



Text: John 5:1-18¹

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 13 – Jesus & A Man in the Crowd

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I think it’s fair to say that in the passage we’re about to read, **Jesus picks a fight**.

New Testament scholar Gary Burge sees chapter five as a trial of Jesus’ identity in which Jesus is accused of blasphemy against God by the religious leadership in Jerusalem. If he is right, then it’s an accusation and a trial that Jesus invited. I believe that Jesus forced the question because it’s a question that must be answered: **Who is Jesus?** Is he a religious prophet? Is he a great moral teacher? Is he a deluded lunatic? Is he a myth? Or is he the Christ, the Son of God?

The purpose of John’s Gospel is to present us with information about Jesus that will lead us to the conclusion that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John has selected his material about Jesus and written only a part of Jesus’ story and his reason for writing is...

“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31

John wants to lead us to believe that Jesus is God come in the flesh, born in Bethlehem, taught and ministered throughout Palestine, crucified outside Jerusalem and risen from the dead. Everything that’s important in life hinges upon our belief of these crucial truths about Jesus. Our purpose for living right now depends on these truths. The promise of life after death hangs upon these truths. And the question that Jesus forces in the passage we’re about to look at is simply this: **Do you believe that I am equal with God?**

If you think of chapter five as a trial it breaks down into three major sections. First of all, in **verses one to seventeen** we have **the incident** that gave rise to the accusation against Jesus. Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath day. Second, in **verse eighteen** we have **the accusation** stated. According to his critics, Jesus has blasphemed against God by claiming equality with God. And third, in **verses nineteen to forty-seven** we have **the defence** that Jesus gives of his claim to equality with the Father. This morning, we’re going to look at the

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incident and the accusation and then next week we're going to dig deeply into Jesus' defence of his claim to equality with God.

I am reading from John's Gospel, chapter five, verses one to eighteen. This is God's holy, inspired and authoritative Word. Let's hear it with due reverence and respond to it with living faith.

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.

Let's look at...

The Incident John 5:1-17

It's really a very simple story. Jesus has come to Jerusalem to attend one of the Jewish feasts commanded in the Old Testament. On the Sabbath day he goes to a pool that is reputed to have healing properties and there he sees one man who arouses his sympathy. Of the many invalids who are at this pool, Jesus



heals only one man. He says to him: “Get up, take up your bed and walk” and the man does! Wonderful! He’s healed! And as the man is carrying his bed away from the pool and through the streets of Jerusalem he is accosted by some of the religious leaders, people whom John refers to simply as “the Jews.” They tell him that he is breaking the Sabbath law by carrying a load in the streets of the city. And then things get serious!

It’s a simple story and there are two things I want you to notice and these two things help to highlight the point that Jesus was making.

First of all, there are many invalids at the pool, but Jesus only heals one man. Why?

The pool of Bethesda or Bethsaida was crowded with the broken of humanity: the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. There were actually two pools, side by side, and that is why John says that it was surrounded by five colonnades. The fifth colonnade ran between the two pools. By the way, this little detail used to be a cause for criticism that John’s Gospel wasn’t historically accurate. However, just last century, these two pools were discovered, exactly where John said they were, surrounded by the five colonnades described by John.

Jesus is drawn to one man who is lying beside the pool. John tells us...

“One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 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?” John 5:5-6

Notice that John tells us that Jesus “**knew** that he had already been there a long time....” This the fourth time in this Gospel that John emphasizes Jesus’ supernatural knowledge of people. In chapter one, Jesus told Nathanael, a new disciple, that he had seen him before Nathanael met him. Jesus said to him...

**“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”
John 1:48**

In chapter two, John tells us that Jesus didn’t commit himself to people who proclaimed an easy allegiance to him because...

“he himself knew what was in man.” John 2:25

In chapter four, Jesus told a woman at a well outside a town in Samaria her entire marital history. He told her that she had had five husbands and was currently living with a man to whom she was not married. She went back into town and said to the townspeople...



**“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”
John 4:29**

Who is Jesus that he “knows” the details of our lives?

The second thing I want you to notice is Jesus’ question: **“Do you want to be healed?”** Why did he ask that? If Jesus knew that he’d been there thirty eight years, wouldn’t he know why? He was an invalid and he hoped to get healed! Why did Jesus ask such an obvious question? He asked it to get the answer he got. In a trial situation, you never ask a question to which you do not already know the answer! An open ended question is an open opportunity for a defendant to utterly smash your case. Jesus knew what the man was going to say and he wanted everyone to hear it!

He wanted everyone witnessing this miracle to hear this man’s words. He wanted the religious leaders to hear these words. He wanted you and me to hear these words. These words reflect what was in this man’s heart ... and Jesus wanted us to know what he already knew: **that there was not a single ounce of faith in this man’s heart!** Not a mustard seed’s worth of faith! Nothing! He said in answer to Jesus’ question...

“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.”

Somehow the water of this pool would become agitated, possibly by an underground spring, and it was believed that the first person to enter the pool would be healed. The claim that an angel stirred the water didn’t appear in the New Testament manuscripts until after 400 AD and that is why none of the contemporary translations include it in the text. It’s possible that, on occasion, people were healed at the pool of psychosomatic illnesses, otherwise why would the story have been perpetuated? These were desperate people and they would latch onto any hope, no matter how remote.

I want you to hear the emptiness of this man’s heart: **“I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up...”**

Can you hear the loneliness of this man? After 38 years as an invalid, all of his family and friends have moved on with their lives, leaving him alone at the edge of the pool.

Can you hear his dependence on others for even the simplest actions? Without someone to help him, he would have crawl to get into the pool

Can you hear the anxiety that ruled his life? He is hinging his hope on something that is unpredictable, uncertain, and unlikely. He sits at the edge of the pool



waiting and watching, fearing that if he misses the stirring of the water he will miss his only chance he has at life.

He said to Jesus: **“while I am going down another steps down before me.”**

Can you hear his frustration, his disappointment, his humiliation? The water had been stirred, probably on many occasions in those thirty eight years, but he had never been first in line!

This man’s response to Jesus’ question reveals that he didn’t know who Jesus was and I’m not sure he would have cared. Later on, when he does find out that it was Jesus who healed him, he rats Jesus out to the religious leaders! Even though he knows they want to prosecute Jesus for Sabbath law violation, he’s glad to get them off his back by fingering Jesus. Bible scholar Leon Morris called the man “an unpleasant creature.” (*John*, p. 307) D.A. Carson wrote that this man’s answer “reads ... as the crotchety grumblings of an old and not very perceptive man who thinks he is answering a stupid question.”²

There’s something else I want us to see about this man. Later on, Jesus catches up with him in the temple and he says something very important to him. He said to him...

**“See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”
John 5:14**

Remember that Jesus “knows” this man and what Jesus is doing is calling this man to repent of the sin that had caused his sickness. **Please hear me:** not all sickness is caused by sin but some sickness is caused by sin. **Let me repeat that:** not all sickness is caused by sin but some sickness is caused by sin. For example, in his instruction in 1 Corinthians on the keeping of the Lord’s Table Paul warns believers that...

“anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” 1 Corinthians 11:29-30

For an example of sickness that isn’t connected with sin, just jump a few chapters ahead in John’s Gospel to chapter nine and read the story of a blind man that Jesus healed. Jesus is very clear that sin was in no way connected with his blindness.

²D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 243.



Sometimes sin is present in sickness and sometimes it isn't and Jesus always knows the difference. The point I want to make here is that Jesus healed this man without first asking him to repent of his sin.

There is no faith in this man's heart but Jesus heals him anyway ... Why?! I'm going to borrow a passage from next week's message on Jesus defense. Jesus said...

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.” John 5:21

Jesus healed his man because he chose to do so. His choice was not in any way conditioned by the presence of faith in this man. This man had no faith, but out of his grace, Jesus healed him. Out of the multitude of invalids, Jesus chose to pour out his healing upon this faithless, “unpleasant,” “crotchety” man.

Who is it who sovereignly chooses whom to heal, whom to bless and whom to save? **Who is Jesus? Who does he think he is?**

The **second** thing I want you to notice is that Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath day.

There were many days on which Jesus could have healed this man. Why did he do it on the Sabbath?

John tells us...

“Now that day was the Sabbath.” John 5:9

You need to know something about the layout of the city of Jerusalem. The pool was right next to the temple in Jerusalem. In order to travel into the city, the man would have had to pass through the Sheep Gate which was close to the temple and then take the streets past the temple into the heart of the city. In other words, when Jesus told this man to pick up his mat and walk, he knew that he was going to be walking right past the temple; Jesus knew that the streets around the temple on the Sabbath day would be full of the religious leaders; and he knew that the Sabbath law of the Jews forbade the man to do what Jesus had told him to do.

That is why I contend that Jesus was picking a fight. He chose the day. He chose the venue. He chose the question. He was acting in a way that would intentionally create a controversy that would be focused, not on the man who was healed, but on him, the One who had healed him.

The religious leaders said to the man...



“It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” John 5:10

The Law that God had communicated to his people through Moses stipulated ...

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work ... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” Exodus 20:8-11

I want you to notice a little phrase here: “a Sabbath to the LORD your God.” In other words, the Sabbath day was a day on which God was to be honored. God could do whatever he wanted on the Sabbath day; it was His day! Mankind had the responsibility to do what God commanded on the Sabbath day, because it was His day.

What this man was doing fell into a category of forbidden work that was based upon something that the Lord had said through the prophet Jeremiah.

“Thus says the LORD: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers.” Jeremiah 17:21-22

The man broke this command in at least three ways: he carried a burden on the Sabbath, he carried it out of his house, and he carried it through the Sheep Gate into the city of Jerusalem. This is not some petty, quibbling breach of the Sabbath of Law; the religious leaders had this man dead to rights! But the question that never passes their lips is “who healed you?”? Twice they ask the man, “who told you to take up your mat and walk?” but never once do they ask him, “who healed you?” That was the question they should have been asking. That question would have led them to wonder about Jesus’ identity: **who is this who heals a man who has been an invalid for thirty eight years?**

The essence of the Sabbath was that it was a day to honor God and forgive me for borrowing again from next week’s passage but Jesus is highlighting a simple fact. Why didn’t these religious leaders even acknowledge the healing that Jesus had performed? It might have led them to honor him. Jesus said...

“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.” John 5:22-23



These religious leaders were more guilty of breaking the Sabbath than the man who carried his bed. These leaders did not honor the Son and in refusing to honor the Son, they demonstrated that they did not honor God who sent him. They were the real Sabbath breakers; not the man who had been healed!

But instead of asking the deeper question that would have led them to honor the Son, these religious leaders were content to paddle around in the shallows of legality.

“And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.” John 5:16

But Jesus was not content to allow the issue to remain there. He pressed the matter. He forced the fight. He demanded that they ask the deeper question.

“But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” John 5:17

What you need to know is that Jesus’ words here speak directly into a discussion in which the rabbis of his day regularly engaged. The question they debated was this: **Does God work on the Sabbath?** And the answer was: Yes. He has to. If he doesn’t work, life stops! The universe grinds to a halt. God does work on the Sabbath. Well, if God works on the Sabbath how does he keep from violating his own Sabbath law? They argued that God could work on the Sabbath and not violate his law because the entire universe was his house and he never had to carry a burden outside of his house. And they argued, God was great that no burden he lifted could be large enough to really be considered work for Him. So, yes, they concluded, God works on the Sabbath.³

Do you see what Jesus was doing? Jesus was claiming for himself a prerogative that belonged to God alone. Now do you understand why they wanted to kill him?

³ *The consensus amongst the rabbis, too, was that God works on the Sabbath, for otherwise providence itself would weekly go into abeyance. About the end of the first century, four eminent rabbis (Rabban Gamaliel II, R. Joshua, R. Eleazar b. Azariah, and R. Akiba) discussed the point, and concluded that although God works constantly, he cannot rightly be charged with violating the Sabbath law, since (1) the entire universe is his domain (Is. 6:3), and therefore he never carries anything outside it; (2) otherwise put, God fills the whole world (Je. 23:24); and in any case (3) God lifts nothing to a height greater than his own stature (Exodus Rabbah 30:9; cf. Genesis Rabbah 11:10). D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: InterVarsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 247.*



Who is the Lord of the Sabbath? (Matthew 12:8) Who is the Lord of the church? Who is the Lord of my life? Who is the Lord? **Who does Jesus think he is?** Next week we're going to dig deeply into that question as we examine his defense in verses nineteen to forty-seven.

As I said earlier, Jesus picked this fight very carefully and very intentionally. He shaped everything to lead to a confrontation centered on the question: **who is this man, Jesus?** John pulls the threads of this story together and brings us to the point:

“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.” John 5:18

This is...

The Accusation

And it's an accusation that begs the question: **Who does Jesus think he is?** More to the point, **who do you think he is?**

C.S. Lewis was a British writer in the mid-twentieth century. A great thinker and a great writer, his children's series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, have kept his name alive in popular thinking down through the years and a movie version of one of that series, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, is currently in the theatres. But C.S. Lewis was also a Christian writer of great insight and skill. He noted that **Jesus always the pressed the question.** People, he observed, were often willing to say, *“I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.”* But, Lewis wrote...

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher.^{18 4}

**Jesus Christ ... Liar? Lunatic? Demon? Or the Son of God?
Who is he?**

- **Invitation to the Lord's Table**

¹⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), 41.

⁴ Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 185.



- **Songs of Communion:**
 - Before the Throne of God Above
 - How Deep the Father's Love for Us
- **Benediction**