

John 5:1-18 Jesus Declares Equality with God

Overall Purpose: Arguably, John wrote this Gospel to evangelize unbelieving Jews who were not living in the Promised Land.

ESV **John 20:30-31** Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; these are written 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.

Key Focus: The key focus of John's Gospel concerns the question, *Who is Jesus?*¹ Related to that key question: *What does it mean to be the Christ? What does it mean to be "the" Son of God?*

Introduction: John 5 dramatically answers the question of Jesus' true identity. In John 5, Jesus declared Himself equal to God. This is a critical issue:

NIV **John 8:24** . . . if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.

Literary Structure: Chapters 5-7 record a shift from skepticism over Jesus' claims, to hardened opposition.²

******One Sabbath day, Jesus healed a lame man. What did Jesus tell the man to do (5:1-9a)?**
After healing him, Jesus told him to take up his bed and walk, 5:4.

Observe: Of all the days of the week, Jesus chose the Sabbath day to perform this healing, and then explicitly instructed the newly healed man to carry his sleeping mat around.

According to 5:3, how many people were lying beside this pool?³ John informs us that a "multitude" of people were lying there.

Of the multitude of invalids by the pool, Jesus why do you suppose Jesus singled out someone who had been crippled for thirty-eight years (5:5-6)? Perhaps it was so that there could be no denying about the reality of the major miracle that was about to happen.

¹ Carson, *John*, 95.

² Carson, *John*, 240.

³ The fact that John informed his readers of the existence of the pool and surrounding colonnades indicates they were not familiar with that part of the world. Also, John used the present tense in describing the colonnades (likely destroyed in the Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70), which suggests that John wrote while they were still standing. Those who hold to a date of writing between A.D. 70 and A.D. 100 point out that John often used the present tense with reference to past events. This is called the "historic present" (Carson, *John*, 82, 241).

Jesus seems to have been asking the obvious with “Do you want to be healed?” (5:6). Why would Jesus ask such a seemingly “dumb” question? One has to begin a conversation with something! The question revealed to the man Jesus purpose in imitating a conversation. Also, He may have asked it to show what was in the man’s heart. (What’s down in the well comes up in the bucket!). It is quite possible that the invalid was a grumpy old man who responded a terse, complaining answer to what he considered to be a stupid question.⁴ (As the narrative progresses, John’s portrayal of this man is not very flattering).

Who can figure out what the grumpy lame man was complaining about in 4:7? He seems to have been complaining that no one would help him into the water, a reference to a local belief that an angel would occasionally stir the water, and the first one in afterwards would be healed. This legend explains why so many invalids were there around this particular pool.⁵

Bible Full of Lies: The Bible is full of lies, did you know that? For example, Satan is the father of lies and the Bible accurately records his words. The Bible does not teach that an angel actually stirred the water; it merely records this man’s belief.

It has been speculated that the pool may have been fed by intermittent springs which caused disturbance.⁶ It is also possible that someone with a psychosomatic disorder recovered after the bubbling of the water, which led to the rumor about it having healing powers.⁷

Review: What did Jesus command the man to do (5:8)? Jesus commanded him to get up, pick up his bedding, and walk around with it.

Power of the Word: God spoke, and the universe came into existence. That speaker was Jesus. Here beside the pool, Jesus spoke again, and immediately the man was healed (5:9a). Further examples of the power of Jesus voice:

ESV John 18:3-6 Judas, having procured a band of soldiers . . . went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus . . . said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth" . . . When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

ESV John 5:25, 28-29 [Jesus speaking] . . . an hour is coming . . . when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live . . . an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

⁴ Carson, *John*, 243.

⁵ In the ESV, there is no verse 4. The numbered text jumps from verse 3 to verse 5. Why it that? The original manuscripts of the Bible did not have numbered verses. The verse numbers were added many years later and are not inspired. Textual criticism is the science of sorting through the 5,000+ hand-copied Greek manuscripts to try to ascertain what the original manuscripts said (there is a about a 10% variance of the total text). What they decided is that verse 4 was originally an uninspired footnote written by a scribe to explain the moving of the waters. Years later, someone else copying his manuscript mistakenly thought the helpful but uninspired footnote was supposed to be part of what John had originally written, but that had been accidentally left out. He decided to “correct” the omission and add it back into the main body of the text. However, in fixing what he thought was an error, the later scribe actually introduced an error.

⁶ Carson, *John*, 242.

⁷ Steven Cole, “Lesson26: The Impotence of Religion, the Power of Christ (John 5:1-16)”, Bible.org. Accessed July 19, 2019.

Salvation Parallel: This man did not have the ability to walk, but along with Jesus' command came the supernatural ability to walk. The impotent man met the omnipotent man. Similarly, we spiritually do not have the ability to come to Jesus (John 6:44), yet along with God's effective call to salvation comes the ability to respond to His call.⁸

ESV **John 6:44** No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

SV **John 6:65** . . . no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

ESV **John 6:37** All that the Father gives me will come to me . . .

Literary Analysis: Nothing Jesus did in healing the man was incidental. Jesus went to a place known for invalids to gather, picked out *one* man to heal who had been lame for over thirty years, then told him to walk around with his bedding. The sovereign initiative was with Jesus.⁹ Jesus had purpose for everything He did.¹⁰ His design was to create a situation wherein He would deliberately confront the religious leadership. Jesus could have healed everyone there, but He didn't. The one man that He did heal did not even believe in Jesus; indeed, as we shall see, the man did not even know who it was who had healed him (5:13a).

******How impressed were "the Jews" that Jesus had healed a man who had been lame for thirty-eight years (5:9b-17)?** They were not impressed at all. Instead, they were upset that it happened on a Sabbath. It is interesting that they did not ask the man who healed him, but rather who told him to carry his matt.¹¹

"The Jews" (5:10): In John's Gospel, "the Jews" often (not always) refers to the Jewish religious leadership.

Spiritually Blind: *Can you image how short-sighted these leaders were?* A major miracle had been done, but ignoring that, they were upset because one of their petty rules had been broken.

It is no wonder that the Jewish people rejected Jesus as Messiah:

ESV **Matthew 15:14** . . . if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.

Synthesis: Jesus recorded this incident with the leaders because it shows their growing and irrational opposition to Jesus.

Timing: The man had been lame for thirty-eight years. Waiting one more day to heal him would not have made any difference. Jesus not only went on the Sabbath to heal him, but then pointedly told him to carry his mat.

⁸ Cole, *Lesson 26*. Theologians talk about the general call of God versus the effective call of God.

⁹ Carson, *John*, 243.

¹⁰ Of all the multitude of invalids there that day, only one was healed. Critics charge that if Jesus were really good, He would have healed all of them. Of course, He did not have to heal any of them. He had a very specific purpose in healing this one.

¹¹ Hendriksen, *John*, 194.

What did the Law of Moses require regarding work on the Sabbath (5:10)? “Sabbath” is transliterated from the original Hebrew word that means “to cease”.¹² In general, the Law of Moses simply prohibited one’s customary employment on the seventh day of the week (Saturday).¹³

ESV Exodus 20:8-10a 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 . . .

Tradition of the Elders: Long after Moses, the Jews came up with a second set of rules designed to specify exactly what Moses meant. These extra-Mosaic rules included not carrying bedding and not healing the sick (5:9b-17). These traditions eventually became more important than the actual commands of Moses:

ESV Matthew 15:3 He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Application: Man-made religion does not save, it enslaves. It is about rules, not relationship (with God). It imposes on people duties and regulations that profit nothing spiritually. It focuses on outward conformity but does nothing for the inward heart condition.

ESV Matthew 23:27-28 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

ESV Colossians 2:21-23 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" . . . These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion . . . but they are of no value . . .

What defense did the healed man offer for carrying his bedding (5:11)? It may be that he rightly concluded that one who had power to heal had authority to tell him to carry his matt, so he simply reported what happened. On the other hand, it may be that he defended himself by blaming the One who healed him (a combination of self-preservation and ingratitude). In essence, he threw Jesus under the bus!

Why didn't the healed man know who had healed him (5:13)? After he was healed, the man probably leaped into the air whooping and hollering. This would have attracted a lot attention that Jesus didn't want, so He quietly slipped away from the crowd. Furthermore, perhaps he was a dull, self-centered and unappreciative man who failed to immediately thank Jesus or seek to learn his identity.

Why do you suppose the presence of a crowd caused Jesus to withdraw (5:13)? See 2:23-25. He was not looking for the type of publicity that the healing would bring. It may also have been a type of psychological warfare designed to baffle/puzzle/awe the Jewish leaders as they puzzled over who it could have been who healed the man.

¹² “Shabbat”, en.m.wikipedia.org. Accessed July 22, 2019.

¹³ Carson, *John*, 244.

Why did Jesus later seek out this healed man (5:14)? On one level, it was to warn him not to sin. On a deeper level, it may have been to intentionally provide information that led to a confrontation with the Jewish leadership.

Jesus did not seek out other people that He healed and warn them not to sin. What can we conclude about the man's spiritual condition based on the warning that Jesus gave him (5:14)? This man likely had a continuing sin problem.

ESV **Matthew 10:28** . . . do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

What might we deduce from 5:14 about the cause of the man's lameness? Based on what Jesus said, there may have been a direct cause and effect relationship between past sin and being lame. For example, perhaps he sinned by getting drunk and was paralyzed when he fell off a roof.

Sin & Sickness (5:14): In the case of this man, it seems likely that past sinful actions led directly to his injury. For example, sexual promiscuity can lead to venereal diseases. All sickness is the result of sin. However, it would be a mistake to conclude from 5:14 that all sickness is the result of personal sin in our own lives. It could be caused by someone else's sin (such as being hurt by a drunk driver). Furthermore, the world is under a curse. Most death and sickness is the result of Adam's sin.

In 5:15, how did the healed man respond to Jesus' warning (5:14)? He turned Jesus in to the religious police! There was no separation of church and state in ancient Judea. The religious leaders had a police force to force compliance.

Why do you think he turned Jesus in to the authorities (5:15)? Unless he was truly stupid, he must have known that reporting the information to the Jews would get Jesus in trouble. Indeed, the man may have been trying to ingratiate himself to them.¹⁴ He was an informant! That Jesus had to warn him about sinning suggests he was not above sinning with regard to betraying Jesus. This guy was sort of a Judas.

ESV **Hebrews 3:12** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

According to 5:16, why were the Jewish leaders persecuting Jesus? They persecuted Him because He was healing on the Sabbath. Moses did not prohibit healing on the Sabbath, but their own, man-made tradition prohibited it.

ESV **Matthew 15:3** [Jesus] . . . why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?

¹⁴ Carson, *John*, 245.

How did Jesus justify His actions (5:17)? He said He was working just as His Father was working.

In what sense did God work on the Sabbath (5:17)? The consensus of first-century rabbis was that God did work on the Sabbath in the sense of holding the universe together.¹⁵

Jesus presented Himself as “the” Son of God. Furthermore, as the One who created the Sabbath, Jesus knew what did, and did not, constitute the type of work Moses was prohibited.

ESV **Matthew 12:8** . . . the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.

Why is it significant that Jesus said “my” Father rather than “our” Father (5:17)? A Jew of that day might refer to God as “our” Father, but never as “my” Father. Similarly, one might say he was a son of God, but never the son of God.¹⁶ To say God was “my” Father would be to claim too special a relationship with God; it was to claim to be equal with God.

******Why did Jesus’ answer cause them to plot to kill Him (5:18)?** Two things caused them to seek a way to kill Jesus: **1)** He was breaking their interpretation of the Sabbath, and worst yet, **2)** He was claiming to be equal with God.

ESV **Isaiah 46:5** To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?

ESV **John 1:1-3** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

ESV **John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .

ESV **John 1:18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

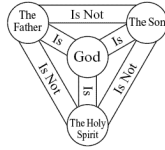
ESV **John 10:32-33** Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."

ESV **John 20:28** Thomas answered him [Jesus], "My Lord and my God!"

Christology: Jesus is equal with God the Father but He is not the Father. Neither is Jesus a second god. Rather, there is one God who exists in three distinct Persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). The Son of God is God the Son, and although equal with the Father, He voluntarily submits to the Father’s leadership.

¹⁵ Dennis & Grudem, *Study Bible*, 2031.

¹⁶ The Son of God became the Son of Man, so that the sons of men might become sons of God.



So What?

Why did John record this healing of the lame man? What point did he want to make to the unbelieving Jews who originally read this? A key question of John's Gospel concerns who the true identity of Jesus. This healing showed Jesus authority over the Sabbath and His relation to the Father: that of equality. Jesus is God in human form.

Synthesis: What did He want from his original Jewish readers? He wanted them to believe. Jesus recorded this incident with the leaders because it shows their growing and irrational opposition to Jesus. John does not want his readers to make the same mistake.

Lord, Liar or Lunatic? It has often been pointed out that Jesus is either **1)** who He claimed to be (God), or **2)** he was crazy, or **3)** He was an evil liar intent on misleading people for his own nefarious purposes

Application: Christ's amazing claims to be God demand that we honor Him as God and submit to Him as Lord.¹⁷

NIV John 8:24 . . . if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.

What secondary applications does the healing of the lame man hold for those who already believe in Jesus?

1) Bad Church Leadership: As in Jesus' day, the biggest problem in many churches is the leadership. Too many church leaders are wolves in sheep's clothing. Some are like Judas who stole from the common purse and betrayed Jesus for a price; they are attracted to old, established churches with large endowments for the salary and easy lifestyle it offers. Others truly do not understand the Gospel or the things of the Lord; they are blind guides; they are religious but do not have the true righteousness from God. Prosperity preachers are in for the money. Some are sexual predators (such as homosexual Catholic priests).

2) Rotten Religious Ritual: Man-made religious traditions will not save anyone. What matters is a super-natural change of heart that can only come from Jesus through His grace. Christianity is about a true relationship with God, not religious ritual. It has been opined that often, the more formal and liturgical a church is, the less of a true relationship with God the people have.

¹⁷ Steven Cole, "Lesson 27: Is Jesus Christ Crazy or Is He God? (John 5:17-23)". Accessed July 19, 2019.

3) Thoughts on Divine Healing:

- a) Jesus had the ability to heal everyone there, but he by-passed the multitude of handicapped people and focused on one man. It simply is not God's will that everyone who gets sick be healed.
- b) It is sometimes claimed that God wants to heal everyone, but won't due to the sick person's lack of faith. No faith was required on the part of the man that Jesus healed here—the man didn't even know who Jesus was until later (5:13). Jesus simply commanded him to arise and walk. The
- c) Jesus chose to heal the lame man for purposes far bigger than the lame man's benefit. The healing wasn't about the lame man; it was about God's cosmic plan.
- d) The healing of this one man out of a multitude has a parallel in being healed from sin:

ESV **Romans 3:11b** . . . no one seeks for God.

ESV **Luke 10:22** . . . no one knows who . . . the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

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

- 4) **Sabbath Observance:** Sabbath observance was the sign of the Sinai covenant (alias the "old" covenant) that was made between Jehovah and ancient Israel (Exodus 31:13). The Sinai covenant became obsolete with the start of the new covenant that was made between Jesus and the church (Hebrews 8:13). Christians are not obligated to keep the sign of a covenant that **1)** is obsolete and **2)** was between God and the ancient Israelites (most Christians are not ethnic Hebrews).

**** = Ask this question before reading the text. This will engage people's minds and focus their attention.

You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.com/NTRF.

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