

Healing, the Sabbath, and Equality with God
John 5:1-18
November 16th, 2025

1. Power Over _____ (5:1-9)

2. Conflict Over the _____ (5:10-16)

3. _____ with God (5:17-18)

4. Truths That Matter
 - a. Jesus is _____ to suffering sinners.
 - b. Jesus is _____.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on John 5:1-18

1. How would you define legalism? In what way do you see legalism displayed in this passage? What harms come from a legalistic approach to God and personal holiness?
2. What was the original intent and purpose of the Sabbath? Ex. 20:9-11; 31:16-17; Deut. 5:12-15
 - a. How had Sabbath rules changed and developed over time?
3. Read the following passages where Jesus faced controversy over the Sabbath: Mt. 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-16
 - a. For what act(s) was He accused of violating the Sabbath?
 - b. How did Jesus respond? What was His argument?
4. Although God can and does still heal today and calls us to pray for the sick (James 5:14ff), there are many modern examples of fake and manipulative “healing ministries.” How does the example of healing in John 5 contrast with those modern “healing ministries”?
5. What is the connection between sin and sickness in the following passages? 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16; John 9:2-3
 - a. What are some errors that we can make in our understanding of sin and sickness?
 - b. In light of that, what do you think Jesus means in John 5:14?
6. How is the Father “working until now”? How is Jesus also working? (John 5:17; see also Hebrews 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-20)
7. According to the Jewish leaders, why did Jesus deserve death for “making Himself equal with God”? See Isaiah 40:18, 25.
 - a. How did that come up again in John 10:33 and 19:7?
 - b. Who made themselves like God/equal with God in the Old Testament? (Ezek. 28:2; 29:3; Isaiah 14:14)

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Big idea: Jesus healed on the Sabbath to show His power and equality with God.

Intro

In January of the year 49 BC, a Roman general took his troops south across a small, insignificant river in northern Italy. The general was Julius Caesar and this event kicked off a civil war that ended with Caesar as a dictator presiding over the Roman republic. After his death, his adopted son ruled in his place. That was the beginning of the Roman Empire that lasted for 500 years until AD 473.

The river he crossed was named the Rubicon. Now the phrase “crossing the Rubicon” means to make a decision or take a step that moves you past the point of no return. It commits you to a specific course of action.

When an NBC super star named Kevin Durant left his long-time team and joined another team that was already loaded with talent, one NBA writer said he “crossed the Rubicon” – which seems a little overly dramatic for basketball.

When the rules were changed so that college athletes could be paid, an article said it was a “crossing the Rubicon moment” – everything changed and we can’t go back.

In John 5 we come across Jesus’ “crossing the Rubicon moment.” It was a decisive act that seems relatively small but set Him inevitably on the course of conflict with the Jewish leaders and His death on the cross.

And as it often does in the other gospels as well, the conflict revolved around the Sabbath.

In Matthew 12 his disciples plucked some heads of grain and ate them on the Sabbath

In Mark 3 Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath

In Luke 13 Jesus healed a sick woman on the Sabbath

When the Jewish religious leaders protested, Jesus argued:

There is OT precedent (David and his companions did something similar and priests “worked” on the sabbath

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

It’s lawful to do good on the Sabbath – to heal

You would help an animal on the Sabbath, shouldn’t I help a woman who is of more value?

Jesus faces similar controversy in this passage, but His response is fascinating and it ends with the Jewish leaders seeking to kill Jesus.

1. Power Over **Sickness** (5:1-9)

- a. Sometime after the events of chapter 4 in Samaria and Galilee, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for a feast, one of many annual feasts that brought Jews from all over.
 - i. It could be another Passover, although that’s unlikely as John names 3 other Passovers that Jesus observed. We aren’t told which one, so it isn’t critical.
- b. But this time when He goes to Jerusalem, we don’t find Him at first at the temple but at a pool of water surrounded by 5 covered patios and full of hurting people.
 - i. Specifically, it was a multitude of sick, blind, lame (crippled), and withered (paralyzed) people.
 - ii. They were there in hopes that they could be healed.

1. The end of v 3 and all of v 4 are likely not in the original manuscript written by John. Depending on what translation of the Bible you are using, it will either include the text but with a marginal note that it isn't in the earliest manuscripts or it will put the text itself in the margins or in a footnote and make that point.
2. We can be grateful for the transparency of Bible translation that where there is any doubt about accuracy, it's included for us all to see.
- iii. There was at least a legend about the spring that they could get well when the waters were stirred up.
- c. Out of the multitude Jesus went to one man who had been ill for 38 years, unable to walk, sitting on a mat, unable even to get himself in the water when it is stirred up.
 - i. Why would He ask the man if He wants to get well?
 1. Some speculate that it was because he could make a living as a beggar or they see it similar to the addict who needs to desire to get better before he makes steps toward recovery.
 - a. That doesn't seem to be in the passage.
 2. It is similar to the blind man in Mark 10 and so it was a pattern for Jesus at least sometimes before healing.
 - a. **Mark 10:51** And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!"
 3. It does set the stage for the miracle.
- d. Jesus heals with a word – get up, pick up your pallet and walk.
 - i. Immediate, decisive, sets the stage for the conflict to come.
 - ii. Four things we can say about this healing that contrasts it with some “healing crusades” that we see with guys like Benny Hinn today (adapted from Carter)
 1. Not fake
 - a. The man was sick for 38 years. He wasn't a plant to fake a healing to stir up a crowd.
 2. Not a “faith healing”
 - a. There are times when someone's healing seems tied to their faith – they believe and are healed.
 - b. But in this case and in several others, Jesus simply heals. There is no connection to the man's personal faith. In fact, he isn't a very sympathetic character throughout the story.
 - c. There's a guilt that is heaped upon people in “faith healing” circles that says if you aren't healed, it's because you don't have enough faith. Of if you are praying for someone else and they aren't healed, it's because you don't have enough faith.
 3. It's free
 - a. He doesn't pay anything. There isn't a number to call or a QR code to scan to donate as a way to sow a seed into his own healing miracle.
 4. It's full

a. He is fully healed, not marginally better.

2. Conflict Over the **Sabbath** (5:10-16)

- a. "Now it was the Sabbath on that day" at the end of v. 9.
 - i. If you were a Jew reading this just after John wrote it, you would have heard the ominous warning music in the background.
 - ii. Not an incidental comment but the key to understanding the passage. Not an accident that Jesus healed him on the Sabbath. The man had been there for 38 years, he could have waited a day. Jesus intentionally chose the Sabbath. Why?
 - 1. Call the nation to repentance for their self-righteousness that led to the illusion of spiritual life when really they were barren on the inside.
 - 2. The OT did prohibit work on the Sabbath.
- b. The Sabbath laws were to restrict work in order to provide rest and time to worship, but there was little Biblical instruction on what was considered "work."
 - i. **Exodus 20:9-11** "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹ "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the 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.
 - ii. **Deuteronomy 5:12-15** 'Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ 'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.
- c. Humanitarian motive behind the Sabbath as well. They were slaves, they know the experience, and now they should not require their servants to work 7 days a week.
 - i. Gathering wood prohibited (Number 15:32-26), carrying a heavy load (Jer. 17:21), buying and selling (Neh. 13:16-19)
 - ii. Because the instruction was scarce on what constitute work, a rule upon rule was added to clarify what was considered work.
 - iii. "The rules about the Sabbath ...are as mountains hanging by a hair, for [teaching of] Scripture [thereon] is scanty and the rules many" (M Hagigah 1:8).
- d. That which was intended to bring freedom and rest, began to be bound up with so many regulations it made a lot of work out of not working.
 - i. Restrictions not just about plowing a field or butchering an animal (that make sense, they are people's livelihoods) to restrictions on tying or loosening a knot, sewing more than one stitch, or writing more than one letter.
- e. When the Jewish religious leaders saw him carrying his pallet (a reed mat that would be rolled up), they confronted him because it fell under their definition of work, although not clearly under the OT definition of work that was prohibited on the Sabbath.
- f. Jewish leaders confront the man

- i. He may be shifting the blame off himself and onto Jesus so he doesn't get in trouble.
 - 1. It works, but he doesn't know Jesus' name.
 - g. Notice again Jesus' grace toward this man.
 - i. He's already healed him although he showed no faith in Christ before or afterward.
 - ii. He seeks him out in the temple and provides caring counsel.
 - 1. Apparently his ailment was related to sin. Not all sickness comes directly from our sin, but sometimes it does.
 - 2. He warns him about something worse to come.
 - a. The "worse thing" could be another illness or, I believe, it is referring to judgment after death.
 - iii. How does the man repay Jesus for His grace? He turns Him in to the Jewish leaders.
 - 1. He knew the Jews wanted to get the guy who was teaching people to violate the Sabbath and he deliberately went back to them and gave them Jesus' name.
 - 2. Have a man who had no faith in Christ before Jesus healed him, the passage doesn't indicate any faith or even gratefulness afterward, and he turned Jesus in to the authorities.
 - 3. "This man was not the stuff of which heroes are made" Leon Morris
 - h. They began to persecute Jesus for doing these things on the Sabbath.
 - i. More than just this one incident – "these things."
 - ii. Notice Jesus' response. It is unlike any of His other responses about Sabbath controversies in the other gospels, although of course those are valid responses also.

3. ***Equality*** with God (5:17-18)

- a. His Father is working and He is working.
 - i. There was discussion in the Jewish community about whether God works on the Sabbath. He rested on the 7th day in Genesis after creating, but what about on the Sabbath after that? If He did stop working, what would happen to the universe? They concluded that He always works – He is working continually. The Sabbath law doesn't apply to God in His sustaining of His universe.
 - ii. He doesn't grow weary and does not need rest.
 - 1. **Isaiah 40:28** Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable.
 - 2. In the same way, Jesus says He is working continually.
 - iii. Follow his argument here – He isn't saying, "God works on the Sabbath, so anyone can." Rather, He is saying, "Because God works on the Sabbath, He can." His Father is continually working and He is continually working.
 - iv. Carter - For Jesus's defense to be valid, all the factors that apply to God must apply to Jesus. Jesus is insisting that whatever factors justify God's continuous work on the Sabbath justify his.
 - v. His continuous upholding of the world by His power is declared in Hebrews 1:3

1. **Hebrews 1:3a** And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.
- b. The Jews understand that Jesus is claiming equality with God.
 - i. His answer did not get Him out of trouble. If that was His goal, He failed. But that wasn't His goal. His goal was accurately declaring who He is.
 - ii. Equality with God is no small thing
 1. **Isaiah 46:5** "To whom would you liken Me And make Me equal and compare Me, That we would be alike?
 2. **Isaiah 46:9** "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me,
 - iii. The rest of the chapter will be His explanation and defense of this statement.
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