

# Equal with God

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Preacher: Canon David Short

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, today is a wonderful reminder of God's grace and kindness to us as we witness together Jeremy Graham being made a deacon.
- Many of us have watched Jeremy and Kimberly grow up in this congregation, growing strong in their faith and then finding each other at a very young age and marrying at a very young age and now having three children at a very young age.
- We've watched you qualify and work and then enter training for ministry through Regent and Artizo. And over the past two years in the children's ministry here at St. John's, we've witnessed your love for God, for his people and especially for our children.
- And we thank God for you, for both of you. And we rejoice together in this day as you're entering full-time paid ministry. And both of you know well what it means, what ministry means.
- Both of you come from families deeply engaged in ministry. So your eyes are wide open to what's coming. And as Guy said, this passage, John 5, is a great text for us today because it's all about the work of God.
- [ 1 : 1 8 ] It's a very searching passage. And I warn you, if you feel cynical about these things, you might want to switch off at certain parts. It's about the work of God and it reveals what the work of God is, but it is not comfortable.
- It's quite disturbing, as you'll see. It's disconcerting. John 5 begins a new section in the Gospel of John to chapter 10.
- The first four chapters have been all about newness. What Jesus brings, you remember, in eternal life, it's not just shuffling around the things in our lives.
- He's not just raising what is naturally ours to a new level. He brings an entirely new life, a different kind of existence. He changes water into wine at a wedding.
- He offers Nicodemus new life. And he gives the woman at the well the living water. This is what Jesus has come to bring. But from chapter 5, we switch from newness to the work of God.
- [ 2 : 2 1 ] And there are signs, miracles, through this section. And after each miracle, Jesus gives a very long explanation of what he's doing, just in case we miss it.
- So here, as we begin this section, and you can follow it along on page 10 on your bulletin. If you don't have one, you can open up the Bible to page 890.
- I think just about all the sermon will come from what's on the bulletin, though. So here we begin. In chapter 5, Jesus returns to Jerusalem, where he performs a remarkable healing on the day of Sabbath.
- He's not avoiding controversy. Very interesting. It seems like he's deliberately provoking the authorities. So much so that by the last sentence, you see what they say?
- This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, which is not very encouraging if you've just been made deacon. There are three moments in this passage which are most disconcerting, but also wonderful.

[ 3 : 33 ] Each moment is completely wonderful and at the same time deeply uncomfortable. Each of these three moments, beautiful and unsettling, comforting and alarming. And the first is this challenging question, which comes in verse 4, which is about line 6 in the second paragraph, where Jesus goes to this man who's severely disabled and he says to him, do you want to be healed?

Do you want to be made whole? Don't you think that's a strange question? I was recently in a massive hardware store in Burnaby looking for some lights.

I walked into the store. I walked around and around through every shelf. I couldn't find any lighting section or any lights. So I waited in line at the counter and I stepped up to the counter and I asked the young woman if they sold lights.

She gave me this very strange look. Her eyebrows lifted and she pointed behind herself. And there were three 20 foot shelves of lights with a neon light at the top saying, the lighting specialists.

I said I was from another country. Surely it's far more obvious that the one thing this guy wants is to be healed.

[ 4 : 57 ] No? Why does Jesus ask this question? I mean, it's feast time in Jerusalem. The city is full. And where does Jesus go?

He goes right to the inner city, to the place of degradation and desperate need. The place all the tourist brochures tell you to avoid. And you don't need that much imagination for this.

There were hundreds and hundreds of people there. It was a pool of raw sewage and deep suffering. Disabled, invalid, as it says here, blind, lamed, paralyzed, all of them beyond human help.

And Jesus chooses one man and he goes to this man. And just you remember as he in chapter one, he saw into Nathaniel's heart and knew Nathaniel. And he knew Nicodemus.

And he knew the heart of the woman at the well as he knows our hearts. He knows the heart of this man. He sees that he's been disabled for 38 years, which was about the average lifespan. He knows his life has been reduced to begging.

[ 5 : 58 ] There is no hope of cure. He has been there for such a long time. And Jesus walks up to him in the middle of this terrible need. And he says, do you want to be made whole? I mean, is there anything else he's wanted?

The fellow's answer in the next sentence is not very promising. It's kind of odd, isn't it? He's lying beside the pool because of some local superstition. The idea that when the waters get churned up, the first one in gets healed.

And he complains to Jesus. He says, oh, I'm all alone here. I don't have anyone else to push me into the pool when he gets stirred up. Every time I try, someone else gets in first. And he's completely missed Jesus' question.

He's completely missed Jesus' request. And he is doing exactly what all of us do. Because Jesus comes to us in our need. And we limit Jesus to the solution that we think that we need.

We don't have any inkling that what Jesus is willing and able to do is something utterly impossible for us. This guy, he's been lying by that water.

[ 7 : 06 ] He can't see past the water. His hope and his focus are on the pool, on the pool, on the pool. And he wants Jesus to help throw him in the next time he gets stirred up. But whenever Jesus comes to us, whenever we hear the word of Jesus, he is calling us to something far bigger and far more almost unimaginable and far more challenging than we can imagine.

We think Jesus' purpose is to help us into the water so that we can get on with life as usual. Jesus, give me a nudge into the water. Just help me get the thing I want. I don't want you to disturb my equilibrium.

But what we see in this passage as we'll go on is that what Jesus wants and what Jesus gives us is beyond, beyond belief. And it's lovely because at the end of that paragraph, in his kindness and goodness, Jesus completely ignores this self-focused and clueless response.

And he simply says to the guy, get up, take up your bed and walk. And he does at once. And I've arranged that woodpecker.

And he's going to be useful at very dramatic pauses. I don't want you to miss this. Jesus just says, get up.

[ 8 : 30 ] I love woodpeckers. But they're just a little crazy, aren't they?

Did someone arrange this? Jeremy? You need to fix it. No, no, no. I'm just kidding. Just kidding. So Jesus says to this guy, get up.

And he does. And it is completely humanly impossible and unimaginable and inconceivable. Just ignore the bird.

38 years he's been lying there. Think about it. What's happened to his muscles, his tendons? They've gone hard. They've atrophied. His bones have gone into different shapes.

His lungs, his knees, his ankles. He doesn't need any physiotherapy. Just the simple command. This is the work of God, the creator. Jesus doesn't invoke the name of God.

[ 9 : 32 ] There's no water involved. It's a simple command. And the magnificent sovereign grace of God, where Jesus found him unasked and now heals him unasked with a single command. And the healing, the physical healing, is total.

But if you ask the question, why did Jesus ask that strange question and you think we haven't got to the bottom of it, you're quite right. So we need to go on to the next section.

Because there is a second very challenging thing. Not a challenging question this time. It's a very challenging command, which is about two-thirds of the way down to the next big paragraph. There's no gratitude from this guy to Jesus.

In fact, he doesn't even bother to find out what Jesus' name is. He just gets up and leaps away. And later on that day, Jesus finds him in the temple and he says to him down there two-thirds of the way, he says, See, you are well.

Sin no more. Stop sinning. That nothing worse may happen to you. Don't you find that a strange thing to say? I mean, in the original, it's very fierce.

[ 10 : 37 ] It's, you're sinning. Stop it now. Lest something worse may happen to you. Now, we need to step back and say, why is this so strange? It's strange because the Bible doesn't teach the doctrine of karma, the cruel doctrine of karma, where we suffer in this life for sins in the past.

Nor that we suffer in this life for sins in this life. Jesus himself breaks that connection up in chapter 9 in John's gospel. There's no direct connection between getting sick and our sin, usually.

So why does Jesus command him to stop sinning? He's in the temple. He doesn't seem to be doing anything wrong. How does Jesus know he's sinful? There's no indication that this man is aware that he is particularly sinful.

He doesn't seem it. I mean, for 38 years, he's been absolutely preoccupied with getting through the day. He thinks of himself as a victim, as would I. But he's no worse than any of the rest of us.

What could possibly be worse than 38 years stuck in a body that put him in that situation with all the humiliations of begging and loneliness?

[ 11 : 51 ] Jesus is not warning him that if he keeps sinning, he's going to get sicker. Because Jesus is saying there's something worse. There's something way worse than any sickness or any loss or any deprivation.

It's being separated from God forever. And you see here in this searching and challenging command, something deeper is going on.

That the healing, this healing is a sign that points to a much more comprehensive healing and work of God that Jesus brings. If Jesus heals him physically, he's going to have a perfect body for maybe the next 38 years.

But there's something deeper in him which is going to keep him from enjoying the full blessings of God. There's something in him that's going to disqualify him from eternal life.

And it's simply, in Jesus' word, sin. He has been healed outwardly in his body, but in his heart inwardly there is no real change. And that's the point, that the work of God is more wonderful and more vast than we can imagine.

[ 13 : 02 ] Imagine God could give you a physically perfect body for a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand years. Great. But it is the cure of selfishness, our sinful rottenness that we need because that's what separates us from God in this life and in the life to come.

And what Jesus is offering and what Jesus' work is, is not just the healing of bodies. It's the restoration to God. It's the rescue from sin. It is receiving eternal life. So when God went up, sorry, when Jesus went up to this guy and commanded him to stand up, it was unimaginable and impossible.

And when Jesus goes to him in the temple and says, sin no more, it is unimaginable and it is utterly impossible. That is what's behind his question.

Do you want to be made whole? Do you want to be healed? And his command, sin no more. Got to hold the two together because Jesus does not want to do a half healing job.

He wants to save us forever. He wants to restore us to complete wholeness, to cleanse us from sin. That's why he intervenes in our lives.

[ 14 : 17 ] When he intervenes in our lives and in his grace begins to heal us, we enter into a lifelong conflict and struggle with sin. This week I was with a group of people and we looked at this passage and we had to confess to one another that often I don't even want to be rid of my sins.

We love our favorite sins. Even after we've been forgiven and filled with the spirit for years and years and years, we love our sins too much. I do. Despite the misery it causes my inner life, my family, my city.

And Jesus comes and says, sin no more. And do you want to be made whole because we desperately need his ongoing work in us? I have a friend of mine in England who puts it this way.

He's very honest. He says, he says to me, I am driven by my desperation from time to time. And I cry out to God to deliver me from all my sins.

He said, I get up in my room and it's like I drive them out the window and I say to them and I say to God, go forever, go forever. He says, I go back to my chair and I think again and quickly before my sins disappear around the corner.

[ 15 : 26 ] I call out and I say, please just leave me your telephone number. I don't want to be completely out of touch. It's too hard for me to think about never again being untruthful or unfaithful or cruel.

I want you gone, but not forever. That is what's called cheap grace. It's thinking I can have the blessings of eternal life. It's thinking I can have what Christ offers and just continuing to live as I want.

The new life means I can't go on as before. If God is saving me and delivering me from evil and sin now, that will have an effect.

But if God is not, he is not healing me and delivering me from sin now, I've got no confidence he will save me in the end. So what is the work that we so desperately need and Jesus comes to bring?

And we need to move to the third searching issue. We've gone from the searching question to the command and now we have a very searching and challenging claim. It's the last line of that second big paragraph.

[ 16 : 34 ] Jesus' actions have been deliberate. You notice he chose to heal this man on the Sabbath.

Didn't have to. Could have waited 24 hours. No controversy. He said to the guy, take up your mat. He didn't need to take up his bed. And although that's not breaking any Old Testament law, it was against Anglican tradition, Jewish tradition in the time.

Yeah. Now, this is not Canadian. Why does Jesus escalate this conflict? And we'll see very quickly.

The reason is he wants to reveal that he is the son of God and he is working the work of God. Because when the authorities confront Jesus, what he's doing, look what Jesus does.

He draws a line between himself. He draws a line between God and humanity and he places himself on the God side of the line. You see that last phrase there?

[ 17 : 34 ] He says, my father is working until now and I am working. And what is the response? This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him.

Not because only he was breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. Oh yeah, they grasped exactly what he meant.

But they refused that it might even be a remote possibility. Better to kill Jesus. Now, the Sabbath is a very big deal for the Jewish people.

It goes back to the creation of the world itself. The view is, and the Christian view too, is that Sabbath is built into the nature of reality. It's part of our self-identity as the people of God.

Do you remember in Genesis, God created the world in six days and then he took one day, the seventh day, and he rested from all the work that he'd done in creation. And the Hebrew word for rest is Sabbath, Shabbat.

[ 18 : 33 ] And it's not that God was tired. He's not weary. He doesn't need a break to recharge like we do. It's not like, oh, it's so hard. Rest, in the biblical view, is stopping one kind of activity for a different kind.

He stops the creating of the world and he enters into the perfect enjoyment and pleasure and delight of all that he has created. That's what Sabbath is for.

He stops creating and now he starts delighting in a world with no defect and defilement, walking with man and woman in the garden. And in the greatest disaster in history, you remember, takes place in the garden.

A man and a woman refuse the word of God. They reject the authority of God and they ruin the garden. And that is where sin and evil and death and suffering enter into the world, staining our lives with sin and shame, spoiling the perfection of creation and opening the door to selfishness and cruelty and hatred and violence and everything else, decay and death.

But right there in the garden, God commits himself to a second great work, not the work of creation, but a work of recreation, of restoration, of renewal, of redemption.

[ 19 : 58 ] And he promises that he will restore this pristine creation and he will redeem men and women and boys and girls to share his life and his joy. He is going to re-establish paradise where he wants to live with people.

And to do that, God has to deal with all the evil and all the sin that's entered our world. And to deal with all the sin and evil that is in us, which means not only has to pay for it on the cross, but he then has to begin a work where he eliminates it from our hearts as well.

And that's why Jesus not only heals this guy's body, he addresses his inner life, his heart, and that's a far more difficult thing to heal. That's why that first question, do you want to be made whole, is so searching.

And that's why the command, sin no more, go together, because Jesus must both raise us to new life and remove our sin. And he says to us, as he said to this man, do you want to be made whole, sin no more?

And we say that's impossible unless God the Father is working in Jesus, you are working still. This is the second great work of God. That is why Jesus has come.

[ 21 : 11 ] That's why he's the Lamb of God and the Word of God and the Bread of Life. And this work of restoration has an end date. It's a temporary work. And we are told in the rest of the New Testament that this world will one day be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The garden will be transformed. The river of the water of life will flow through that place from the throne.

And on both sides of that river, the tree of life will constantly bear fruit for the healing of the nations. And at the heart of that new world is face-to-face fellowship between God, his Son, and the great number of those who have been redeemed, from whom God has eradicated all sin and evil, whose lives are cleansed, who have new hearts.

So you see, when Jesus says to these authorities, my Father has been working and I am working still, he's not trying to calm them down.

He's raising the stakes. It's an astonishing claim. He's saying, I'm not just breaking your rules about the Sabbath. I'm God. What God does, I do.

[ 22 : 25 ] What I do, God does. I am working in tandem with God to bring about this great purpose of redemption. I'm the Lord of the Sabbath. I'm what the Sabbath is made for.

I am the one who gives life to the dead. I am the one who takes away sin. I'm the one who determines how Sabbath be used. And it drives the Jewish authorities crazy.

And we'll look at this next week. We don't have time to look at it this week, but Jesus ramps it up. Let me just read to you two verses later.

You don't have it on your passage there. Jesus says, As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to all whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.

This is the challenge of Jesus' claim. That he is the one God has put forward to do the work of redemption. He raises the dead. He judges the living and the dead. He is the one who gives life and salvation, and God has handed all judgment to him.

[ 23 : 36 ] That's why it's such a great passage, Jeremy, as you begin this new phase of your ministry. Do you know the Book of Common Prayer calls the pastoral ministry the cure of souls?

Because every form of pastoral ministry is pointing to Christ, who is the cure for all ailments. And the question Jesus asked that man on that day is still the question he asks us.

Do you want to be made whole? Do you want it? And it's a question only your heart can answer. And then he commands us, sin no more.

And both of these things are impossible unless Jesus continues to work in us. The cure of souls, as you know, is not a one-off inoculation. It's a lifelong process with the same sovereign power and the same sovereign grace that Jesus continues to work in us day by day through his goodness.

And the service of ministry is not trying to fix people the best way we know how. It's not based on your emotional intelligence or giftedness or abilities, though you've got many.

[ 24 : 49 ] It's directing people to trust this Christ. And it's trusting him to continue his work in your life and in the work of the lives around you to bring us to that place of rest in God.

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