

John 5:1-18

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, St. John's, and happy Thanksgiving Sunday. I'm still getting used to having Thanksgiving a little bit earlier.! As Ben said, my name is Jude, and I'm part of the Artizo Apprenticeship Program.

I'm from Texas, so just FYI, you will hear me say y'all probably quite a bit during my sermon. I've tried to stop, and it is a habit I cannot break. While my home church is St. Peter's Fireside downtown, I'm excited to be here and talk about John 5.

So this morning, we're continuing our series, Encounters with Jesus. And last week, Jordan talked about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. And then today, we're going to talk about Jesus' encounter with a paralyzed man and with the Pharisees.

And what does this tell us about Jesus' character? We'll actually start at the end of the passage, which is where John says why he's included this story in his gospel.

So if you haven't already, please open your Bibles to John 5, and that's page 890 in your pew Bibles. And once you've got the passage in front of you, look with me at verses 16 through 18.

[1 : 1 0] And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My father is working until now, and I am working.

This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. So John tells us there's two key factors that fueled the Pharisees' hatred of Jesus.

Namely, he's working on the Sabbath, and then two, he's implying that he's equal with God. And in this passage, there's also two pieces of Jesus' character that John highlights, which tie into the Pharisees' frustrations.

First, Jesus has power over all creation, including the Sabbath. And then second, Jesus has authority given to him by the Father. We'll look at how John illustrates this in the story, and then we'll look at Jesus' encounter with the paralyzed man and the Pharisees, and what that implies for us today.

Our passage from John 5 shows Jesus seeking out a poor, paralyzed beggar, which is quite a contrast to the story that actually comes immediately before in chapter 4, where a rich official actually comes and seeks out Jesus to heal his son.

[2 : 2 6] The healing at the Bethesda pool is the third sign in John's gospel, although he doesn't actually say that explicitly in the text. And the first piece of Jesus' character that John highlights is that Jesus has power over all creation, including the Sabbath.

The story takes place in Jerusalem, where Jesus has recently arrived for a Jewish festival. And John gives us a specific location for the story.

He says in verse 2 that it happens at this pool called Bethesda. And we're not told precisely the significance of this pool, but it's clear from the paralyzed man's response to Jesus in verse 7 that it was thought to have miraculous healing abilities, something which multiple biblical scholars agree about.

We first meet the paralyzed man in verse 5, and John tells us that he has been at the pool for a very long time. He's been there 38 years. When Jesus meets the paralyzed man, he immediately asks him a question.

He says, Do you want to be healed? Verse 6. This always has struck me as an odd question to ask, since I personally would wonder who doesn't want to be healed. But while John doesn't say Jesus' motive for asking this, it seems clear that Jesus cares about the man's desires.

[3 : 4 5] Do you want to be healed? The man says he wants to be taken to the pool in verse 7, yet Jesus seems to ignore this comment. Instead, Jesus gives him three short explicit directions.

He says, Get up, take up your bed, and walk. And then the man is immediately healed. It's interesting to point out that this story doesn't seem to deal at all with the belief of the man, or the faith of the man, but only Jesus' miraculous power.

Unlike other accounts of Jesus healing people, for instance, you could look at a story of Jesus healing two blind men in Matthew 9, this story of healing doesn't talk at all about the faith of the paralyzed man.

He doesn't even know who Jesus is. Instead, John emphasizes Jesus' power to bring physical healing. Perhaps even in contrast to Jesus' power, to contrast Jesus' power with the alleged power of this pool that the paralyzed man's waiting by.

And this power, which proves that Jesus is equal with God the Father, that he is divine, is part of what angered the Pharisees. Verse 9 marks the halfway point in the passage, which brings us back to the other reason the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus.

[5 : 00] This, namely, he's breaking the Sabbath. And here John highlights the fact that Jesus has authority that's been given to him by the Father, meaning he governs even the sacred laws of Sabbath keeping.

After narrating the story of Jesus' healing power, John makes an explicit note in verse 9. He says, That day was the Sabbath. And this enrages the Pharisees.

I find it interesting that once the paralyzed man is healed, the Pharisees never mention the fact that he's been healed, but instead, the first thing they do is they start questioning him about, Why are you carrying your bed on the Sabbath?

His response to their criticism is essentially, Well, don't blame me. I'm just doing what the guy who healed me told me to do. And when asked the name of who healed him, the man is unable to provide an answer.

He still doesn't know who Jesus is. And later, the man meets Jesus again in the temple, and this time he actually, he finally realizes who it was who healed him. So look at verse 14 with me.

[6 : 01] Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, See, you're well. Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. Okay, a quick side note here. Jesus tells the man to sin no more, so that nothing worse may happen to him.

Jesus doesn't really say what he means by this, but biblical scholars confirm that Jesus is referring to the eternal consequences of sin, as opposed to any earthly disability afflicting the man.

So Jesus is warning the man that a life of sin is going to be far more debilitating, ultimately, than any physical problem that the man has ever faced. Okay, back to our discussion of Jesus' authority. After the healed man realizes Jesus' identity, he reports back to the Pharisees in verse 15. Why he does this is unclear, but at this point it seems that John is satisfied with the narrative, and he switches his tone and tells us why he's included this story in his gospel.

And this brings us back to where we started. So look again with me at verses 16 and 17. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

[7 : 11] But Jesus answered them, My father is working until now, and I am working. Jesus' comment about working on the Sabbath is important here. Jesus is essentially saying that he governs the Sabbath.

He gets to choose when to work. He gets to choose when to rest. Jesus is implying that he's equal with Yahweh, the one who rested on the seventh day, and the one who commanded the Jews to keep the Sabbath in the first place.

This passage shows us about Jesus' power over all creation, and his divine authority. Now I'd like to invite us to reflect on how do Jesus' actions toward each of the characters here, what does that imply for us at St. John's Vancouver at 730 in the morning?

Jesus demonstrates incredible power over creation in this passage, and yet I'm fascinated by the way that he uses it. Jesus intentionally seeks out the paralyzed man, who doesn't even know who Jesus is.

He doesn't even show any signs that he believes Jesus can heal him, except maybe taking him to the pool. And this just provides a precious glimpse of the grace, the abundant grace of Jesus.

[8 : 22] The story reminds us of the grace we've been given as followers of Christ. We're reminded that our Lord, who now sits at the right hand of the Father, has power over disease, decay, and death.

Although there's no guarantee of immediate deliverance from our present suffering, the story gives us a glimpse into the new heaven and the new earth that's described in Revelation 21. So John reminds us that Jesus will one day wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. And that's Revelation 21.4. Jesus' gracious healing of the paralyzed man reminds us of his grace toward us, but what about his actions toward the Pharisees?

The Pharisees resist Jesus' new way of working, just as we often resist Jesus' own authority in our lives. And yet, even Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees, we see his loving grace.

Jesus doesn't write off the Pharisees' love of the Sabbath, but subtly points the Pharisees back to the one who invented the Sabbath in the first place. He's pointing them to himself, although they respond with resistance.

[9 : 30] This passage invites us to accept the loving, gracious authority of Jesus over our lives and over all things. Where we have strayed from God, we're invited back into obedience and worship.

As we go back into our lives this week, and particularly as we celebrate Thanksgiving this week, I'd invite us to contemplate the power, the authority, and the abundant grace of Jesus.

Do we see ourselves more in the paralyzed man or in the Pharisees in this story? And how might Jesus respond to us? And how can we, in turn, respond in worship to Jesus' grace?

So, let's pray. God, would you give us an ever-increasing awareness of your power and your authority and your grace in our lives and the lives of others and in your creation?

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.