

SESSION EIGHT

The Sabbath Worker: *Finding Healing in His Name (John 5:1-47)*

“Christians, you who are vessels of election - were by nature as wicked as others - but God had compassion on you and plucked you as brands out of the fire! He stopped you in your course of sinning - when you were marching to hell! He turned you back to Him by sincere repentance. Oh, here is the banner of love displayed over you!” ~ Thomas Watson

I. Healing of the Paralytic: Pool of Bethesda (5:1-15)

5:1 . . . *the feast* . . . Determination of the feast's identity with certainty is impossible. Due to the mention of sick lying outside in the porticoes of the pool, one can probably rule out the Passover. The weather would not have been warm enough for such activity. John mentions “feast” simply to explain why Jesus returned to Jerusalem (see 2:13; 10:22-23; 12:12).

5:2 . . . *a pool called Bethzatha* . . . Because of a textual variant, the name of the pool has been rendered “Bethesda” or “Bethzatha/Bet ‘Esdata”.

5:3b-4 Earliest and some of the best manuscripts omit this passage. Few textual critics would accept the authenticity of this section.

5:6 . . . *Do you want to become well?* Jesus' question could elicit the man's perspective on his plight; or more likely, Jesus is making another indirect offer (e.g., 4:10; 6:32, 33).

5:7 . . . *when the water is stirred up* . . . Most likely the “bubbling and frothing which probably occurred during the draining of water into the southern pool may have given rise to the idea of the ‘troubling of the water’ which was a phenomenon that apparently attracted people to the pool at the time of Jesus . . .” (S. Gibson, “Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem,” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 55 [2005]: 287).

5:9 . . . *that day was a Sabbath*. John surprises the reader both here and in chapter 9 by announcing that it was the Sabbath. For first-century Judaism, to disregard one commandment was equivalent to dismissing the entire Torah!

Carrying anything from one location to another would be regarded as work.

5:14 Bared from all Temple activity because of prior physical abnormality, he is now able to enter the Temple and participate in corporate worship.

. . . *lest anything worse happen to you*. While an illness or disease is not necessarily the result of sin, Jesus does suggest there is that possibility. The phrase here most likely suggests future judgment (see 5:29). Eternal damnation far exceeds any physical disability!

II. Responding to the Religious Authorities (5:16-30)

5:17 . . . *My Father is working until now . . .* The major premise that God works on the Sabbath was not disputed among the Jews. The Lord sustained all of creation on a daily basis (e.g., humans were born or died on the Sabbath). In addition, God did not break the Sabbath because the entire world was his private residence!

However, the minor premise, “Jesus is God’s agent; and thus, he had divine prerogative over the Sabbath,” is what the Jewish leaders found offensive. In case the reader misses this connection, verse 18 makes it explicit.

5:20 . . . *shows him everything he does, and will show him greater deeds than these . . .* Jesus will identify these “deeds” in the next three verses.

5:21 Just as the Father gave physical life on the Sabbath, the Son will grant spiritual life. This “giving of life” not only speaks of the resurrection, but also this phrase indicates that both the Father and the Son operated together in the “making” of Creation (see Gen 1:26 and John 5:15).

5:22-23 Just as the Father judged those who died on the Sabbath, the Son will now judge (see 12:48; Rev 19:11). This position of judge is further emphasized by the self-proclaimed title “Son of Man” in verse 26 (see Dan 7:13).

III. Appealing to Various Witnesses (5:31-47)

5:31 . . . *testimony not true . . .* Biblical standards require a minimum of two witness to verify the veracity of a person (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15). Thus, Jesus will appeal to the following witnesses:

5:34 . . . *a lamp . . .* Most likely Jesus is making this connection between Elijah and John the Baptist (also, see Matt 17:12-13; Mk 9:13). A Jewish writing from the intertestamental period states that the word of Elijah was “a flame like a lamp” (Sirach 48:1). A typical Herodian oil lamp could burn from 4 to 5 hours; however, this lamp’s duration and brilliance far exceeds any earthly lamp. Sadly, the Jewish leaders would prefer to remain in darkness rather than respond to the light.

5:37 . . . *never heard his voice nor seen his form . . .* Jesus’ statement recalls Deuteronomy 4:12: “you heard the sounds of words, but you saw no form—only a voice.” (also, see Deut 5:24-33). Even their “father” Moses saw God (Num 12:8) and heard his voice (Num 7:89), but they have not. Jesus is the embodiment of God’s word (1:1-18) and His image (14:7-9; also, see 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3).

5:45-47 Ironically, the Jewish leaders boasted in their knowledge of the Scriptures and their advocate Moses. The leader of the Exodus was hailed as the most righteous of all people in history and the continuing advocate for Israel (e.g., Exod 32:32; Jer 15:1). Instead of Moses exonerating them, he will condemn them!

IV. Intersect

A. Religion cripples one from walking with God.

1. Religion creates a legalistic system resulting in false security.
2. Religion creates a system absent of humility.

“Conceit makes the way God deals with me personally the binding
standard for others.”

~ Oswald Chambers, *Approved Unto God*

3. Religion believes God's favor can be humanity obtained.

B. True healing is found in Jesus.

“Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a
song of praise is fitting. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great
is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.”

~ Psalm 147:1, 3-5

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that free from sins, we might
live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”

~ 1 Peter 2:24

“Religion today is not transforming the people - it is being transformed by the people. It is not raising the
moral level of society - it is descending to society's own level and congratulating itself that it has scored a
victory because society is smiling accepting its surrender.” ~ A. W. Tozer