

## Sermon Series: *The Gospel of John*

# Sabbath, Sin, and the Son of God

TEXT: John 5:1-18 (ESV)

If you had the opportunity to help someone would you do it? If you had the power to be a blessing to someone else who was suffering would you do it? What if you still do it if it brought a little discomfort to your life? If the cost of helping was just a little bit of your time, would you still do it?

What if you knew a situation of great pain and you could do something about it, would you still help out? If there was a man who had endured several years of suffering would you help him out of that situation?

Let's suppose you knew a man who had been out of work for several years and he had lost everything and you had the power to give him a job, would you do it? Would you still do it if meant that you might lose a couple of friends?

Let's suppose the man had been out of work and living on the streets for 10 years and you had the power to give him a job but in so doing you might lose a half dozen friends would you still do it?

What if the man had been out of work and living on the streets for 20 years and you had the power to give him a job and utterly change his life, but you might lose all of your closest friends and bring a stain on your reputation, would you still do it?

What if the man had been out of work and living on the streets completely alone for 38 years and you had the power to provide him with a job that take care of all his needs but in giving him the job you would gain enemies who would actively begin plotting your death, would you still give the poor man the job and bless his life?

Even if you would not do that, what if you think about someone who would? What would you learn about the character of someone who would do that?

### **John 5:1-18 (ESV)**

**1** After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **2** Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. **3** In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.

**5** One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. **6** When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, *“Do you want to be healed?”* **7** The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” **8** Jesus said to him, *“Get up, take up your bed, and walk.”* **9** And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. **10** 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.” **11** But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘*Take up your bed, and walk.*’” **12** They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘*Take up your bed and walk?*’” **13** Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. **14** Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “*See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.*” **15** The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

**16** And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. **17** But Jesus answered them, “*My Father is working until now, and I am working.*” **18** This was 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.

## Introduction of Active & Intense Opposition

This episode is unique to John. Why did John include this miracle? I think he included it because of the controversy it stirred. The healing itself was not controversial. What was controversial was not the healing but rather the day on which Jesus chose to work this healing. The day was the Sabbath. This led to Jesus being questioned why he did what he did and Jesus’ answer led to the beginning of the plans of his death.

Chapter 5 introduces for the first time in this gospel that we begin to see active and intense opposition to Jesus. We see for the first time the reasons clearly given for why the Jews were **persecuting** (v.16) Jesus and why the **Jews were seeking to kill him** (v.18).

## The Unnumbered Third Sign

This miracle is the unnumbered **third sign**.<sup>1</sup> The healing of the invalid on the Sabbath was another manifestation the glory<sup>2</sup> of Jesus and was the doorway through which Jesus had occasion to personally give the first indications of His true identity to the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. *Jesus intentionally created situations that forced a conclusion about His identity.* He was not content to allow any ambiguity to remain about who He truly is.

The issue here is not *that* he healed but *when* He healed. Jesus healed on the Sabbath and He did this often and He did this intentionally because in so doing He was communicating a truth. *That truth is that because of His absolutely unique and intimate relationship to God the Father, Jesus possessed and had authority to wield all the power of God the Father because the truth is that Jesus is equal to God the Father.*

This is either true and we should respond by falling on our faces in absolute joyful worship of Him OR it’s not true and He thus deserved to be nailed to a tree for His blasphemy.

This passage can be viewed in six scenes.

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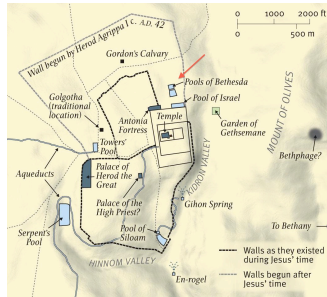
<sup>1</sup> Should I include all signs? Kruse, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> See Jn 1:11.

## Scene 1: The Setting & Context

### John 5:1-3 (ESV)

**1** After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **2** Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. **3** In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.



John tells us where this takes place. When we were last with Jesus, he was in Cana in Galilee where he performed the second sign which was the healing of the official's son (4:46-54). John now tells us that he **after this** Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast. He does not tell us which feast (presumably one of the three pilgrimage feasts<sup>3</sup>) it was nor exactly how long after healing the official's son that this took place. Some scholars suspect this might have taken place a year or a year and a half later.<sup>4</sup>

It does not really matter, but this took place in **Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate at the pool of Bethesda**. Bethesda in Aramaic may mean “house of (divine) mercy” or “house of two springs.”<sup>5</sup>

Both names are fitting since the waters seemed to offer some hope of receiving the great mercy of healing. Archeological excavations in the area have revealed that there were actually two pools that they were indeed surrounded by **five roofed colonnades**—four around the outer edges of the pools and a fifth one that divided the two pools.<sup>6</sup>



These roofed colonnades provided shelter for **a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed** who lay all around these pools hoping to be healed.

## The Missing Verse Four

If your using the ESV or the NIV then you've probably noticed that verse four is missing (but it is included in a footnote). The NASB & ASV have included the verse in brackets to denote that it is not included in the oldest manuscripts. Verse four is missing from all manuscripts dated earlier than the fourth century.<sup>7</sup> Most likely this began as a marginal explanation of verse 7 that was subsequently included within the text rather than retained in the margins.

This verse explains why there were multitudes of disabled lying all around the pool. These multitudes of people were lying near the pool in hope that they might be the first in the water after it was “stirred.” Evidently they believed that an angel “stirred” the water on occasion and then the first person into the water thereafter was healed from whatever ailed him. Multitudes of people

<sup>3</sup> Passover, Pentecost, & Tabernacles.

<sup>4</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 177.

<sup>5</sup> Köstenberger, 178.

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 242.

<sup>7</sup> Frank E. Gaebelein, Merrill C. Tenney and Richard N. Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 9: John and Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 62.

believed this so they crowded all around the pool in hope that they could be healed. Our man in this passage is one of those multitudes.

## Scene 2: Jesus Visits the Sick & Heals the Invalid (v.5-9a)

### John 5:5-9a (ESV)

**5** One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. **6** When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “**Do you want to be healed?**” **7** The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” **8** Jesus said to him, “**Get up, take up your bed, and walk.**” **9a** And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

While Jesus was in town for the feast, He chose to walk over to the pool of Bethesda and visit the multitudes of sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed. We might say after church Jesus didn’t go to lunch, he went to visit the sick. There were probably a lot of other things that Jesus could have done—people to see, truth to teach, places to go, crowds to woo, but Jesus chose to go visit these hopeless people.

### Out of the Multitude He Healed Only One

Out of all the **multitude** of people, Jesus zero’s in on one man. Jesus only healed one person on this day. Out of all the multitude, Jesus only healed one man and then He immediately went away (v. 13). What was he praying while He was walking by all these hundreds and hundreds of people? How long did he walk before He found Him? These two pools together were 318 feet long. The smaller pool was 197 feet wide and the larger one was 250 feet wide.<sup>8</sup> How many blind, sick, lame, and paralyzed did He pass by before He found the man for which He was looking?

### He Saw & Knew... Invalid for Thirty-Eight Years

Why did He pass by so many and only heal this one man? Was He simply moved with compassion when he knew the man had been an **invalid for thirty-eight years**? How He knew this information about the man is not certain. It may have been supernaturally revealed to Him or He might have discovered this some other way, but John says **He saw the man and knew** the exact number of years he had been strapped with this incredible burden. He saw this man lying there and knew that he had **been lying there a long time**.

This man has been an invalid for nearly four decades. He’d been an invalid for almost as long as the average life expectancy of a man living in antiquity.<sup>9</sup> For about as long as most men lived, this man had lived with a life defining disability. Jesus **saw him and knew this**.

**Application:** Jesus both sees and knows the hidden details of your every secret struggle. Jesus sees and knows your **duration** or your pain. When you think no one is looking with loving eyes upon your silent pain, there is a Sovereign Savior who knows the years, months, weeks, days, hours, and seconds of your secret sufferings. He sees and knows.

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<sup>8</sup> Colin Kruse, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Volume 4: John Gen. Ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 146.

<sup>9</sup> Köstenberger, 179.

## Do You Want To Be Healed?

After Jesus sees this man and knows the details of his incredibly difficult situation, He then approaches the man and asks him a question, “*Do you want to be healed?*” This is a very interesting question. I do not think Jesus is asking this question to learn something He does not already know. I think he is asking this question to draw something out of this man. The fact that this man has been **lying there for a long time** is evidence enough that he wants to be healed. But what might his answer reveal?

**John 5:7** (ESV)

*7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.”*

The man’s answer reveal his absolutely hopeless situation. He is all alone in this world. He has **no one to help him**. No one! He evidently has no use of his legs. The belief was that the first person into the water after the water was stirred by the angel was the one who was healed by whatever ailed him. This man is not by himself fast enough to get into the water first. He cannot get himself quickly enough to be first into the water and there is no one around who will help him. And when he does finally get moving he is too slow and others get into the water before him. So he’s tried this before. Evidently he has made several attempts and yet he has never made it first into the water.<sup>10</sup>

What this tells us is that this man is completely unable to help himself. He’s never going to be healed because his lame condition means there will always be some who are faster than he and so essentially there is no chance he’ll be healed. He cannot help himself. He cannot heal himself. He cannot save himself and he says as much. So what is Jesus’ response to this? He heals this helpless man.

**John 5:8** (ESV)

*8 “**Get up. Take up your bed and walk.**”*

This man expects nothing and asks for nothing. This man does not even know with whom he is speaking and apparently neither does anyone else around. Jesus is not mobbed by people asking for help. This man has absolutely no idea who Jesus is or what He can do.

This man has no faith at all in Jesus and this is unlike so many other miracles that Jesus performs. Jesus simply speaks a powerful and compassionate command, “**Get up. Take up your bed and walk.**” And this man feels the immediate difference in his weak and worthless legs and **at once** he is up and walking. Jesus speaks a command and the power to obey it is contained within it. “Get up!” and up he goes! Thirty-eight years are reversed in one second! Thirty-eight years of impotence are wiped away in the span of eight words. Thirty-eight years of hopelessness are wiped away!

**John 5:9a** (ESV)

*9a And at once the man was healed and he took up his bed and walked.*

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, given that this has happened several times (at least more than once), perhaps there actually were healings since he remains there waiting hope against hope that he will one day make it into the water first.

One sentence changed thirty-eight years. What does this teach us about Jesus? It teaches us that He is unthinkable powerful! Who can speak one sentence and wipe away thirty-eight years of grief! His power is unimaginable.

This also teaches us that **Jesus helps those who cannot help themselves**, contrary to popular opinion. Jesus only heals the man who confesses that he cannot heal himself. Jesus sovereignly breaks into this man's sad life, apart from any request from him, and erases thirty-eight years of pain and immobility.

Jesus has just done a wonderful, powerful, compassionate deed. This man's life is changed forever and joy has come are replaced hopelessness. We can all breath easy and relax, right? It's all good, right? All is right in the world, right? No. In fact, it's only now that the trouble has begun. The trouble comes because of the day on which this miracle was performed.

### Scene 3: 'The Jews' and the Man Who Was Healed (v.9b-13)

**John 5:9b-13** (ESV)

**9b** Now that day was the Sabbath. **10** 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." **11** But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, '**Take up your bed, and walk.**'" **12** They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, '**Take up your bed and walk?**'" **13** Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.

### Did Jesus Forget What Day It was?

It is notable that Jesus he chose to do that on the **Sabbath**. I'm absolutely certain Jesus knew what He was doing and *when* He was doing it. He knew what controversy this would stir up. I'm also convinced He did this on purpose. This was not accident. He often healed on the Sabbath. He intentionally did things like this so that the religious elite would be forced to consider His claims in light of His deeds.

### Other Healings On the Sabbath

1. In **John 9** Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath and "the Jews" (i.e. Jewish religious leaders) were furiously stirred up.
2. In **Mark 3** we are told about a man with a withered hand who was in the synagogue on the Sabbath and "the Jews" were watching to see if He would heal the man. Jesus anticipated their malice and called the man forward. Then He asked the "Jews," "**Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save or to kill?**" (Mk 3:4). No one said a word. So Jesus healed the man.
3. Later He healed a women on the Sabbath who had been bent over and bound by Satan for 18 years (Lk 13:10-17). Again "the Jews" were furious, but Jesus put them to shame with His compassion.
4. On another occasion He healed a man with dropsy (Lk 14:1-6). All of these works of kindness and compassion earned him the ire of the the Jewish religious leaders.

### No Joy In Healing, Just Casting Blame

Even in this case before us, no joy whatsoever is shown by 'the Jews' toward this man who has been set free from thirty-eight years of bondage. Instead they only notice that he is unlawfully carrying his bed on the Sabbath. Even this man shows no joy, but quickly lays the blame for his Sabbath-breaking at the feet of "**the man who healed me.**" They then of course demand to know who it was who



would command such a thing. This man has no idea who healed him, because Jesus had immediately left the man after healing him, evidently because had He stayed He would have been swamped by others in need of similar healing.

## Scene 4: Jesus and the Man Who Was Healed (v.14)

**John 5:14** (ESV)

**14** Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “*See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.*”

Jesus then later found this man in the temple. Remember this a feast time. There are crowds and crowds of people all around. Yet Jesus **found** this man. It appears that Jesus went looking for this man and “found” him in the temple area. Jesus had a message for this man that He was not able to tell the man just after healing him. The message is very important.

*“See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”*

The staggering but clear implication is that this man’s thirty-eight year long paralysis was because of sin in his life. Jesus warns Him that if He does not repent and change His ways, then something worse than thirty-eight years of paralysis may lay ahead of him, like for example, an eternity of suffering in the unquenchable fires of hell.

## Paralysis—the Result of Some Specific Sin?

This sentence that Jesus spoke to this man is a heart-stopping warning and should make your ears tingle. Are we sure we heard that right? Is it possible that Jesus is saying that this man’s own sin, some specific sin, brought on this suffering? Would God really do that?

## Examples of Physical Suffering Resulting From Sin

1. Well, when **Miriam**, Moses’ sister, was jealous of Moses’ role as leader and got angry because He married a black woman, God struck her with leprosy (Num 12:1ff).
2. When king **Uzziah**, in his sinful pride, willfully disobeyed God by pretending to be a priest, leprosy broke out on his forehead and though he lived, he was a leper till the day of his death (2 Chr 26:16ff).
3. When **Jeroboam** raised his hand against God’s prophet, his hand shriveled up so badly he couldn’t even draw it back to his chest (though he was healed by God’s grace 1 Kg 13:4).
4. When **Ananias and Saphira** decided to lie to God, they fell down dead (Acts 5).
5. Paul warned the **Corinthians** that reason that some of them were *weak and sick and some dead* was because of their disrespect for the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:30).
6. And the apostle John warns that there is a sin that leads to death (1 Jn 5:16). So we need to have a category for *some* sickness (even significant and prolonged sickness—38 years) that results from specific sin.

## Some Suffering Result of Sin But Not ALL Suffering

However, we must avoid the error of thinking that **ALL** sickness is the result of sin. Jesus clearly rejected this notion (See Jn 9). When the disciples saw a man born blind they asked Jesus whose sin caused this blindness, his or his parents. Jesus responded by saying that the man was not born blind because of sin, but so that the glory of God could be demonstrated through His life! So although **some** sickness may be caused by specific sin, not **all** sickness is caused by specific sin.

## Healed To Be Holy

Holiness is uppermost in the mind of Jesus. Holiness was so important that Jesus sought this man out through all the crowds in order to make sure he got this message. We should be sure that we get it as well.

## Direction Not Perfection

Now we know Jesus is not telling this man to be perfectly sinless because Jesus taught the disciples that the daily pattern of personal prayer was to include the request for forgiveness of sins (Mt 6:11-12). That was to be prayed every day. *This message is about direction not perfection.* Jesus came back to tell this man that a change in direction was required. He needed to repent and turn away from his habitual sinning. If he did not do so, then something much, much worse than thirty-eight years of paralysis awaited him!

## Holiness: Healing for the Soul

It's no good to heal the disease of the body and fail to address the disease of the soul, which is sin. Jesus healed this man's physical problem and now He was helping him deal with his spiritual problem. Jesus did this often. Before He healed the paralytic brought to Him on a stretcher He said, "Your sins are forgiven." Only after taking care of the man's spiritual paralysis from sin did He heal the man's physical problem. Healing only physical wounds and failing to address the spiritual wound of sin is spiritual abuse. Sin is paralysis of the soul and Jesus is warning this man that if he fails to turn away from his sin, then something unimaginable will happen to him.

So what does this man do? What would you do if you were in his shoes and you heard these words coming out of the mouth of Jesus? Does he fall down at Jesus' feet and ask for forgiveness and help to do what Jesus is commanding?

Certainly the thought would have had to have crossed his mind, "If this guy can take care of my physical disability, surely He could help me with my spiritual disability. If this guy can take care of my legs, surely he can take care of my sin. If this guy can heal my body, then surely he can heal my soul." So did he fall down before Jesus and ask for help and forgiveness of his sins? No, he did not.

## Scene 5: The Man Who Was Healed and 'The Jews' (v.15)

**John 5:15** (ESV)

**15** *The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.*

The man found out Jesus' name and then went away told 'the Jews.' And once they realized that it was Jesus who gave the command to break the Sabbath, then the persecuting and plotting began.

## Scene 6: Jesus and 'The Jews' (v.16-18)

**John 5:16-18** (ESV)

**16** *And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." 18 This was 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.*



Jesus wasn't just doing "illegal" good deeds on the Sabbath (like healing people and making them whole and freeing people from bondage to Satan) but He was also claiming that what He was doing was OK because He was *God's one and only Son*. He was claiming that the work He was doing was actually the work of God. Jesus was only doing the things that God wanted Him to do and it is simply too much for 'the Jews' to swallow to believe that God was actually wanting Jesus to break the Sabbath—unless they had somehow misunderstood the Sabbath?

When Jesus prayed He did not say "our Father" like any other good Jew, instead Jesus said, "**MY** Father," and everyone knew the implication of His words—*He was claiming to have a completely unique relationship to God the Father*—a relationship like the one between Father and Son. Jesus was claiming to be equal with God, and that, my friends, is quite a pill to swallow. Can you swallow it?

## Conclusion

So this is the third sign. Sign of what? A sign that Jesus is equal with God. John said that all of these signs were intended to manifest the glory of Jesus, so then where can we see the glory of Jesus in this story?

1. The glory of Jesus is manifest in His being able to out of all the multitudes of needy people to pick out the one person who needs Him. Jesus is gloriously able to **see and know** the depth of your suffering and the duration of your suffering.
2. The glory of Jesus is manifest in that Jesus, not only in knowing your needs, but then **coming to you** offering you His service. He doesn't wait for you to come to Him. He comes to you and He asks you, "Do you want to be healed?" He's looking for an answers that demonstrates that you know you cannot save yourself. **It is the glory of Jesus to only help those who know they cannot help themselves.**
3. The glory of Jesus is manifest by the fact that He has the **power to completely change your life in an instant**. The invalid's life changed "at once." When you look to Jesus to save your soul and heal your life, He has the power to change it **at once!** Whatever it is that you think has paralyzed your life, can be removed from you in a moment, by one word from Jesus. Will you look to Him? Will you trust him?
4. The glory of Jesus is manifest in the fact that **He is Lord of the Sabbath**. He has authority to rightly explain what the Sabbath is and how it should be used [come back next week for more on this].
5. The glory of Jesus is manifest by the fact that He has the power to **take away your sin**. If Jesus is able to speak life into dead legs, then He also has the power to speak life into a dead soul. If He has authority to take away disease, then He also has authority to take away sin.
6. His glory is also manifest by His being **the one and only Son of God**, which means **He is equal with God**. The wonderful thing about worshipping Jesus is that it is also worshipping God. When we praise Jesus God is very pleased because all the work that Jesus did was the work that God told Him to do, so when we praise the work of Jesus we are also praising the work of God! And this is wondrously glorious!

Members of the prayer team are available.