

Gospel of John Study

Session 12

In our last session the apostle John related the second miracle Jesus did in Galilee. A royal official's son was healed by Jesus at long range. The sad part of this was that this sign was the only one Jesus performed while in Galilee during this visit. Jesus indicted the Jews of Galilee for their lack of true faith. They merely wanted to see Jesus do amazing things but they had no real desire to put their faith in Him as they were familiar with His upbringing and family. John used this story to teach us the true nature of faith. It is not rooted in our curiosity. It is not the same as our emotions. It is not based in speculation, superstition or our expectations. Rather genuine faith is firmly rooted in a true knowledge of Jesus Christ. This true revelation of Jesus comes only from Scripture which comes from our Heavenly Father and is confirmed in our lives through the Holy Spirit.

In this session, Jesus has headed back south into Jerusalem and encounters a man who has been ill for decades. What happens gives us a deeper insight into the love, mercy and grace of God but it also sets up a deeper hostility between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. What we are going to note is that a shift in the perception of Jesus is going to take place. In chapters 1-4 we saw mere hesitation and reservation concerning Jesus on the part of the Jewish leaders. Now in chapters 5-7 we are going to see that Jesus faced outright opposition and often this opposition was "official" in nature. The first point of contention deals with the Sabbath and this leads to an even more critical controversy over the nature of Jesus and exactly who He really is. (We won't get to the second controversy until our next session.)

[John 5:1-5]

Q: Where is Jesus in this narrative? Where is this story taking place? (*Jerusalem*)

Q: Why is Jesus in Jerusalem? (*He was celebrating a feast associated with the Jewish religion*)

Most of the time, when Jesus is attending a feast or celebration in Jerusalem John lets us know the name of the feast because the nature of the feast deals with a theme John will be presenting in the text. He links the celebration with the material he's presenting. However, in this case, we actually have no evidence whatsoever of which feast this is. John doesn't tell us and the reason he doesn't tell us is because the material in John 5 that John is going to be sharing is not meant to be thematically related to this feast. All this phrase means in this chapter is that this reference becomes a historical marker to explain Jesus' presence back in Jerusalem.

The sheep gate referred to in v.2 was just west of the northeast corner of the wall around Jerusalem. This gate is spoken of in Nehemiah 3. Again, modern archeology proves this passage accurate in that there was two large pools of water by this gate. These pools were called Bethesda. They were built close to one another and formed a trapezoid when taken together. The northern most pool was slightly smaller than the larger one to the south. The larger one was approximately the size of a football field and about 20 feet deep. The four of the five porches were around the perimeter of the two pools and there was one that ran down the middle between the two pools. These pools were fed by large reservoirs called Solomon's pools but also

intermittently by springs which account for the occasional disturbances in the water. Because of this belief that an angel gave this pool healing powers, a large number of sick, blind, lame and withered all congregated around the pools. Yet the main purpose of the pools was bathing - which was a public event in that day and time.

There is a note in most of your Bibles concerning the last half of v.3 and all of v.4. This note is in your Bible to let you know that this may or may not be part of the original text by John. Some of the early manuscripts don't contain this information. So there is a chance that a person transcribing an early manuscript of John wrote a note in the margin explaining the sick man's words in v.6 about the water being "stirred up". In time, people copying from this text just inserted it in the text - either by accident or intentionally. Here's the deal, this one actually does show up in some manuscripts, thus it may actually be part of John's gospel. However, there are more early manuscripts without it than with it - thus it is suspect and we get a note about it. Why it is even in our Bibles today is that when the King James was translated, they didn't have many ancient manuscripts. They used only one primarily and it was actually fairly late by our standards today. Since it was the most commonly used translation in English for three and a half centuries, for the sake of continuity with the KJV, the modern translations usually keep the KJV sections in their Bible but put a note that it may or may not be authentic.

Q: How long had the man been ill? *(38 years)*

Q: What does John say that the man's illness was? *(He doesn't say. We have to infer it from the rest of the account)*

Now let's do a quick review of John because there is another point that John is making with this account that is subtle and easy to miss when you don't read the book all in one sitting. This deals with John's teaching about the use of water in religion and life and how Jesus supercedes the old ways of thinking and believing.

Q: What was John the Baptist doing? *(baptizing people and preparing their hearts for the coming Messiah)*

Q: Why did John the Baptist say that Jesus needed to increase but he needed to decrease (John 3:30)? *(Because Jesus was the Messiah and His ministry would be greater than John's ministry. His ministry would take away sins and bring the Holy Spirit while John's would not do either.)*

Q: In John 1:33, John the Baptist said he baptized people with water but he said that Jesus would baptize people with _____? *(The Holy Spirit)*

[II Corinthians 1:21-22]

Q: Who did Jesus give us in these verses? *(The Holy Spirit)*

[Ephesians 1:13-14]

Q: What did a person need to hear in order to be saved? *(The message of the truth, which is the gospel of salvation. This goes hand in hand with what we saw in the last session - believing in the truth is what is essential for salvation.)*

Q: By Whom were believers sealed? *(The Holy Spirit)*

Jesus showed Himself greater than the water of repentance based baptism by bringing us the Holy Spirit who is the seal/promise of our inheritance of salvation.

Q: At the wedding in Cana, what did Jesus replace in order to create the wine? *(water)*

Q: What was that water in the stone pots used for by the Jews at the wedding? *(for ceremonial purification)*

By replacing the water used for ceremonial purification/cleansing with wine, Jesus was showing Himself greater than the laws of ritual purity. This water for purification only was for the outside of the body; it was applied externally only. However, the wine Jesus created was consumed and taken into the inner part of a man. Jesus is the One who now cleanses the heart and conscience of man. The cleansing He brings is internal, not external.

[Hebrews 9:8-14]

The tabernacle enclosed the presence of God. It was a wall that kept distance between holy God and sinful man. Now with Jesus' ministry and the internal cleaning of the soul, the Holy Spirit encloses the believer so that he or she is holy to serve God. (Colossians 3:3)

Q: Where did Jesus encounter the Samaritan woman? *(By Jacob's well)*

Q: What did Jesus tell the woman about the water she drew from that well? *(That if she drank it, she would get thirsty again. (John 4:13))*

Q: What kind of water did Jesus have to offer the woman? *(Living water (John 4:10))*

Q: What was the advantage of living water? *(Those who drank it would not thirst again. The living water would become in that person a well of water springing up to eternal life. (John 4:14))*

So Jesus is the living water and those who partake of Him into their innermost parts will never thirst spiritually again. They will have springs of life coming from their innermost beings to eternal life. Jesus is superior to the water, even from the great patriarch Jacob's well.

But now we are going to see one more advantage of Jesus when it comes to water and that is that He will be shown greater than the popular superstitions and healing cults of His day. As noted there were many sick, blind, lame, etc. people hanging out at this pool, looking for healing. They believed it had the power to heal them. As we read this next section we are going to see that it isn't the pool that heals this man but it is Jesus who does the healing. He is greater

than the healing cults and superstitions.

[John 5:6-16]

Now knowing the rest of the story, we can see that the man has suffered as an invalid for 38 years. He cannot walk. He lies on a mat and must be carried to and from places and then laid on the mat once he gets to where he is going.

Q: Who takes the initiative in this situation that led to the man's healing? (*Jesus*)

Q: What is Jesus' question to this man? (*v. 6 - Do you wish to get well?*)

Q: Knowing that the man has been an invalid for 38 years and is lying by a pool where supposedly miraculous healings take place, why do you think that Jesus asks the man this question? (*When talking to others and their desire for wholeness, Jesus wants to ensure that the person truly wants to be whole. It could also be that this question was rhetorical that was used to show Jesus where the man's heart was at that time by starting a conversation with him.*)

Q: What is the man's answer to Jesus' question? (*v.7 - It's an excuse for why he hasn't been healed, it is not a real answer to the question. Think about it, the question just required a simple yes or no response.*)

V.7 is the reason the last half of v.3 and all of v.4 were added by people copying the manuscript of John, if these two verses are non-inspired. They were explaining the reference to "stirring" of the waters.

Q: What are some words you would use to describe this old invalid?

While some people try to paint this man as a victim, a person who is down on their luck, these views are far too charitable.

Q: What are three things in this passage that let us know the heart and inner character of this man? (*1 - the man seeks to avoid trouble with the authorities by blaming the One who healed him, 2 - the man doesn't take the time to find out the name of the person who healed him or even thank Him, 3 - once he does find out it was Jesus who healed him, he reports Jesus to the authorities*)

With these things in mind, the response the man gives Jesus in v.7 is more the response of a crotchety old man who is grumbling about his life. He thinks he's answering a stupid question as he has no idea who Jesus is. In fact the word translated "Sir" is no more than a civil answer to a complete stranger.

Q: Despite this man's sullen and gloomy character, what does Jesus say to him? (*v.8 - Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.*)

So after hearing Jesus say this to him, the former invalid gets up, picks up his mat, and begins to walk. A true miracle has just happened and this guy just follows Jesus' basic instructions and walks away from Him - no questions asked. This man healed probably dealt with hopelessness due to the nature of his illness and the length of time he had the illness. It may be that hopelessness also factored into the man's non-answer to Jesus' question.

There are four things we need to see about this miracle. 1) This was not a fake healing. This man chosen by Jesus had been in invalid for 38 long years. Jesus was in his early 30's at the time and so if this were some sort of hoax, it would have needed to have been planned about 5 -6 years before Jesus was even born. 2) This was not a faith healing. This man stands in stark contrast to the faith that was explained in chapter 4. This man had no faith in Jesus. He didn't even know who Jesus was. When asked by the Lord if he wanted to get well, he started complaining about why he was in his condition. 3) This was a free healing. The man didn't pay for healing, he didn't win the lottery or have a golden ticket. He certainly didn't deserve to be healed as he was an old man who was broken and bitter. Despite these qualities in the man and his complete lack of knowledge of Jesus and His power to heal, Jesus did the unthinkable. He healed the man. There was no shortage of people to heal at the pool of Bethesda that day yet Jesus healed this man. 4) This was a full healing. This man wasn't partially healed. In an instant, through the words of Jesus, this man was completely healed of his illness. The lame man walked and had the strength to carry his mat. The verb tense in v.8 of "walk" means to "keep walking". He required no physical therapy or weeks at the gym to regain his strength. He was just restored fully. Jesus is greater than any illness we may contract. Even illnesses must obey the Lord Jesus. If it is His will to heal a person of anything, including death as we'll see in chapter 11, it will be done and done fully.

[John 1:16-17]

[Romans 5:20-21]

Q: What does this healing of this crotchety man show us about Jesus? *(He is full of grace, mercy and love despite our failings.)*

Q: Why do you think that God does good for people who aren't good? *(1- none of us is good and thus no one deserves God's goodness or mercy in any way. If God didn't bless sinful people, He wouldn't bless anyone. 2) God desires to show us His goodness so that we will repent and come to know Him.)*

[Romans 2:3-4] - This is the justification for those two answers above.

Q: Why do you think Jesus told the man to take up his pallet? *(By carrying his pallet, the healed man was identifying with his lame past. It showed he was the man who was formerly lame. It also showed the man that he was indeed healed and had the strength to resume his life. Additionally, Jesus was setting up the conflict to come with the Jewish leaders. His instructions to this man were going to be used to teach the Jewish leaders and people something about Jesus and God's will. Look at the very end of v.9)*

We need to take a side trip back into ancient Israel to understand their concept of the Sabbath. It was not only important for the Jews to keep the Sabbath but vitally important and to break the Sabbath was to invite the death penalty. Though it was never known to be enforced to this degree, the Jewish leaders held a sharp desire to kill Jesus based upon His breaking of the Sabbath in what they considered such cavalier fashion.

[Exodus 20: 8-11] - This is the teaching of the Old Testament concerning the Sabbath. People were supposed to suspend doing their normal work or business on the Sabbath.

The Old Testament forbid work on the Sabbath but what constituted “work”? The assumption in the Scriptures was that work was one’s customary employment. However, the rabbinical teaching of the day had greatly enlarged this definition to include 39 different classes of work. The main prohibition was that of carrying anything from one domain to another domain. (There was the exception of cases of compassion on another.) Now according to the Scriptures, there is no proof that the healed man actually broke any Laws as since his main employment was begging and not carrying mats from one place to another. However, according to the “tradition of the elders” this man was breaking the Law concerning the Sabbath as he was breaking one of the 39 classes of work they identified as illegal by carrying anything at all. Now it is important to realize that the Jewish leaders were not charging Jesus with breaking the law yet. Their beef is with this man who was healed. He can’t tell them who healed him either. He was breaking their tradition.

What is interesting that even in the rabbinical teaching, acts of mercy and compassion were excluded from judgment as they benefitted other people and not oneself. Yet, the Jews in this story have completely perverted the meaning of the Sabbath by outlawing the act of compassion by Jesus towards this man.

Jesus and His followers understood the truth. They were part of a Messianic community. They saw that a new day had dawned in which the Sabbath and other ceremonial laws and institutions have been reinterpreted and fulfilled. Jesus’ presence means that more than the Temple is has arrived and the showing of elementary compassion warrants the setting aside of the rigorous demands of the Sabbath provisions where these provisions conflict with showing love. God created the Sabbath for man, not man to live up to another set of rules called the Sabbath. It was for man to enjoy rest from his usual activities and labors. There is nothing wrong with this as God desires for us to take time to reflect on Him and worship Him. It’s the legalistic formula that expresses itself in a ritualistic code that dishonors God.

Q: How does the man respond to the Jewish leaders’ question about carrying his pallet? (*v.11 - He pushes the blame for the offense off on the one who healed him and he doesn’t know that man’s identity.*)

Here’s the problem that this man sets up for Jesus. From the point of view of the Jews, anyone who is telling or teaching people to violate one of the 39 classes of prohibited work is far more dangerous than a single individual who does so. This is why they questioned the man as to who did told him to carry his palate. Notice the Jews do not mention the miracle of healing by asking, “Who healed you?”. They just want to know who ordered him to break the law. The Jews think that they see the important issue here but they don’t. None are as blind as those who are certain that they see.

Q: What does Jesus tell the man He healed later when He found him at the Temple? (v.14 - *You are well, don't sin any more that something worse doesn't happen to you.*)

The phrase “do not sin anymore” or “stop sinning” is an imperative. Imperatives are often commands but also they are used to imply critical urgency. It is crucial that this man quit sinning so that something worse than 38 years as an invalid doesn't overtake him. It is obvious from what we know of this man that he wasn't chosen for healing based on any moral purity or perfection.

Q: Do you think that all illness is a direct result of the sin of the sick person?

While sickness is the result of the fall, so in some global sense one could reason that all illness stems from sin in one way or another. Yet, in the Gospels, the cause of an individual's illness or affliction is not always associated with one's personal sin. As we will see in John 9 in the account of the man born blind who Jesus healed, Jesus Himself expressly tells His disciples that it wasn't the man or his parents' sin that led to him being blind. It was in order that God would be glorified. So while it is possible for some ailments to be the direct consequence of a specific sin; it is more probable that it is not. It may be that the reason Jesus chose this invalid out of all the others around the pool that day was because his sin did lead to his condition and it would give Jesus a chance to teach on this matter (though that is speculation).

[John 9:1-3]

[Luke 13:1-5]

While we don't know the extent of the man's sin or what it was, in this case, because Jesus said something about it, we can know that this man's condition was a result of his personal sin. The phrases “Stop sinning” is vitally connected to “so that nothing worse happens to you” grammatically. It is one of the rare instances, if not the only instance, where this is the case. Most of Jesus' healings contain no reference to the person's sin or moral state at all.

Q: When something bad happens to you, do you see it as God punishing you for your sin?

It is important not to assume that when tragedy strikes a person that he is morally inferior to yourself. The message of Jesus is that everyone is guilty and if a person doesn't repent, something far worse than a tragic situation in this world will fall upon them - an eternity in hell.

[Romans 8:1]

[John 5:24]

It is an error to think that when misfortune of any kind befalls you, that it is your sin that led to this misfortune. While it is possible, as sin always has some consequence, it is far more probable that God is using the circumstance to grow your faith or teach you something new about Himself or use the situation to glorify Himself through you or prepare you for a blessing larger

than what you were imagining or a hundred other reasons shown in Scripture. Don't jump to the conclusion that a specific sin is at the root of each of your problems. Think to the example of Job. He had no idea why all the trouble befell him, even till the end, but God was glorified through his life.

[Ecclesiastes 9:11-12]

Q: What does the former invalid man do directly after speaking to Jesus in the Temple? (*He runs to inform the Jews as to who healed him.*)

The word "persecuting" in v.16 is in the tense that means they started persecuting Jesus and they kept doing it. They had always been suspicious of Jesus but breaking the Sabbath was an open breach of conduct and they were going to use it forcefully against Him. Jesus, became a regular Sabbath-breaker and they were going to call Him on it every chance they could.

Q: Based upon our discussion tonight, how did one break the Sabbath according to the Jews? (*one merely had to do work that fell into one of 39 categories - whether it was true work or not*)

Now Jesus is going to take the conflict over the Sabbath and transform it into a brand new conflict. The rest of chapter 5, which we'll look in the next session, sees a major escalation of tension between Jesus and the Jewish leaders due to the teaching Jesus is about to drop on them. What Jesus is about to say is in response to them confronting Him about breaking the Sabbath.

[John 5:17]

The word "answered" in v.17 is the word that introduces a lengthy discourse. It is the word used to show that an address to an issue follows, not a mere reply to a question. In this case Jesus is answering their charges with His defense.

This response is different than all other responses Jesus makes concerning the Jews charges of Him breaking the Sabbath. This one truly hits to the core of the matter. Here's the line of reasoning by the Jews.

Q: What did God do on the seventh day of creation? (*He rested and sanctified the seventh day-Genesis 2:2-3*)

This set up a moral dilemma for the Jewish leaders. If God failed to rest on the Sabbath as He commanded man to do, He has become a law-breaker. Yet, God cannot take a day off or all of creation would fall apart. Thus the consensus among the most eminent rabbis was that God did not cease His labors ever but was not guilty of breaking the Sabbath since the entire universe was His domain and therefore He never carries anything out of it. Also, since God fills the whole world, He lifts nothing to a height greater than His own stature thus He cannot be charged with violating the Sabbath. The important point to all of this is the truth that Jesus refers to in v.17 which is something even the Jews agreed with and that is that God never ceases from His labors. He is always at work.

To Jesus it doesn't matter what rationale the Jews used to justify God never ceasing from His work because as God's Son, He would use that same justification to not cease from doing the Father's work. Jesus is working just like the Father. This sets up the next major reason the Jews despised Jesus and wanted to kill Him. He said God was His Father and thus He was claiming to be of the same nature as God. In other words, He was calling Himself God and the Jews caught on to His claim.

Though we haven't encountered this yet, John is going to show as we progress that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament, including all the celebrations and feasts. All of these annual events testify to Jesus' real identity. In this same way the weekly Sabbath celebration also pointed to Jesus. Jesus is showing the Jews something very new and we'll touch on it and then close and pick it up in the next session.

By telling the Jews that the Father is working constantly and currently and that He is also working the same works as the Father, He is in essence saying that the seventh day rest at creation has never ended. God's creation of the physical universe was over after six days but His work on the redemption of man never ended. His spiritual work was never stopped and that is what Jesus engaged in with Him through the present time.

[Hebrews 4:3-10]

In this Hebrews passage the Sabbath rest is given as part of a pattern of rests in the Old Testament. There was the rest of the seventh day, there was the rest of the Israelites entering the Promised Land and there was the promise of rest in the Psalms. Yet this all leads to the conclusion in Hebrews that there is one final rest remaining for the people of God. This rest can only be entered and enjoyed by faith in Christ. This is a rest from dead works (the rituals and overbearing rules concerning the Sabbath) and an enjoyment of the salvation in Christ which was dawning at the time of Christ's ministry. The deal is that all of these "rests" point to Christ. The one in question is the Sabbath or seventh-day rest. As God rested from His labors of creation, Jesus is now the vehicle to find rest from the labors of God's creation of a new heart in the person who puts their faith in Him. It is a rest for us in that we no longer need to labor to find a right standing before God. When a person finds Christ, they find the final rest.

Back to the conflict Jesus just amplified by saying God was His Father. The Jews of that day might say that God was their father in a "national" or "communal" way but never as their personal father. Jesus was making this claim to them directly. He was expressing that He had a unique Father-Son relationship with God that no one else possessed and that it was the reason for His working, even on the Sabbath.

In our lives, since we are Jesus' brothers and sisters, we also work with the Father. Our works are to be redemptive like Jesus' were. In the next session we'll dive into Jesus' address to the Jewish leaders in depth.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?