

Lord of the Sabbath

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 16th of January 2000.

The preacher is Phil Muleman. His sermon is entitled Lord of the Sabbath and is from John chapter 5 verses 1 to 29.

Our Heavenly Father I pray that you would open our hearts and our minds to understand your word and to know how to live it out in our lives and to serve you more fully.

For we ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen. You may like to open your Bibles to John chapter 5, the passage that Tony read to us this morning as we continue through the sermon series on John. Well I've just returned from two weeks holidays. I've had a week painting my house and the inside of my brand new kitchen which I'm really thankful for. And then we've had a lazy week down at Phillip Island in 35 degree days.

[1 : 14] And we spent much of that time at the beach. And during my frequent visits to the beach, daily visits really, it was kind of like a pilgrimage, I've witnessed some amazing, albeit temporary, healings of sunburnt people.

And why do I say temporary healings? Well, lots of people, there were lots of red rock lobsters down there. And they were sunburnt. And as they entered the cool water, they got some relief from their sunburn.

And sometimes it was almost like a hot frying pan being dipped in cold water as you saw the people go into the water. Because they just, and they'd cool down. And I can testify to that because I'm a victim of it.

And so on and so on. But I'm not too bad. Well, the water has brought some relief from these people's painful sunburn. Now, if you've been attending the Summer Wednesday Fellowship Bible studies over the past few weeks and following the sermons over the last couple of weeks, you will notice that Jesus himself has been doing some extraordinary signs and healings which all serve to point to who he is.

And that's why we've sung some of those songs this morning. And at the end of chapter 4, Jesus heals an official's boy which causes the official to put all his trust into Jesus.

[2 : 41] And in the Gospel reading that Tony read to us from John 5 this morning, we see yet again another miraculous healing of a man who had been ill for an astonishing 38 years.

Now, we're not told what brought Jesus to the pool nor what drew him to this particular invalid out of the many who were presumably present at the pool.

It says there were many there. But what we do notice is that his need, this man's need, was a long standing one. And while it's probably unlikely that this man spent the entire 38 years by the poolside, he'd be pretty sunburnt if he was, if he'd spent the entire 38 years by the pool for its healing to do its stuff, I don't think he was doing that.

But we get this picture of this, quite a sobering picture of this invalid, unable to enter the water by the pool. As we think about this man, this poor man's need, it can cause us to think back through the years of our own lives where there has been a long lingering need and is perhaps still with us today, cast in a shadow over the entire landscape of our past.

The reality of such a need is more regularly identified today through the insights of psychology and analysis in relation to personality traits. In quite a basic sense, we all suffer to some degree from the hurts and the errors of our past.

[4 : 17] But in some people's experience, however, the shadow is particularly dark and overwhelming. And like this man by the pool, this invalid by the pool, they lie emotionally and relationally paralysed.

And from this perspective, Jesus' question then of verse 6, which says, Do you want to be made well? That question is really rather a penetrating question.

Do you want to be made well? Now it's said that an Eastern beggar often loses a good living by being cured. Now cure has its implications, especially when the need is so long-standing that a whole way of life has been built up around it.

Now I've travelled through Asia and I've been into India and Pakistan and Nepal where there's quite a lot of begging that was going on. And those people that were beggars were professional beggars. And they knew how to ask for money. Now if they had been instantly cured, they would have lost their livelihood and not had any skills to equip them for the future.

[5 : 30] And those sorts of things. And I think that's the sort of thing I'm trying to say. And so Jesus' question needs to be faced by all who would want to be delivered, for example. So are we ready for the implications including possibly repenting of sin and expressing a new loyalty to Jesus as verse 14 sort of points out?

And I want to talk more on verse 14 later on in this talk. Well the man's reply to Jesus in verse 7 I don't think is particularly encouraging.

Jesus says, Do you want to be made well? And his reply is not all that encouraging. He complains that he lacks someone to carry him to the pool at the right time. And he's still locked up, if you like, inside his own need and thinking of a cure by the popular means that was popular at that time.

Now if you look at the NRSV Bible, you'll notice in chapter 5 there is no verse 4. And if you go down to the bottom of the Bible, there's a footnote which has a little 4 there.

And this is possibly what the popular thought was of the day. And this is what they thought would happen. An angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water.

[6 : 57] And whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had. And that was possibly the thought that was going on around that time.

And he thought if he could just get into the well, be the first one, he would be made well. And he's sort of complaining about what's going on I think. Well despite all this, Jesus offers a healing hand to this man.

The complaints of this man, he still offers a healing hand. In verse 8 he says to the man, Stand up, take your mat and walk. At once, not in a little while, but at once, the man was made well.

And he took up his mat and began to walk. Now how would you respond if you witnessed something like this before your very eyes?

Someone standing up, picking up their mat and walking, knowing that they hadn't walked for a long time. I'd be stunned. I'd be amazed. I'd want to praise God I think.

[8 : 06] Now I think a few weeks ago in the paper there was a press article about a woman who woke up from a coma, who'd been in a coma for 16 years. And even our papers reported that as a bit of a miracle.

And this is an amazing thing that's happened here. Well in the case that we see here, it's not really the case for the people who see this invalid first.

The man following Jesus' instructions, he gets up, walking, and he's carrying his mat. And then he encounters some of the Jewish authorities of the time who remind him of the particular day of the week that it is.

And what day is it? It's the Sabbath. And you know what? It's unlawful to carry a mat on the Sabbath. Now strictly speaking, this fellow had not contravened, I don't think, the written commandment about work on the Sabbath.

Now if I flip back to Exodus chapter 20, I'll read to you some verses from verses 8 about the Sabbath day.

[9 : 13] In Exodus 20 it says this. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

You shall not do any work, you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock or the alien residents in your town. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day.

Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. Now this man had not really contravened the written law because he was an invalid.

He wasn't a furniture removalist or anything like that. So he couldn't be accused in that sense of breaking the law by carrying his mat, I don't think. And as I said, he hadn't contravened the written

law.

But the oral traditions, the spoken traditions which the Pharisees cherished, were placed over the written law. And we see that being exemplified here.

[10:23] Now the oral tradition of the law identified just under 40 areas of work which would breach the Sabbath law. And carrying anything on the Sabbath, except in cases of compassion, was forbidden.

So he'd broken the oral tradition. And one commentator writes this, The law of the sabbatical rest was perhaps the most important of all the bulwarks by which Judaism was protected from the erosion of the encompassing paganism which surrounded them.

The Sabbath was an extremely important thing. And these authorities or these people had lost sight of the ultimate purpose of the law. And that was that it was a modelling a life which pleased God and witnessed his gracious choice of Israel.

The choice of Israel. And the law for these people had become an end in itself. Now notice here in this passage that when the Jews confront the man, in verse 10, they don't show any interest in the wonder of his recovery.

With all the implications that that has for his future lifestyle. They don't show any interest in that at all. And nor do they appear in the least open to the significance of his healing.

[11:45] As a pointer to who Jesus was. They're not interested in that either. They've just broken the oral traditions. And this man's personal limitations are reflected in his unawareness of who it was that in fact had healed him.

He didn't even know the name of Jesus at that time. And in his ignorance, he represents, I think, the many people in our world who do not acknowledge or worship God.

And yet daily receive his benefits of health and strength. The ordering of this universe. And to say nothing of the patience with which God delays the day of his judgments and so on.

And when Jesus, a little bit later on, meets this man who's now been made well, he warns him of the need to respond to the grace of God.

That is, to God's undeserved favor shown towards him. You've got to respond to that. And he warns him of the need to respond to the grace of God in his life by repenting, turning away from his sin, lest he face a worse fate.

[12:59] And I think that's referring to the coming judgment, which we'll look at in a little while. Now whether or not this man is grateful to Jesus is hard to tell. It's not there in the passage.

There's no indication of it. But this man wastes no time at all in informing the authorities of who it was that healed him and caused him to become a Sabbath breaker.

He finds out that it's Jesus that's healed him. And he goes back straight away and he tells the authorities, it's Jesus that's healed me. And so now the story turns to Jesus. And Jesus becomes the object of a more focused antagonism here.

And the authorities move here in verse 16 to persecute him because he's broken the Sabbath. And then he says some other words in verses 17. And so they go on, they say they want to kill him.

And there's two reasons. The first one, as I just said, it's because of his liberal approach, if you like, to the Sabbath. He doesn't obey the Sabbath. And the second reason is because he equates himself with God.

[14:03] He called God his own father. In verse 17 he says, My father is still working and I also am working. And then in the end of verse 18, For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because he was not only breaking the Sabbath but was also calling God his own father, thereby making himself equal to God.

Now this is the first time in John's Gospel where Jesus claims a unique relationship with the Father. He's been identified as Messiah in chapter 4 by the Samaritan woman at the well.

But here he claims a unique relationship with God, with the Father. Now the image of Father, the word Father, is suffering a degree of eclipse in much of our contemporary Christian thinking.

Let me offer you three reasons why. First of all, the word Father is a gender word which puts it under suspicion straight away with those seeking a less sexist formulation of Christian faith.

Secondly, the experience of fatherhood for many has been a poor one. They've had fathers who've been abusive or alcoholic or who've left the family through divorce and gone off with someone else.

[15:32] Or their fathers are absent through workaholicism or the sheer demands of career and so on. So the word Father and its associations are not especially helpful. And thirdly, those whose faith

is largely shaped by a vital personal experience of Jesus and the living ministry of the Holy Spirit often find little place in devotion or practice for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as 1 Peter says.

Now the loss of the Father image is a serious one. Certainly, sexism does need to be addressed. and the feminine qualities of God as taught in Scripture recognized.

But not to the degree or the point of jettisoning the word Father altogether as some would like. And believe me, it's out there. People would like to get rid of it. And certainly, the word Father has negative images in some people's experience.

But that's not in itself an argument for discarding this image altogether. Jesus himself calls God Father, doesn't he? Our fundamental human need for a true fathering is answered finally and precisely by our relationship with the only perfect Father from whom all fatherhood derives and that is God himself.

I find this hard to believe sometimes but even I'm not a perfect father. And I think that you guys out there who are dads or grandfathers and so on, you probably would admit to yourself that you're not the perfect father.

[17:15] I've had a great holiday with my kids and I have a great time with my kids but I let them down when I say I'll go for a walk with them in the morning and I don't wake up or something like that.

We fail our kids. But God is a perfect father. He does not fail us. Now certainly as we read John's Gospel we learn that Jesus must forever be at the centre of our relationship with God.

But God is Father as well as Son and Spirit. And so to admit the Father in worship and experience is to water down Christianity and indeed it's not seeing God as sovereign.

Well we've looked at the image of Father and Jesus' extraordinary healing powers up to this point. And in the remaining time what I want to do is look at why Jesus has the ability to heal this man in the instant way that he did and why he does indeed call God Father.

Now he's defended his Sabbath healing by appealing to the identity of his work with the work of the Father. In verse 17 again it says my Father is still working and I also am working.

[18:35] Now the Jewish authorities' response to this is to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. Blasphemy in the sense that Jesus is claiming equality with God by setting himself up in rivalry to God.

Much like there is, for example, a contest for the leadership within a particular political party. There's a battle for the leadership and so on at the time.

And it was the lure of just such a rival inequality which was the occasion of the fall that we read about in Genesis. You know the story where God creates the world, places Adam and Eve in the garden and after a little, some time in the garden the devil, the serpent comes along and the devil comes along in the form of a serpent and he says to Eve, if you eat from that tree it's okay, don't worry about that.

And this is what he says to Eve in verse 5. You will not die at the end of verse 4. For God knows that when you eat of it, of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and so on, that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Now that sort of becoming like God is trying to be in competition with God, setting up a rivalry with God and so on. Well if that sort of thinking were in Jesus' mind, the Jews of course have the best grounds for their accusation against Jesus of blasphemy and so on.

[20:11] But Jesus is not claiming equality with God in the sense of being an opponent or a rival deity. He's not doing that at all. Rather, it is an equality expressed as a unity in which the Son is so utterly submitted to the Father that the two are one in the works that they do.

Now in verse 19, Jesus says some very important words. He says, and he says it three times in this passage, very truly I tell you. And whenever you see these words in John's Gospel, very truly I tell you, take note of what it's saying because these are some really important words and important things which help us to understand who Jesus is and what he's on about.

So he says here in verse 19, 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. Jesus here places no limit on his dependence on the Father.

Now another commentator says this, and I think it sums it up quite well. The Father is God sending and commanding. The Son is God sent and obedient.

[21 : 36] The Father is God sending and commanding. The Son is God sent and obedient. Well, another love of my life is sailing.

And I love to sail because my dad taught me to sail. There's a few people here who know that I love sailing. And my father taught me to sail.

He taught me not to be scared when the boat leaned. And I think that's why I love sailing now because he taught me not to be scared. And I learnt not to be scared because he showed me that he wasn't scared of it.

And that was a really important thing for me. If he'd shown me his fear, I would have been scared too and I'd never sail anymore. But Dad revealed sailing to me and he taught me how to sail.

And I imitated what he taught me and I still do to some degree when I get the opportunity. So in the same way that Dad revealed and taught sailing to me, we read in verse 20 that the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he is doing.

[22 : 50] Now I'm sure that my dad loves me and he taught me how to sail. But God loves the Son and shows him everything that he is doing. And there is no rivalry here between the Father and the Son.

None whatsoever. Now today I think I'm a better sailor than my dad. And I don't think he gives a hoot. He doesn't care.

And there's no rivalry between us in that sort of situation. We have rivalry in other areas but not in that area. But here the Father and the Son are seen to have no rivalry at all.

And they are unique. And they have a unique relationship of revealing and imitating. So let me go back and ask another couple of questions.

Why was Jesus able to heal this man? It's because he is God. And why is he able to do this work on the Sabbath?

[23 : 48] Well, it's because he is God. He's Lord of the Sabbath then, isn't he? Now the physical healing of Jesus of the man at the pool and the authority by which he speaks to the Jewish authorities is now seen, as we continue through this passage, in two other areas.

And the first area he talks about is talking about the end of the age. And he says, at the end of the age, the Son will raise the dead. Now let's look at verses 21, verses 25 and verse 28.

In verse 21 it says, Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. The Son is able to do what God is able to do.

In verse 25, this is one of these very truly, I tell you, listen, 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 voice of the Son of God. Verse 28, Do not be astonished at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice.

[25 : 08] Now just as Jesus brought life into the dead limbs of the man by the pool, he is the same power that will one day call the dead of every generation into life from the power of death.

But this power is already at work. Look at verse 24. The voice of the Son is already sounding in this world. In verse 24, again it says, Very truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and does not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.

The resurrection life which the Son, or Jesus, will confer at the end of this time, at the end of time, is already imparted here and now to those who respond to the voice of God.

Believe in Jesus, we have eternal life. It starts now. And this amazing claim of Jesus is asserted throughout John's Gospel in one area in particular that we see it is at the raising of Lazarus.

You know the story so well. Lazarus is dead and they come to get Jesus and he's been dead for a few days and they've wrapped him up and they've put him in the cave and they've rolled the stone over because they couldn't stand the stench and all those sorts of things.

[26 : 33] And what does Jesus do? He says, Come out, Lazarus. Lazarus is dead. He's been raised from the dead. And just as Jesus rose Lazarus from the dead way back then in John chapter 11, so too Jesus will raise us from the dead if we believe in him.

So at the end of this age the son will raise the dead. The second thing is the son will be the judge of all people at the end of the age.

Again, look at verses 22 and verses 27 and 28 and 29. In verse 22, The father judges no one but has given all judgment to the son.

It's quite clear. All judgment goes to the son. Verse 27 And he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the son of man. Verses 28 and 29.

The second part of verse 28. The hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.

[27 : 50] Jesus will be the judge. And at the end of this age he has been given authority by his father. That is God to do so.

And the note of judgment is struck by the story of the invalid by the poor at the beginning of this chapter. Jesus warns him. Remember I said this earlier.

Jesus warns him about the moral implications of what has been done for him. Remember he says in verse 14. Do not sin anymore so that nothing worse happens to you.

The nothing worse is his standing at the end of this age before the son of man which is a title Jesus uses of himself as one who had personally received his healing grace and yet not changed his lifestyle in the light of it.

Jesus will be the judge. And this Jesus who will raise the dead and judge the dead at the end of this age are awesome in their implication.

[29 : 03] And it's impossible to remain neutral in the face of Jesus' claims. I'm sure that there are some people who just don't understand or don't agree with what I'm saying here. And there are some people that think hallelujah.

Well C.S. Lewis thinking about these words of this passage has used some words which I think are worth repeating again. And he says this.

In the mouth of any speaker who is not God these words would imply that I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivaled by any character in history.

He's saying this about Jesus. And then he goes and he says you must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him and kill him as a demon. Or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. Those claiming to have chosen the last option that is to call him Lord and God must face this question.

[30 : 21] What difference knowing that Jesus is Lord and God what difference does this make into my life? Since he is the son who will raise us in the face of the destructive power of death and since he is the one before whom we shall stand at the end of this life we ought to pay more than just lip service to the principle he himself embodied with respect to his father.

And that principle is seen in verse 19. Whatever the father does the son does likewise. Are we doing as the father asks us to do?