

John 5:1-18

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[0 : 00] To turn with me to John's Gospel, chapter 5. John's Gospel, chapter 5. If you've got a church Bible, that's on page 890. John chapter 5 begins a new section.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 10. Those first four chapters have all been about newness, haven't they? What Jesus brings, you remember, in eternal life.

That Jesus is not just shuffling things around, the things of our lives. He's not raising what is natural to a new level. Jesus brings an entirely new life.

Jesus brings a different kind of existence. He changes water into wine at a wedding. He offers Nicodemus, that religious leader, new life. He gives to the woman at the well, living water that satisfies.

And that's what Jesus has come to bring. But from chapter 5, there's a switch from newness to the work of God. There are signs and miracles throughout this section.

[1 : 13] And after each miracle, Jesus gives an explanation of what he's doing. Just in case you miss it. And so here as we begin this section in chapter 5, Jesus returns to Jerusalem, the capital city.

Where he performs a remarkable healing on the Sabbath day. And Jesus walks headlong into a storm of controversy. He doesn't seek to avoid it, which is very interesting.

He seems to be deliberately provoking a fight. Deliberately provoking the religious authorities of his day. So much so that by the time you come to the end of our section this morning, in verse 18, can you see?

The Jews were seeking to kill him. There are three moments in this passage. Three disconcerting but wonderful moments.

Each moment is wonderful and yet deeply uncomfortable. Each of these three truths are beautiful yet unsettling, comforting and alarming. The first is a challenging question.

[2 : 20] Can you see it in verse 4? What's the challenging question there? Jesus goes to a man who is severely disabled. And he says to him, Do you want to be healed?

Do you want to literally be made whole? He goes to a disabled man who's been wanting to get well for 38 years.

And he says, Do you want to be healed? I was recently, a few months ago, in that massive DIY place on the A40 B&Q.;

Do you know it? Other DIY outlets are available. But those places, they're like aircraft hangars, aren't they? And I was looking for some light bulbs, a specific light bulb.

And I walked into the store and I walked round and round, down each aisle, getting quicker, looking on each shelf. And I just couldn't find the lighting section or any lights.

[3 : 25] I went round again, but I couldn't find it. So I waited in line at the customer service counter. And I stepped up to the counter and I asked the young woman, Do you sell lights?

She gave me a very strange look. Her eyebrows lifted. And she pointed behind herself and there were three 20 foot shelves of lights.

With a neon light at the top saying, Lighting specialists. So obvious, isn't it? Surely, it's really obvious, isn't it?

This guy who Jesus speaks to, the one thing that the guy wants is to be healed. Why does Jesus ask him this question? It's feast time in Jerusalem. The city is full and jam-packed.

And where does Jesus go? Jesus goes right to the inner city. He goes to the place, really, of degradation and desperate need. It's the kind of place where all tourists are warned on websites, Don't go there.

[4 : 33] You don't need much imagination to imagine that there would be hundreds and hundreds of people there. History books tell us that this pool was actually a pool of raw sewage and deep suffering.

The disabled were there. Invalids. The poor, the blind, the lame, the paralysed. All of them beyond help. All of them desperate.

And Jesus chooses one man. And he goes to this one man. And just as he saw in chapter 1 into Nathaniel's heart, he knew Nathaniel. And he knew Nicodemus in chapter 3.

And he knew the heart of the woman at the well in chapter 4. And just like he knows your heart and my heart, he knows the heart of this man. He sees that he's been disabled for 38 years.

Which was about the average lifespan. He knows his life has been reduced to begging. There's no hope of cure. He's been there for such a long time.

[5 : 37] And Jesus walks up to him in the middle of terrible need. And he says to him, do you want to be healed? Do you want to be made whole? I mean, is there anything else that he would have wanted?

And this fellow's answer to the next sentence is not very promising. It's kind of odd, isn't it? He's lying beside the pool because of some kind of superstition.

This idea that when the waters rumbled, when they got churned up, the first one into the water gets healed. And so the man complains to Jesus and he says, I'm all alone.

I'm all alone here. I've got no one else to push me into the pool. And when it gets stirred up every time someone gets in first, he's completely missed Jesus' question. He's completely missed Jesus' request.

And he's doing exactly what all of us do. Because Jesus comes to us in our need and we limit Jesus to the solution that we think we need.

[6 : 43] We often don't have any inkling that what Jesus is willing and able to do for us is something utterly impossible for us.

This guy has been lying by the water for years. He can't see past the water. His hope and his focus, they're on the pool, on the pool, on the pool.

And he wants Jesus to help him throw it in next time it gets stirred up. But when Jesus comes to us, the word of Jesus comes to us and he is calling us to something far bigger, far more almost unimaginable, far more challenging that we can imagine.

And we think Jesus' purpose is to help us to get into the water so that we can get on with life as usual. Jesus, give me a nudge into the water, will you? Let me get the thing that I want.

I don't want you to disturb my equilibrium. But what we'll see in this passage as we go on is what Jesus wants and what Jesus gives is beyond belief.

[7 : 59] And it's lovely. Because at the end of that paragraph, in his kindness and goodness, Jesus completely ignores this self-focused and clueless response.

And he simply says to the guy, get up, take your mat and walk. And he does so at once.

And I don't want you to miss this. Jesus says, get up. Jesus says it. And the guy does it. And it is completely, humanly, impossible and unimaginable.

And inconceivable. 38 years he's been lying there. Think about it. What has happened to his muscles? His tendons.

They've gone hard, haven't they? They've atrophied. His bones will have gone into different shape. His lungs, his knees, his ankles. But the man doesn't need any physiotherapy.

[9 : 15] Just the simple command of God the Creator. Jesus doesn't invoke the name of God. There's no water involved. It's a simple command.

And the magnificent, sovereign grace of God. And Jesus finds him unasked. And he heals him unasked with a single command.

And the physical healing is unasked for. But if you ask yourself, why did Jesus ask that strange question?

And we've not got to the bottom of it. You're right. So we need to go on to the next section. Because there's a second very challenging thing. And it's not just a challenging question this time.

But there's a challenging command. Which is this, isn't it? Afterwards, Jesus found him in the temple. And said to him, See, you are well.

[10 : 12] Sin no more. There's the command. Sin no more. Stop sinning. That nothing worse may happen to you. There's no gratitude from this guy towards Jesus.

me a telephone number I don't want to be completely out of touch it's too hard for me to think about never again being untruthful or unfaithful or cruel I want you gone but not forever it's what's called cheap grace it's thinking I can have the blessing of eternal life thinking I can have what Christ offers but continuing to live as I want and new life new life means I can't go on as before if God is saving me and delivering me from evil and sin now that will have an effect but if God is not and is not healing me and not delivering me from sin now I've got no confidence he will save me in the end so what is the work that we so desperately need that Jesus comes to bring and we need to move to the third searching question the searching issue we've moved from the searching question to the searching command and now we've got this challenging and searching claim it's in the last line look at verse 17 Jesus answered them my father is working until now and I am working

Jesus actions have been deliberate did you notice when he chose to heal this man he chose to heal this man on the sabbath day he didn't have to he could have waited 24 hours no controversy he said to the guy take up your mat the guy didn't actually need to take up his mat did he could have just broken up could have just walked off of course picking up your sick mat is not breaking the old testament law but it was breaking the kind of presbyterian tradition of the time it was breaking the kind of religious polices interpretation of the law now why does Jesus escalate this conflict and we'll see very quickly that Jesus wants to reveal that he is the son of God and that he is working the work of God because when the authorities confront Jesus for what he's doing look what Jesus does he draws a line between God and humanity and he places himself on the God's side of the line do you see that phrase that my father is working up until now and I am working what's the response look at verse 18 with me they grasp it don't they this is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because not only was he breaking the sabbath in their view but he was even calling God his own father making himself equal with God they grasped exactly what he meant but they refused it as a remote possibility it was better to kill Jesus than to accept his claim of course the sabbath day is a big deal for the Jewish people the sabbath day goes back to the very creation of the world it's the Christian view as well but the sabbath was built into this very nature of reality and the sabbath day is part of our self-identity as the people of God so you remember the start of the bible God created the world in six days and then he took one day and he rested on the sabbath day he rested from all the work that he'd done in creation and the Hebrew word for rest is shabbat it is sabbath it's not that God was tired after six days

God is not weary God does not need a break to recharge like you and I do no it's not like that God doesn't get to a Saturday evening and think oh it's so hard rest in the biblical view is stopping one kind of activity for a different kind and so God stops the creating of the world and he enters into the perfect enjoyment of it and the pleasure of it and the delight of it the delight of all that he has created that is what the sabbath is for he stops creating and now he starts delighting in a world with no defect and no defilement he walks with men and women in the cool of the day in the garden and in the greatest disaster in history do you remember what takes place in the garden?

[22 : 00] the man and the woman they refuse the word of God they reject the authority of God and they ruin the garden and that is where sin and evil and death and suffering enter into our world staining our lives with sin and shame spoiling the perfection of creation and opening the door to selfishness and cruelty and hatred and violence and decay and death but right there in the garden God commits himself to his second great work not a work of creation but a work of recreation and he commits himself to the work of restoration and of renewal and redemption and he promises that he will restore this creation and he will redeem men and women and boys and girls to share his life to share his joy to enter into his rest he will re-establish paradise where he will live with his people but to do that

God has to deal with the evil and the sin that has entered into our world and to deal with all the sin and evil that is in you and I which means he not only has to pay for it on the cross but he then has to begin a work where he eliminates sin from our hearts and that is why Jesus not only heals the guy's body but he addresses his inner life he addresses his heart and that's a far more difficult thing to heal isn't it that is why that first question do you want to be made whole is so searching and that is why the command sin no more go together because Jesus must both raise us up to new life and remove our sin and he says to us this morning as he said to this man do you want to be made whole sin no more and you listen to me as I say that and as I say it we think that is impossible and it is impossible unless

God the Father is working and Jesus you are working still this is the second great work of God this is why Jesus has come this is why he is the Lamb of God it's why he is the Word of God the Bread of Life and this is his work of restoration and it has an end date it is a temporary work because we are told later on in the New Testament that this world will one day be replaced with a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell and the garden will be transformed and the water of the river of life will flow through that place from the throne and on both sides of that river the tree of life will constantly bear fruit it will be Eden restored and reimagined and at the heart of that new world is face to face fellowship between God his son and the great number of those who have been redeemed from every tribe and tongue and nation whom God has eradicated all sin and evil whose lives have been cleansed and they have been given new hearts and so you see when Jesus says to these authorities my father has been working and I am working still he's not trying to calm them down he's raising the stakes it's an astonishing claim he's saying

I'm not breaking your rules about the Sabbath your do's and your don'ts who do you think I am? I am God what God does I do what God says I say what I do God does I'm working in tandem with God to bring about this great purpose of redemption I am the Lord of the Sabbath I am the one that the Sabbath was made for I am the one who gives life to the dead I'm the one who takes away sin I'm the one who determines how the Sabbath should be used and it drives the Jewish authorities crazy we'll look at it next week but just look how Jesus ramps it up let me read to you from verse 21 for as the father raises the dead and gives them life so also the son gives life to whom he will the father judges no one but has given all judgment to the son that all may honour the son just as they honour the father whoever does not honour the son does not honour the father who sent him this is the challenge of Jesus' claim he is the one who is put forward to do the work of redemption he raises the dead he judges the living and the dead he is the one who gives life and salvation and God has handed all judgment to him and so the question Jesus asks on that day to that man he still asks to us do you want to be made whole?

do you want it? and it's a question that only your heart can answer and then he commands us sin no more and both of those things are impossible unless Jesus continues his work with us in us it's a lifelong process with the same sovereign power and the same sovereign God that Jesus continues to work in us day by day through his goodness and to trust Christ so trust Christ to continue his work in your life and in the lives of those around us to bring us to that place of rest as we come to the Lord's table this morning Jesus asks us that question he asks us do you want to be made whole?

[28 : 59] and to come to the Lord's table and to eat of the bread and drink of the wine is to say yes Jesus I do to receive him to trust him to come to him again and again as we receive his word and the bread and wine at the table it is saying yes to Jesus Jesus says sin no more and we come to the table and we say Lord Jesus I know I will fail and I know I will stumble but I know you will continue to forgive me but I wish I so wish that I could never sin again I wish I could never sin again and at this table Jesus meets us and he enables us to grow in obedience and likeness to him and this table this bread and wine is a foretaste it is a taster of that desire of every believer that will come in fulfilment when we will be saved to sin no more and so as the bread and the wine are passed to you this morning hear the question of Jesus do you want to be made whole?

go and sin no more but