. And walk. A strange thing to say to a man who cannot walk. But he does it.

The very next line. Verse 9. At once the man was made well. And he took up his mat. And began to walk. No weeks in Donval rehab for this man.

No physiotherapy or OT that he needs to get his muscles working. If you've been in hospital for a couple of weeks. You would know that it takes a bit of time. Before you've built up your muscle tone again.

In your legs or arms or whatever it is. That's been operated on. Or been sick. Here is atrophied muscle. Instantly strong. New life.

[6 : 48] Into dead limbs. Jesus speaks. But the incident is not over. It's not a simple miracle story.

There are two complications at least. In the verses that follow. The first complication is when this occurred. It was the Sabbath. Verse 9 concludes by telling us.

The complication is. That the man in picking up his mat. Has broken the Sabbath laws. Now we need to understand that by Jesus' day.

The Sabbath laws were extremely complicated. There were numerous categories of work. That you were not allowed to perform. 39 categories or something like that. And carrying your mat was one of them.

So this man in carrying his mat. Was breaking one of the Sabbath laws of the day. We also need to know. That the complicated Sabbath laws of Jesus' day.

[7 : 48] Are not in the Old Testament. It's a later tradition. A much later tradition. Probably in the 1 to 200 years leading up to Jesus. And it got consolidated in the years that followed.

And eventually written down about 200 AD. In a Jewish book called the Mishnah. This was regarded as what were called the tradition of the elders.

A sort of tradition that claimed to come from an oral handing down. By word of mouth not in writing. All the way from Moses. As though on Mount Sinai.

When Moses got all the laws that are in the Old Testament. In the early books of the Old Testament. He in addition got other laws that were never written down. But were passed on by word of mouth. Now there's nothing in the Old Testament that suggests that of course.

It's a tradition that's very late. And it's certainly built up to a climax in the time of Jesus. This man gets into trouble for carrying his mat.

[8 : 48] In verse 10. The Jews. That is the Jewish authorities. Said to the man who'd been cured. It is the Sabbath. It is not lawful for you.

To carry your mat. Now it's clear that this happens. Very very soon. After he's healed. And presumably.

In the immediate vicinity. Of these pools. Where many invalids lay. That's clear. Because. This man doesn't know who Jesus is. And Jesus has disappeared out of the crowd.

So he's still in the same area. It seems. It implies then. That these Jewish authorities. Are not interested in why the man's carrying his mat. They're not interested in a healing. They are simply about the detail. Of their traditions and laws. The man answered them. The man who made me well. Said to me. Take up your mat and walk.

[9 : 48] Passing the blame. It's the same style of statement. That. Adam made to God. When the. When they ate the fruit.

In the garden of Eden. The woman whom you gave me. She. The man who made me well. He said to me. He's passing a blame. In a sense. Of course. This man.

If he's been sick for 38 years. And suddenly walking. Is probably not likely. To be thinking about the detail. Of a Sabbath law anyway. Well. They ask him. Who is the man. Who said to you.

Take up the mat and walk. And the man who'd been healed. Did not know who it was. But Jesus had disappeared. In the crowd that was there. So it's very close. To the time and place.

Where this healing took place. Jesus has. Walked off somewhere else. And he's out of sight. This man. Didn't even know Jesus name. Has no faith in Jesus.

[10 : 40] He didn't come to Jesus. To be healed. Often there are miracles. Because somebody comes to Jesus. Asking for healing. And as an expression of faith. Demonstrates asking for healing. And Jesus. Responds by healing.

Not so here. No faith from this man. He doesn't even know Jesus name. There's no record of him. Even thanking Jesus. He just walks off with his mat. The Jewish authorities.

Later find out. That it's Jesus. That's because the man. Meets Jesus again. Discovers who he is. And then he goes back. To the authorities. To tell them. So here's a man.

Who. Who recognizes. An astonishing miracle. For him. And yet. He's prepared to say. To the Jewish authorities. The man's name is Jesus.

Who did this. Again. It hints. At lack of gratitude. The result of that. Is in verse 16. The Jewish authorities.

[11 : 39] Started persecuting Jesus. Because he was doing such things. Because he was doing such things. On the Sabbath. Doing what? Speaking. Get up your mat and walk.

Or because he was commanding somebody else. To take up their mat and walk. That's all Jesus has done. It clearly shows. The perverted priorities. Of the Jewish authorities.

They're worried about technical details. Of the law. They fail to see the big and glorious picture. Jesus' retort to them is even more provocative.

He says to them. My father is still working. And I am working still. Also. I was widely accepted. That. By the Jews of Jesus day. That God the father was. Or God was.

Was still working actually. Even though it was a Sabbath day. Holding and sustaining the universe. But when Jesus says. And I also am working. He's identifying himself with God.

[12 : 37] In a way that they find rather blasphemous. And so verse 18 says. For this reason the Jews. Were seeking all the more to kill him. And we might be a bit horrified.

To kill him. Really. I mean that looks a bit over the top. But remember that breaking the Sabbath. And the blasphemy laws. Were each. Capital offences. In the Old Testament. So in a sense.

They're wanting to keep Old Testament law. In putting Jesus to death. It's the first time it's mentioned. That they're wanting to kill Jesus. But it comes up again.

As a louder and louder. Somber theme. In this and the other gospels. As well of course. So in chapter 8. And then again in 10. And 11. And then from 13 onwards.

Much more frequently. They're certainly out to put Jesus to death. Really for blasphemy. As the worst of his sins. See how their priorities are perverted.

[13 : 40] The one who's giving a sample of new life. They want to put to death. The one who's breaking in with miraculous power.

They're wanting to shut him up. They're wanting to shut him up. And to stop him. The blindness of legalism. Of course the Pharisees and Jewish authorities of Jesus' day were not the only ones who clouded God's word with additional detail.

And pedantry really. And pedantry really. And legalism. Comes time and again when we try and add things to God's word. And say well we shouldn't be doing this or this or this or this or this. And actually in the end what happens is that we're so caught up with minutiae that are actually often irrelevant.

That we've lost the big picture of what God's glorious gospel is doing. And so here. The other complication.

That's the first one. The Sabbath. And that provokes the persecution and opposition. The second one comes when Jesus meets the man again. In the temple area. We're told in verse 14.

[14:53] That later Jesus found him in the temple. Suggests that Jesus was actually looking for him. Jesus again taking the initiative. And he says to the man.

See you've been made well. But then the warning. Do not sin anymore. So that nothing worse happens to you.

Jesus is warning him here. His illness in this particular case. This man's illness. It seems was a result.

Of his own sin. I don't mean that he necessarily did something stupid. And therefore suffered the consequences. But that he actually sinned. And God has intervened.

With some long illness. For this man. And Jesus now is saying. You've been made well. Not because you're faith. Not because you're good. Just because I took the initiative. Now.

[15:52] Repent of your sin. Stop sinning. We're not sure what the man's sin was. But we don't need to know. Jesus is demanding of him.

Moral reformation. And it's subsequent to the healing. He's been healed. Now repent of your sin. Or something worse will happen to you. Something worse. People sometimes say that actions speak louder than words.

But the problem with actions is. That they're often ambiguous. Without words. That is some actions and some events. What do they actually mean? What does this miracle mean?

This healing of Jesus. Is it simply just a. Gratuitous healing of an ill man. Or is there rather something more to it? The events need words to interpret them.

[16:52] If I give you an example. If I walk down the street. And I pass you in the street. But I make no acknowledgement of you. You might go home and say. Oh the vicar is very rude. That may not be accurate.

How do you interpret that event? It could be that I'm rude. It could be that I'm blind. It could be that I've got something in my eye. And I don't see you. Or I've got the wrong glasses on.

Or something. Or it could be that I'm so preoccupied with something. That I'm not concentrating on anybody else. You see there's a range of ways. Of interpreting an event. Same with the cross of Jesus.

Jesus hanging on a cross to die. Failure. Disgrace. Shame. Guilt. Blasphemy. Treason. Well that's one interpretation.

It's not the right one. We know Jesus' death is glorious victory and atonement. Not simply because of the event itself. But because of the words that interpret the event.

[17:53] That we have in the scriptures. So what we find here is Jesus' event of healing the man. But then some words that help us understand the significance of that event.

What is this healing really doing? What is it really all about? And Jesus' explanation is profound. It shows us there are deep layers about this healing.

That we would otherwise miss without his words of interpretation. Remember too the context of this explanation. The context is persecution. They think he's a blasphemer.

For identifying himself with God the Father. So Jesus interprets the event. To defend his unity with God the Father. To show that he's not a blasphemer.

Or even a Sabbath breaker. So he explains to them. What this event is really signifying. Jesus says in verse 19.

[18:56] Very truly I tell you. The son can do nothing on his own. But only what he sees the father doing. For whatever the father does. The son does likewise.

Well Jesus is rather boldly and provocatively. Clearly aligning himself. With God the Father. As a unique son. Oh it's true that in the Old Testament.

The children of Israel. We're also regarded as the children or sons of God. But Jesus is claiming a unique relationship of sonship. With the father here. It includes obedience.

That what the father does. I do. He's not acting independently. He's acting in alignment and harmony. With what God the father does. Central to their relationship is love.

The father loves the son. And shows him all that he himself is doing. So what Jesus is hinting at. Is that what he has done. In healing this man.

[19 : 55] Is actually the work of God. And of course it is God's work to heal. To give life. To restore. And so in Jesus doing that.

He's actually demonstrating that. His claim to be equal with the father. Is a valid claim. And not a blasphemous one. But there's more to this as well. Jesus refers back then.

To what he's done. At the end of verse 20. He will show him. Greater works than these. So that you will be astonished. The son.

Jesus. Will show you. Greater works. Than these. Sorry. The father. Will show Jesus. Greater works than these. Now what.

The works. These works. Is the healing of this man. What are the greater works. What Jesus is saying. Is that this healing of this man.

[20 : 55] Is God's work. That Jesus has done. Demonstrating his. He's one with God. The father. But secondly. He's showing. That this work. Of healing the man. And speaking with him afterwards.

Is actually pointing towards. Greater works. And those greater works. We could summarize. Under the headings of life. And judgment.

As Jesus elaborates. In the rest of this passage today. Down to verse 29. The theme of life. The healing of this.

This ill man. Is a demonstration. Of resurrection life. He's not brought back. Literally from the dead. And resurrected. But the life. Into dead limbs.

Is the same. Power. At work. As the power. Of the resurrection. To come. That's God's power. It's God's prerogative. To give life. To whom he chooses.

[21 : 53] And so God. The son. Demonstrating that power. Is showing. A greater. Life giving power. Is on the way. In effect. Jesus says. In verse 21.

Just as the father. Raises the dead. And gives them life. So also the son. Gives life. To whomever he wishes. So in healing this man. We are getting.

A foretaste. Of the resurrection. To eternal life. And the end of death. That's the connection. That Jesus is drawing. Jesus is saying. You've seen a great work.

In this man being healed. But the greater thing. To come. Is the resurrection. And the two are connected. Life into death. Life. Limbs. And the whole person. Yet to come.

Is what Jesus is saying. He's therefore showing. That he is one with God. Not a blasphemer. At all. The other theme is judgment.

[22 : 49] In these verses. Jesus remember. Had warned the man. That something worse. Will happen to him. Not an idle warning. The significance.

And importance of it is. That it's a warning. From the judge. Himself. And so Jesus goes on. To say in verse 22. The father judges.

No one. But has given. All judgment. To the son. So when Jesus. Warns the man. Something worse. Will happen to you. This man's sin.

Has caused his sickness. In some way. Jesus is pointing to the. Day of judgment. To come. I should say of course. That not every.

Sickness. Is the result of a. Specific sin. I think it's right. That Christians actually. Should ask God. Is there something. In my life. That I need to reform. In which my sickness.

[23 : 44] Or strife. Or trouble. Is your warning to me. But not every time. Is it the answer. We shouldn't go around. Burden with guilt. Because we're sick. But nonetheless.

On the other hand. We shouldn't just ignore. The possibility. That God's trying. To teach us something. Not every sickness. Comes from a specific sin. As Jesus makes clear. Elsewhere. But in this man's case.

It seems to be. For him. It's a warning. Of judgment. The greater thing. To come. Is the day of judgment. To come.

Just like the greater thing. From the healing. Is the day of resurrection. To come. And of course. The two are connected. The point of God the Father.

Handing Jesus judgment. Is in verse 23. So that all may honour the Son. Just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son. Does not honour the Father.

[24 : 40] Who sent him. As these people. Are trying to persecute. Jesus. They are not honouring. The Father. They think they're doing.

God's business. In being the. Religious police. In accusing Jesus. Of blasphemy. And Sabbath breaking. But actually.

By not honouring Jesus. They are not honouring. God. Something that our world. Has failed to understand. Of course.

Our world thinks. That all. Religions lead to the same God. That we must be in harmony. And get on with each other. But so often.

It's very. Very clear. If you do not honour the Son. Then you do not honour the Father. We can only worship God the Father. Through Jesus the Son.

[25 : 35] There is no other way. So often. I hear of people. Who say. I really like Jesus teaching. But he's not divine. But that's an absurd arrogance.

Because it's somebody saying. Well I will decide. Which words of Jesus I like. You see. Jesus. Good words about. Teaching and healing. And moral life. Are all intertwined.

And inseparable. From the fact. That he claims to be divine. And one with the Father. There's somebody. That many of us know. Who's. Not a member of our church.

But has taken that view. After many years. Of being a Christian. Has renounced it. Many years ago. And sadly. Now is dying. Without faith. And he made.

Exactly that comment. I like Jesus moral teaching. But he's not divine. But actually. That's an arrogance. A very tragic one. I think. Jesus is making clear here.

[26 : 38] That his teaching. Is all inseparable. With the fact. That he claims to be. And is. One. With God the Father. And those that. Claim that we can worship.

Legitimately God. Without Jesus. Are wrong. Of course. If Jesus is wrong. Then they might be right. But they can't both be right. It doesn't work like that. Jesus goes on to say.

In verse 24. Truly I tell you. Anyone who hears my word. And believes him who sent me. Has eternal life. He's passed.

He does not come under judgment. But has passed from death to life. And here's the connection. Between the themes of life and judgment. How do we respond. To Jesus word. But notice that in this verse.

Jesus does not say. He who hears my word. And believes me. No. That's not what he says. He says. He who hears my word.

[27 : 35] And believes him who sent me. That's an astonishing. Claim. Of connection with God. That Jesus word. Directs us to the one who sent Jesus.

Believe Jesus word. No. Not strictly. It's believing. Hearing Jesus word. And believing in him who sent me. That is. Jesus word. Is directing us to God the father.

They are inseparable. In a sense. You can't really have one without the other. And it's in hearing Jesus word. And believing God who sent Jesus.

That we pass from death to life. So this healing of Jesus. Of this man. Who was ill. And his warning of him.

To stop sinning. Or something worse will happen to him. Is pointing us to a greater truth. A greater thing than this. As he said. The day of resurrection.

[28 : 35] Or the day of judgment to come. On that day. Will you be a person. Who's heard Jesus word. And believes in the one who sent him. In which case.

Life. If not. Judgment. And hell. And that's how Jesus concludes. In the following paragraph.

Very truly I tell you. The hour is coming. And is now here. When the dead will hear the voice of the son of God. And those who hear will live. The healing of this man.

Is just the foretaste of that. In a few chapters time. Lazarus will be called forth. Dead. To life. From the tomb. Lazarus come forth. And out he comes. The dead now living. And in a few more chapters. Of course. Jesus himself. Will rise. And his tomb. Be empty. Those who hear the voice of the son of God. And those who hear will live.

[29 : 35] For just as the father has life in himself. So he has granted the son. Also. To have life in himself. Not life like you and me have. But life in himself.

That is as the source of life. The father and the son together. Are each the source of life. Is what that's saying. They have life in himself. As John's gospel in effect opens.

In him was life. And the life was the light of man. He wouldn't say in you was life. We live. Yes. But in him. In Jesus was life.

In the sense of the source of life. Something uniquely the prerogative of God. Something that belongs to the father. And. To the son. They're the life givers.

The source of life. And likewise for judgment. In verse 27. He's given him authority to execute judgment. Because he is the son of man. Language that evokes a picture.

[30 : 33] From the Old Testament. The prophet Daniel. Of the son of man coming in glorious judgment. Jesus notices the son of God in verse 25. The son of man in verse 27. Titles of divinity in effect.

That Jesus applies to himself. Without blasphemy. He's the one who gives life. He's the one who executes judgment. In complete harmony with God the father.

And not in any blasphemous way at all. The hour is coming and is now here he says. It's breaking in. The healing of this man and his warning about judgment. Is the breaking in.

Of this new era. Of life and final judgment. But it's coming. It's not yet fully realized. And so Jesus concludes saying. Do not be astonished at this.

For the hour is coming. Future only now. When all who are in their graves. Will hear his voice. And will come out. Those who've done good.

[31 : 35] That is not good. As our world humanistically defines it. Those who've done good. In believing Jesus word. And believing him who sent Jesus.

Well they will rise to the resurrection of life. But for those who've done evil. Those who've rejected Jesus. The persecutors of Jesus. Those who've not believed his word.

And those who've not believed in him who sent him. They'll rise to the resurrection. Of condemnation. To hell. To judgment.

It's a solemn warning. It's a solemn warning of course. To those who are persecuting Jesus. Who fail to understand who he is. But it's a warning to us as well.

The healing of this man. And the warnings to him by Jesus. Are pointing to greater things than these. To the final day. When Jesus returns.

[32 : 34] And when he calls us out of our graves. To what will we rise? Will we be those who've heard his word.

And believe him who sent him. In which case we'll rise to life. But if not. We'll rise to the resurrection.

Of condemnation. Light. And life. To all he brings. We can only sing that with sincerity.

If we've heard Jesus' word. And believe in him who sent him. And if that is the case. Of course we can sing it not only with sincerity. But for eternity. Hail the heaven born prince of peace.

Hail the son of righteousness. Born to raise us from the earth. Born to give us second birth. Joyful. All you nations rise. Join the triumph of the skies.

[33 : 35] With the angelic host proclaim. Christ is born. In Bethlehem.