

**The Gospel of John**  
**Session Nine: Healings and Conflict**  
**Commentary**

**John 4:43–5:18**

4:43–54 The healing of the royal official’s son completes the “Cana cycle” in John’s Gospel, which spans from 2:1 to 4:54 and begins and ends with a “sign” performed by Jesus in Cana of Galilee (2:11; 4:54; see 2:11). The present sign is a rare instance of a long-distance healing performed by Jesus. The story resembles that of the Gentile centurion in Mt 8:5–13 and Lk 7:2–10, but this is not the same incident. All three signs featured in the Cana cycle (the turning of water into wine, the temple clearing, and the healing of the royal official’s son) set forth Jesus as the Messiah, who showed convincing proofs of his divine commission.

4:43 Jesus left there (Sychar) and entered Galilee. From Sychar to Cana was about forty miles, a trip of two or three days.

4:44 On a prophet’s lack of honor in his own country, compare Mt 13:57; Lk 4:24.

4:45 Jesus’s Galilean welcome must be understood in light of vv. 44 and 48 (cp. 2:23–25).

4:46 The royal official was probably a Gentile centurion, possibly in service to Herod Antipas (Mk 6:14). His son’s illness involved fever (Jn 4:52) and appears to have been terminal (vv. 47, 49).

4:47 The distance from Capernaum to Cana was about fifteen miles. The journey was mostly uphill (see 2:12). Conversely, from Cana Jesus would come down to Capernaum.

4:48 The expression signs and wonders probably harks back to the series of miracles performed by Moses at the exodus. Jesus rebuked people for their dependence on the miraculous; for John, miracles were “signs” pointing to Jesus’s messianic identity (see 2:11).

4:49–50 This is a rare instance of a long-distance miracle. A similar incident is described in Mt 8:5–13 and Lk 7:2–10. The words your son will live may recall Elijah’s statement in 1Kg 17:23. If so, Jesus’s messianic activity is compared with the healing ministry of Elijah (Lk 4:23–27).

4:54 The second sign refers to signs done in Cana (see note at 2:11); in the interim, Jesus had performed signs in Jerusalem (2:23; 3:2; 4:45). Thus John closed the cycle of Jesus’s first ministry circuit, starting and ending in Cana of Galilee (see 43–54).

5:1–47 The “festival cycle” in John’s Gospel spans from 5:1 to 10:42 and is characterized by escalating conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. This cycle begins with yet another sign—Jesus’s healing of a lame man at a feast in Jerusalem (see note at 2:11). The fact that the healing took place on a Sabbath provoked a major controversy. Jesus was accused of breaking the law by telling the man to pick up his mat (5:8–10). The controversy escalated to the point

where the Jewish leaders charged Jesus with blasphemy for claiming to continue the work of God (v. 18). This provided an occasion for Jesus to defend his ministry and enumerate evidences for his identity.

5:1 After this marks the passing of an indefinite period of time. Up to a year and a half may have passed after the last recorded festival, the Passover, when Jesus cleared the temple and met with Nicodemus. The unnamed Jewish festival may have been the Festival of Shelters. On Jesus went up to Jerusalem, see 2:13.

5:2 Bethesda may mean “house of mercy,” a fitting term given the desperate state of the people who lay there hoping for a miraculous cure; see 1:38.

5:5 We do not know the invalid’s age or how long he had been lying there, but he had been crippled for thirty-eight years, which is longer than many people in antiquity lived and roughly as long as Israel’s wilderness wanderings (Dt 2:14). On John’s penchant for selecting “difficult” and striking miracles, see note at 2:11. For a similar healing, see Mt 9:1–8.

5:6 Realized probably indicates supernatural knowledge (see 1:48; 4:19). Jesus’s conversation with the man may have been occasioned by his request for alms (Ac 3:1–5).

5:7 Superstition attributed the stirring of the water to the actions of an angel (see the addition of v. 4 in some later mss).

5:8–9 A mat (Gk *krabattos*; as distinguished from “bed,” Gk *klinarion*, e.g., Ac 5:15) was the poor man’s bedding. Made of straw, it could be rolled up and carried. We are not told this day was the Sabbath until the miracle was performed. This sets the context for the tensions with the unbelieving Jews (cp. 9:14).

5:10 In a petty display of religious legalism, the Jewish leaders objected to the man’s picking up his mat on the Sabbath. While not actually breaking any biblical Sabbath regulations, the man was violating a rabbinical code that prohibited the carrying of an object “from one domain into another” (m. Sabb. 7:2). Hence Jesus was accused of enticing the man to sin.

5:11–13 It is interesting that Jesus did not make himself known to the man when he healed him.

5:14 Jesus met the man again in the temple, a short distance from the site of his healing. Jesus’s words may imply that the man’s suffering was due to sin but do not suggest that all suffering is caused by personal sin (see 9:2). Something worse may refer to eternal judgment for sin (vv. 22–30).

5:15–16 The man never thanked Jesus. He only reported him to the authorities.

5:17 While Gn 2:2–3 teaches that God rested (Hb *shabath*) on the seventh day of creation, Jewish rabbis agreed that God continually upheld the universe, yet without breaking the

Sabbath. If God was above Sabbath regulations, so was Jesus (Mt 12:1–14). What is more, even the Jews made exceptions to the rule prohibiting work on the Sabbath, most notably in cases where circumcision occurred on a Sabbath (Jn 7:23).

5:18 Making himself equal to God seemed to violate the OT teaching that there is only one God (Dt 6:4). Thus the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy, which became the primary charge leveled against Jesus before Pilate (Jn 19:7).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *CSB Study Bible*. Edited by Trevin Wax. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).