

Doing the Father's Work

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Date: 17 May 2015

[0 : 00] Well, we have a challenging task this morning in that I have a heart that is full and I have a very earthy vessel.

So, I'm going to read the Bible and then I'm going to pray and then you're going to pray and listen.

John chapter 5. John chapter 5.

John chapter 5.

It was Jesus who had healed him and this is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

[2 : 56] But Jesus answered them, my father is working until now and I'm working.

Let's pray. Precious God and Father, it is our undeserved privilege to be together this morning because of your grace.

To be able to hold the scriptures in our hand that give to us an accurate reflection of the character and heart of our Savior.

And I would ask that your spirit would work in the lives of those of us who are here that know the Lord Jesus Christ.

That seeing in these scriptures the heart and the character of our Lord Jesus that we would be drawn to love him more.

[3 : 56] That we would be drawn to follow him more. That we would be drawn to love him more. That we would be drawn with glad and humble hearts to obey him.

And have our lives reflect his grace, his kindness, his affection for those who are lost and broken.

And his resolute spirit in the face of adversity and spiritual darkness. I pray also this morning for those that are here that do not know Christ.

Some who are here and don't know that fact. And I would pray that this morning as the preaching of the word is bathed with prayer.

And empowered by your spirit that this morning they would be convicted to understand that apart from Christ there is no hope. And only the fear of eternal condemnation.

[5 : 06] I pray for those that are here that do know the lost state of their soul but are despairing to think that there is any remedy. Let them see Jesus who is here among us this morning even as he was at that pool.

And we who know Jesus pray that he would give the same command to the soul of a man or a woman or a boy or a girl that needs Christ that he did.

To the man who was infirm. We ask this in Jesus' name. And for his glory. Amen.

Well, I wanted to read the passage to you this morning because this passage, which is longer than some, is a very interesting passage in terms of it is a shift.

Chapter 5 is a change of direction in the Gospel of John. The first four chapters are largely introductory and give us a picture of the Savior, help us understand his mission, and give us some early indications of the ministry that he was going to be involved in.

[6 : 26] Remember something about John. John is a book that doesn't give us a lot of detail. But the details that we are given are all designed to make it very clear that he is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and he came to redeem fallen man.

And you can understand that his ministry and his mission was going to put him in direct conflict with unbelievers and the unbelieving world.

And so as we open up this passage this morning, I want to break it down for you into three different pieces. And bear with me as sometimes in the process of study, what happens on Thursday when it goes to print, and what is preached on Sunday may be just a little different.

And if you get overly frustrated, just put the pencil down and listen and rely upon the help of the Holy Spirit to make it clear and beautiful. Do you follow me? This is a good passage.

It's simple. We see a broken man and a perfect picture of fallen humanity. That's one. We see an unbelievably kind and gracious and sovereign Savior who steps into the absolute messiness of human life and calls a man to faith.

[7 : 54] And we see those stone-cold, hard-hearted, self-righteous, full-of-themselves people who just can't stand the fact that Jesus doesn't buy their way of doing things.

We don't want to be them, do we? So let's dig in and, first of all, see an accurate picture of humanity.

There we are in verse 1. It says this. After this, there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now, he had left Jerusalem earlier because at the outset of his ministry, remember one of the early things that he did that was pretty dramatic?

How many of you remember that he stomped into Jerusalem and he cleansed the temple? That was no small detail. And growing adversity and rejection of his presence in Jerusalem led him to leave and go back up to his home country and spend some time.

But back he comes to Jerusalem, and he comes up around the time of a feast. And by this point in his ministry, he was not all that well-known yet.

[9 : 07] He comes to a place, the Sheep Gate, a pool there at Bethesda, and it was a place where, for whatever reason, there was a large gathering of individuals who came believing that it was one of these sacred, important sites where if the waters were roiled and it was a pool that was fed by underground aquifer of some sort, they believed that when the waters were stirred, whoever scampered in first was the one who got blessed and healed.

And so this was an absolutely miserable gathering of broken people. In our culture, we do a great job of kind of making brokenness fairly manageable and at least discreet.

We have hospitals. We have nursing homes. We have hospice. We have all different kinds of institutions that kind of tuck the problems of life over into a corner, and they're not right out there in front of us where we can see the ugly.

That wasn't the way it was in the ancient world. I want you to imagine that you were to drive around all over the west side on a pretty decent day, and at every one of the places where there are stops, intersections, you'll have these people standing with signs.

How many of you have noticed that? I see signs. Homeless. Hungry. Out of work. I want you to imagine that there was a certain locale where all of these people gathered at the same time, all of them holding, in a sense, the sign that was indicating what their particular problem was.

[11 : 10] That's what this place was, Bethesda. It was the absolute gathering place for all the broken and hurting people of the area. I want you to recognize also that this was the place that was the actual reservoir for the city of Jerusalem.

How many of you would like to have a crowd of people around your water supply like this? Huh? I mean, we're a little hyper about our water, are we not?

Yes? Yes. And yet, people came with the ambition and desire that maybe, maybe, just maybe, that something would happen there spectacular and they would be healed of their disease.

I do want you to understand that this pool setting tells us something. The pool is a reminder of just how desperate man's condition really is. That's what I want you to understand.

This is a gathering place of all the brokenness of the nation and city of Jerusalem. And here they are. Everywhere you look, you see someone who has the physical, external evidence of the fall.

[12 : 26] Look at the passage. Blind, lame, paralyzed. And there they were all gathered together.

I want you to understand that they were there in desperation. I can tell you that the first time someone had a little bit of a gimp step, they didn't say, would you mind taking me down to Bethesda because I'm hoping we can do something about this.

People didn't go to Bethesda at the first indication of a little bit of discomfort. They only went there after they had despaired of every other option. And there they were.

They were there with their hopes exhausted. And there they were gathered around this water reservoir in hopes that at some undetermined time, the waters would kind of stir and the first person in, hopefully he'd have something happen positive.

Now, I want you to stop and think with me just for a moment. If disease would lead people to such a wild and, for the most part, unreasonable hope, you cannot imagine that sin and the burden of a person's soul will lead them to do more significant and sober things.

[13 : 48] Isn't that true? Stop and think with me about the things that people engage in with the ambition that maybe something that they can engage in or involve themselves in is going to bring healing in their life.

How many of you bumped into people that have the idea that maybe a better education would make a difference? Or maybe a different neighborhood?

Or another wife? Or a different drug? Or another boyfriend? Yes, there's a mess, but there's got to be something that I can do.

And maybe if I get there, it'll take care of the problem. I want you to look with me now, if you would, at verse 5 and 6. It says, One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years.

38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he'd already been there a long time, he said to him, Do you want to be healed?

[14 : 55] 38 years is a long time. I know some of you sitting here don't know what 38 years looks like yet. And there are some of you sitting here that think, Well, I think 38 years is about as old as dirt.

I mean, I remember when I was in my teens, I thought someone who was in their 30s was, Man, that was someone who was an antique. I mean, I'm thinking 38 years is really young now.

And here's this guy, For 38 years he'd been under this affliction, And he'd been hoping and hoping and hoping, And there, In the wild ambition, That someday, somehow, He would be healed of his problem.

I do want you to understand something to relate it over to the issue of sin, That the deep and abiding stain of sin does not heal with time. There's no remedy.

There are some things that do fade, But the truth of the matter is, Is that the sting and the stain of sin will never go away, Unless someone does something that is outside of the soul of the person who's been snared with sin.

[16:19] And so if you're sitting here this morning, And the reality of the matter is, Is that when you step back from the present moment, And you stop to think a little bit objectively, The reality of the matter is, You're like that person at the well.

You've been caught, And you've been snared in the ugliness of sin, And even though you've been in some pursuit, There's really nothing that is changing any of it at all.

I do want you to understand this morning, As you look at this situation, That you have Jesus here, Stepping into this situation, And coming in almost without being recognized.

Just shows up at the pool. And I want you to fix this in your mind, As you stop and think about the moment, That Jesus alone can heal the sin-sick soul.

I think that's important for us to understand. And if you're here this morning, And the reality of it is, Is that the Spirit of God is convicting you, That there is this darkness, This ugliness, This despair in your soul, And there are times where your conscience bears in on you, And you don't know what to do with that burden, I want you to know that only Jesus can help with that.

[17:35] Only Jesus. I said there's a second part that we want to see. First of all, we see the mess of broken humanity. But then secondly, I want you to see this exclusive work of grace.

So many times Jesus starts out with questions. And by the way, Questions are a good way To discover what's going on in a person's life, What they need, And how to help where they're really hurting.

So here's Jesus, And we find Him there in verse 6, Asking a very interesting question. Do you want to be healed?

Now, How many of you understand that if you really don't know what the problem is, You don't know the solution? Do you understand that? There is a legend that in, I think it was Gordon Conwell Seminary, For about 20 years, The teacher in systematic theology, The very first day of his class, He would walk in and he would write the number 2 on the board, And the number 4.

And he would do this at the beginning, And then he'd kind of wait a while, And he'd say, Alright, What does that mean? And mathematicians immediately, You know, It's like, 2 plus 4 equals, Hello, Anybody out there?

[19:10] Robert, You graduated with a master's in math, So help me out here a little bit, Or whatever it is, And that's way beyond me, 2 plus 4 equals, Thank you! Okay, Now, But when you get mathematicians together, 2 and a 4 could be something else, What could it be?

2 times 4 is? See, And we could go off in ad nauseum on mathematical details, Or it could actually be referring 24, Right?

Which could be hours in the day, And the professor gets different seminary students, And seminary students are always incredibly bright, And ready to answer in a moment's notice, And I know, I know, I know, You know, And then he stops and says, Listen, If you don't know what the problem is, You really don't know what the solution is either.

So Jesus asks this man, Do you want to be healed? Who is asking this poor guy, Do you want to be healed? It happens to be the creator of the universe, The savior of mankind, And when he says to this guy, Do you want to be healed?

The obvious answer is, Yes! Do something, Jesus! What's the guy say? Duh! Yeah, Well, Yeah, I'd like to, But every time the waters stir, You know, Guess what happens?

[20 : 22] Somebody beats me in! Look at the solution here. If there ever was a picture of man's complete inability to understand spiritual truth that has a play on his salvation, This man's an illustration.

How many of you have ever been around people that you just can't figure out why they don't get it? The truth of the matter is, Until the spirit of God opens their heart and brings conviction, The remedy to their souls is absolutely beyond their ability, Just like in this man's case.

And so here's the guy, Jesus asks the question, And he's already got the solution figured out. Look at what he says here. He says, Well, yeah, yeah.

Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred, And while I'm going, I have a solution, But it just hasn't panned out. How many of you have been around people that have solutions that just don't pan out?

The spiritual problems in their lives, They've got all figured out, But the dots don't connect. I had a wonderful opportunity last night To talk to a lady that I'd met probably three, four months ago, And she was at the Spring Tea.

[21 : 48] And I've got to tell you ladies, Listen to me. Let's get this clear. The Spring Tea is about lost people that need Jesus. Isn't that right? I'm going to tell you something.

We are going to work to make the gospel absolutely crystal clear. When people walk away from it, The one thought they want to have, Or I want them to have, Is that Jesus is the only answer to the desperate need of my soul.

This lady had picked up on the theme of forgiveness, And she saw me standing there, And she said, Can I ask you a question? Well, I actually got in a conversation, And then, Can I ask you a question? Sure. She says, That forgiveness thing really hit me.

And, I said, I'm glad to hear that. That's good. And then she kind of went into some of the details of her life.

Very challenging. Very difficult. You know what I said to her? I said, You know what? There's only one solution. That's Jesus. Only Jesus can change your heart. Only Jesus can take away all the burden, And the grief, And the hardship, And the heartache.

[22 : 57] And I said, I love the fact that Jesus is the only one who can answer that problem. Well, I was very stoic. You can understand how I am.

I'm pretty calm about things like that. You know, Like, Yeah, Well, Just give it a shot. No. I mean, I'm sitting there just about breaking up on the spot, Right out there in the front. And, She said, Well, Maybe that's why I've had a stroke.

Now, What's the connection between a stroke and salvation? I hadn't had that one figured out. Do you follow me? I said, Well, People have strokes for all different kinds of reasons, And I don't know why you had a stroke, But I will tell you this.

You need Jesus. Let's come back around to the center of the issue. And so, Here is Jesus stepping in to a situation where, Hey, Listen to me.

Did the man understand how desperately his condition really was determined by the one in front of him? And the answer is, Not in your life. So, Now we come to this unbelievable response.

[24 : 03] Jesus hears the guy, And in verse 8, Jesus said to him, Get up, Take up your bed, And walk. I really don't know the tone of voice that Jesus used.

And I've kind of, You know, I'm one of those guys who imagines. So how did Jesus say this? Get up, Take up your bed, Walk. You know, I don't know how he did it. It was probably just, Just kind of, You know, Just, I mean, How many of you know what a preaching voice is?

Do you know what a preaching voice is? Hey, If you hear me with a preaching voice, I can get fired up about almost anything. So don't think that I do this just on Sunday. But, You know, I'm kind of against the, The voice that gets ratcheted up for spiritual moments.

Do you follow me? I just think Jesus would not, Hey, Just bang. Get up. Take your bed. Move out of here. You know, I mean, Whatever. And the guy, Bang!

There it happened. So, Why don't you just think about these three distinct commands that Jesus gave? And the man's obedience, This is something I want you to get your hands around.

[25 : 10] The man's obedience, Listen, Was a simple response to Christ's sovereign authority. Let's go off page here for a little bit.

I'm going to use two very fancy words, And I've been trying to dial it down a little bit, But there's a time to step into it. Okay? Monergism. Let's say that slowly.

This is not English class, But I'm trying to help you understand something. How many of you know what mono is? One. You guys are on top of this.

Monergism means one person doing the heavy lifting. Got it? Synergism means there's more than one helping. And if you want a classic illustration of monergism, One person doing the heavy lifting, This is it.

Now, there was a preaching voice in case you're wondering. Okay. Prior to Christ's words, This man was absolutely unable to act.

[26 : 18] He didn't get it. But, Jesus steps into the scene. Jesus is tender to this man's brokenness. Jesus said, Do you want to be healed?

Yeah, but, It just hadn't been working for me the way I thought I had planned. Jesus said, Pick up your bed and get out of here. You know, it's a bang. I want you to understand, Unless the Spirit of God speaks life into a dead heart, There is no faith.

And there's no action. Is that a fair statement theologically from this passage? From this one? Now, let me stop, Because I do want to help you understand that, That Scripture helps us see, That God is absolutely sovereign in salvation, And He helps us see that man is absolutely responsible to respond.

How you put the two together? I don't know. But, In this case, We see Jesus speaks the word, The man responds, And what does He do? He picks up His bed, And He scampers right out of there.

Ah, That sounds pretty good, Doesn't it? Now, Let's move ahead to come to the last little part. At the last part of verse 9, It says, Now the day was the Sabbath.

[27 : 37] Okay? This is kind of a little reminder that there's problems coming. So let's come to grips with conflict with false religion.

There in verse 9, It says, Now the 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. The Jews, In this case, Is not talking about just the generic Israelites, Who were all over the city of Jerusalem.

It's really talking, And I want you to understand the context. It's really talking about the spiritual leadership, Of the nation of Israel, That we're all caught up in their man-made religion, Of the fact that salvation is something that comes about, Because we all do these certain things that get us there.

And they were keeping score, And making the rules, And here was this guy, I mean, He was bopping through town, Carrying his bed, And nobody did that on the Sabbath.

And it was their moral responsibility, When they see some lowlife, Carrying a bed to stop, What are you doing? Now, Let's pay attention to what happens next.

[28 : 54] Verse 11, But, How many of you like butts on occasion? Buts are there for a reason. It's like, Whoa, There's another part to this story. But, He answered them, Now, They were the on-site authorities.

Who told you, You could carry your bed on the Sabbath? He said, Oh yeah? Good question you asked me, But let me tell you something. The man who said to me, You take up your bed and walk, He's the one who said, Carry it.

So there. Can you kind of sense this little tension between the two parties? That guy had been at that place for 30, He'd been sick for 38 years, And someone said, Take up your bed and walk, Get going.

And he was healed. Do you think he knew that something had been happening, That hadn't been happening before? Yes. And he, Hey listen, If he can make me well, He can make me carry things on Sunday, Or Sabbath.

He understood that the one who had made the miracle, Had the right, To give him instruction. And let me make this point for you, Sitting here this morning, When Christ saves us, He changes our heart, And he's the one who we end up listening to.

[30 : 13] Get that clear in your mind. The one who saves us, Has the right to command our obedience in all things. The one who saves us, Has the right to command our obedience in all things.

And so one of the practical questions, That you ought to be asking yourself today, When you sit here, And you're thinking about, So what's going on in my life? Who's running the show? How much of what you're doing, Is a reflection of the fact, That your Savior is in charge?

If Jesus is my Savior, Then one of the things, That should indicate, That he is, Is I'm following, His instructions.

Part of what that means, Is that my vocabulary on Sunday, In front of you, Is the same as my vocabulary on Tuesday, Anywhere else in the city. Isn't that right? That means that, That my heart, And my attitudes, Reflect my relationship with Christ.

Well, The man, Stirred up quite a problem, When he said that. He said, Hey, The one who healed me, Is the one who told me to do this. Now, Let's work forward, Just a little bit, And I'm going to skip over this issue, In verse 14, Of see you are well, Sin no more.

[31 : 37] Deal with some of that, In another time. But I want you to recognize, That later, After the man had told the Jews, That Jesus was the one, Who had healed him. Now verse 16 and 17, And this is why the Jews, Were persecuting Jesus, Because he was doing these things, On the Sabbath.

Stop just for a minute. How many of you remember, The last setting, In the book of John, In which Jesus, Ended up having a head-butting contest, With the Jews, With the spiritual leadership.

Remember when he cleansed the temple? And they kind of, You can see them put their hands, On their hips and said, Yeah, Who told you to do that? And he, Well here they are again. They weren't very happy with him.

But here's the, Here's the absolute zinger. I love this. Verse 17, And Jesus answered them, My father is working until now, And I am working.

The question, Underlying this is, What was the, What was the Jews concerned? Now the truth of the matter is, They were concerned with any and every miracle, Jesus did, On any day, At any time.

[32 : 39] Not just the Sabbath. But Jesus, In order to assert his authority, Had no problem doing smackdown on Saturday. Do you follow that?

And it just really, It just really torqued them. Here's this guy in the flesh. I mean, You can touch him, And he was healing people on Saturday.

Now, We come to this absolute zinger of an answer. Let me have you spell it out in contemporary vocabulary. Here's the way I do it.

My dad's on the clock, And I am too. That's what Jesus said to the Pharisees. Now in more formal English, Here's how we read it. My father is working until now, And I am working.

Do you know what he was saying? I and my father are one. And by the way, The Jews didn't have any problem with God the Father working on the Sabbath, Because they understood that it was his work that was managing every detail of their lives.

[33 : 43] Am I right? For by him, The universe is sustained. And Jesus steps right into their space, Gets face to face with them, And he says, Hey, Back up.

My dad's working right now, Saturday, And I am too. So there. What's going on?

Jesus, Number one, Gives us a clear picture of the fact that his affection for lost mankind, Means he was willing to go where broken people were.

What's that for us? Are you following me? I wonder, When was the last time you were in the space of broken people? Oh, Can I tell you something about being around where brokenness is?

It is a messy business. It is a messy business. But if Jesus was there, Then we who belong to him, Do we need to be there?

[34 : 55] And the answer to all of us is what? Yeah. So a takeaway would be this. You can check the box, And your little mind says, I'm going to work to be around broken people, Because they need Jesus.

Number two, Understand that genuine faith will always end up in conflict with faith that is not genuine.

I was talking with an individual not too long ago, Who was grieved because of some people that were bent out of shape over music style.

And I encourage this person to understand that actually turmoil in people's lives over music style Can be dated back to even before the cross.

Do you understand that? How many of you understand that? It's just the way life is. And I encourage them to understand, You're not going to get away from it.

[36 : 08] And what you need to recognize is that When you see that kind of turmoil, It's an indication that something's off kilter. Talk to me About your interest and affection for lost mankind.

Don't get bent out of shape on things that don't count forever. And Jesus, He wanted people to understand what counted forever.

And it was the broken man at the well. It was not the matter of these Sabbath rules that had been put into place For the sake of self-righteous arrogance in people's lives.

Hey, When you see the picture of Jesus who is in love with lost mankind And is ready to go the distance for them.

Huh? You follow me? You who are touched by your own salvation Begin thinking more carefully about Since Jesus is like that and it blessed me, I want to grow to be like Him to bless others.

[37 : 19] Does that make sense? I want to be part of reaching a broken, lost world That desperately needs Christ. That's what I want.

And I'm willing to go to where they are. That's what He wants. Let's close in prayer. Our Father God, this morning as we see this picture of the heart of our Savior, We want Your Spirit to kindle in us an abiding desire to see Jesus lifted up.

The Savior of lost mankind. The healer of brokenness. The only help for the soul that is ruined and fallen because of sin.

And let us who know Jesus have a heart like Him To draw people to the Savior we love. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm going to ask that we stand together as we close. And let me encourage you. Let me tell you, if you're here today and you need Jesus, This is an appropriate time for you to respond To the prompting of the Spirit of God.

[38 : 41] If He's been tugging on your heart, How do you know He's tugging? Because He is giving to you that sense of shame and guilt and burden. And let me tell you, nobody can solve that problem but Jesus.