

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: Healed on the Sabbath: The Authority of the Son

John 5:1–47

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 5 is a turning point in the Gospel and one of the most important chapters for the deity of Christ. After healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus defends Himself in a way that the leaders rightly understood as a claim to equality with God (v. 18). The rest of the chapter is an extended self-revelation in which Jesus claims to do what only God can do, give life, execute judgment, raise the dead, and to be honored exactly as the Father is honored. He then summons four witnesses (John the Baptist, His works, the Father, and the Scriptures) to establish His identity. The teacher must be ready to handle this with confidence, for the chapter leaves no room to regard Jesus as merely a good teacher; He is either the divine Son He claims to be or a blasphemer. The heaviest doctrinal block belongs at Question 9.

At the same time, the chapter is deeply formational. It opens with a probing question, “Do you want to be healed?”, that exposes how we settle into brokenness and fix our eyes on obstacles rather than on Christ. It warns against a religion of rule-keeping that loses the heart of God. And it calls those who receive grace to “sin no more.” The teacher should let the chapter both raise the students’ view of Christ and search their own hearts.

So aim at both: a firm grasp of Jesus’ full deity and divine authority, and a heart willing to be healed, to honor Him, and to follow His call. The disciple we are forming bows to the Son as God and trusts His authority over every part of life.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus healed a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years simply by His word (vv. 6–9). What does this healing reveal about Jesus’ power and His compassion for those whom others overlook?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The healing at Bethesda displays both Jesus’ power and His compassion. He approaches a man who has been disabled for thirty-eight years, longer than many people then lived, and who has no one to help him into the pool. Jesus heals him with a word: “Get up, take up your bed, and walk” (v. 8).

Stress the compassion. Of all the multitude of sick people at the pool (v. 3), Jesus singles out this one forgotten, helpless man. No one was helping him; everyone else got there first. Jesus' eye falls on the overlooked. This reveals the heart of God toward those the world passes by.

Stress the power. There is no ritual, no stirring of the water, no struggle. Jesus speaks, and thirty-eight years of paralysis end instantly. This is the same creative authority John has been showing us, the word of Christ that commands reality.

Apply it to the students. The God we serve sees the people others forget and has power to do what no one else can. This both comforts those who feel overlooked and calls us to notice the overlooked as Jesus did. His compassion and His power belong together.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' creative power to heal by His word (John 5:8).
- Christ's compassion for the overlooked and helpless.
- The heart of God toward those the world passes by.
- Power and compassion united in the Son.

Discussion Prompts

- What does this healing reveal about Jesus' power and His heart?
- Why does it matter that He chose the most helpless man at the pool?
- Who are the overlooked people Christ may be calling you to notice?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus asked the man, "Do you want to be healed?" (v. 6). Honestly, are there areas where you say you want to change but have quietly made peace with staying the same? What is one of them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the startling question Jesus asked: "Do you want to be healed?" (v. 6). It is not as obvious as it sounds. After thirty-eight years, the man's identity, routine, and excuses were all built around his condition. Healing would change everything.

Help students see how we make peace with what God wants to change. Long-standing sins, resentments, fears, and habits can become strangely comfortable. We complain about them, yet we also protect them, because change is costly and frightening. The man answered Jesus not with "yes" but with an excuse.

Invite honest reflection. Where do students say they want to change but have quietly settled for staying the same? A besetting sin, a broken relationship, an unhealthy pattern, a spiritual

coldness. The first step toward healing is wanting it more than we want the comfort of the familiar.

Then point to hope. Jesus did not wait for the man to muster perfect resolve; He spoke, and the man obeyed and was healed. Christ meets our weak and divided wills with His power. Ask each student to name one area where they have made peace with staying the same, and to bring it honestly to Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The human tendency to settle into and protect our brokenness.
- The cost and fear that can accompany real change.
- Wanting healing as part of cooperating with Christ's work.
- Christ meeting our weak and divided wills with His power.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you say you want change but have settled for staying the same?
- Why is real change sometimes frightening even when we long for it?
- What is one area you will bring honestly to Christ this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

The leaders were more concerned that the man carried his mat on the Sabbath than that he was healed (vv. 9–12). How can religious rule-keeping become a substitute for the mercy and heart of God, and how does Jesus correct that distortion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The leaders' reaction is jarring: faced with a man healed after thirty-eight years, they object that he is carrying his mat on the Sabbath (vv. 10–12). They had buried the mercy of God under their own additions to the law. The Sabbath, meant as a gift, had become a weapon.

Help students see how rule-keeping can replace the heart of God. Religion can subtly shift from loving God and people to defending our standards and traditions. When that happens, we can be scrupulous about rules while missing mercy, justice, and love, the very things God cares about most (compare Matthew 23:23).

Show how Jesus corrects the distortion. He does not despise God's law, but He refuses to let human additions to it crush a suffering person. He insists that mercy and the work of God belong on the Sabbath. The leaders' problem was not too much devotion to God but devotion that had lost God's heart.

Apply it carefully. The point is not that rules do not matter, but that rules divorced from the heart of God become cruel and self-righteous. Help students examine where they may value being right or keeping standards over showing the mercy and love of Christ. True obedience is never opposed to mercy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of rule-keeping that loses the heart and mercy of God (Matthew 23:23).
- Human traditions distorting God's good law.
- Jesus upholding both true obedience and mercy.
- Self-righteousness as a subtle substitute for love.

Discussion Prompts

- How can rule-keeping become a substitute for the heart of God?
- Where might you value being right over showing mercy?
- How does Jesus correct this distortion?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus later warned the healed man, "Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you" (v. 14). What does this teach about the call that follows God's grace, and where is Jesus calling you to "sin no more"?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Later Jesus finds the healed man and says, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you" (v. 14). Grace came first, the healing, freely given, and then came the call to a changed life. The order matters.

Help students see the relationship between grace and the call that follows. Jesus does not heal the man because he cleaned up his life; He heals him freely. But grace is not the end of the story; it summons a response. Having received mercy, the man is called to leave sin behind. This is the consistent pattern of the gospel: grace received, then lives transformed (Titus 2:11-12).

Guard against two errors. Do not turn "sin no more" into earning grace; the healing came first. But do not treat grace as license either; Jesus clearly calls the man to stop sinning. Grace and the call to holiness belong together, never in competition.

Apply it personally. Where is Jesus saying "sin no more" to each student? Grace has been given; now there is a specific sin to leave behind. Ask each to name one area where, in gratitude for grace, they will turn from sin this week. The warning, "that nothing worse may happen," reminds us that sin has real consequences and that Christ's call is for our good.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grace given freely, followed by the call to a changed life (Titus 2:11–12).
- “Sin no more” as the response to grace, not the price of it.
- Guarding against both legalism and license.
- The real consequences of continuing in sin.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the order of healing then “sin no more” teach about grace?
- Where is Jesus calling you to “sin no more”?
- How is turning from sin an expression of gratitude rather than earning?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus said, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (v. 17), and the leaders understood He was “making himself equal with God” (v. 18). What exactly was Jesus claiming, and why is it important that the leaders understood Him correctly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When challenged for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus says, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (v. 17). John tells us exactly how the leaders heard it: “this was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because... he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (v. 18).

Be clear about what Jesus claimed. By calling God His own Father in this unique sense and by claiming the right to work on the Sabbath as the Father works, Jesus was claiming a unique relationship and equality with God. He was placing His own activity on the level of God’s. The leaders did not misunderstand; they understood all too well.

Stress that the leaders’ interpretation was correct, and Jesus did not correct it. If Jesus had merely meant He was a good teacher or a special prophet, this was the moment to clarify and defuse the charge. Instead, He spends the rest of the chapter expanding the claim. He accepts that He is making Himself equal with God because it is true.

Apply it to the common modern claim that Jesus never said He was divine. This passage refutes it directly. Jesus’ contemporaries, who shared His language and culture, understood Him to be claiming equality with God, and He confirmed it. Help students see that the deity of Christ is not a later church invention but the plain claim of Jesus that got Him killed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus’ claim to a unique relationship with the Father and equality with God (John 5:17–18).

- The leaders' correct understanding, which Jesus confirmed rather than denied.
- A direct refutation of the claim that Jesus never claimed deity.
- The deity of Christ as the claim that provoked deadly opposition.

Discussion Prompts

- What exactly was Jesus claiming in verse 17?
- Why is it significant that the leaders understood Him correctly?
- How does this passage answer the claim that Jesus never said He was divine?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus said, "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (v. 19). What does the Son's perfect dependence on the Father teach you about how to live your own life before God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up a beautiful truth: "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (v. 19). Even as Jesus claims equality with God, He lives in perfect dependence on and submission to the Father. Deity and dependence are not in conflict in Him.

Help students learn from the Son's dependence. If the eternal Son lived in constant attentiveness to the Father, doing what He saw the Father doing, how much more should we. The pattern of the Christian life is not self-directed activity but watching for the Father's leading and joining His work.

Draw out the practical shape of this. It looks like prayerful dependence rather than self-reliance, like asking what God is doing rather than charging ahead with our own plans, like a life lived in step with the Father rather than running on our own steam. The Son's example dignifies dependence as the way of true life, not weakness.

Apply it concretely. Where are students living independently of the Father, leaning on their own strength and wisdom? Ask each to name one area where they will practice the Son's posture this week, seeking the Father's direction and joining what He is doing rather than acting on their own accord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Son's perfect dependence on and submission to the Father (John 5:19).
- Dependence as the way of true life, not weakness.
- The Christian pattern of joining the Father's work rather than self-directed activity.
- Prayerful reliance over self-reliance.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the Son's dependence on the Father teach you?
- Where are you living in self-reliance rather than dependence on God?
- How could you practice the Son's posture this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus claimed authority to give life and to execute judgment, saying all should "honor the Son, just as they honor the Father" (vv. 21-23). What does it mean that the Son must be honored exactly as the Father is, and what does this say about the deity of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus claims staggering divine prerogatives: "as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will" (v. 21), and the Father "has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father" (vv. 22-23). Giving life and judging the world are works of God alone, and Jesus claims both.

Focus on verse 23: all should "honor the Son, just as they honor the Father." This is a remarkable demand. In a strictly monotheistic faith, to require that the Son be honored exactly as God is honored is to claim full deity. Jesus even adds that "whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father." There is no honoring God while bypassing Jesus.

Draw out the implications for worship and devotion. We do not honor Jesus as a great man among others; we honor Him as we honor God, with worship, trust, and obedience. Any religion that respects the Father but not the Son, or treats Jesus as less than fully divine, fails to honor God at all, by Jesus' own words.

Apply it to the students. This both refutes views that diminish Christ and shapes our devotion. To honor the Son as the Father demands a wholehearted worship of Jesus. Ask students whether their actual reverence for Christ matches the honor He claims here, and how their worship and obedience might rise to it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Son's authority to give life and to judge, works of God alone (John 5:21-22).
- The command to honor the Son exactly as the Father is honored (John 5:23).
- The impossibility of honoring God while dishonoring Christ.
- Full deity as the ground of the worship due to Jesus.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to honor the Son just as we honor the Father?

- How does this verse establish the deity of Christ?
- Does your reverence for Christ match the honor He claims here?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus said, “whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life” and “has passed from death to life” (v. 24). How does it change the way you live today to know that, in Christ, you have already passed from death to life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up a precious promise: “whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (v. 24). Note the tense: “has passed.” For the one who truly believes, the decisive move from death to life has already happened.

Help students grasp the present reality. Eternal life is not only a future hope; it is a present possession for those who truly hear and believe. The believer is already on the other side of the great divide, already alive in Christ, already secure from condemnation. This is enormous comfort.

Keep the nature of saving faith in view. The believing Jesus describes is the living, obedient faith the whole Gospel calls for, not bare assent. To such faith, the promise stands: passed from death to life, here and now.

Apply it to daily living. How would today look different if students truly believed they had already passed from death to life? It would loosen the grip of fear, including the fear of death; it would free them from striving to earn what is already given; it would fill ordinary days with the dignity of resurrection life already begun. Ask each student where this truth most needs to take hold.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Eternal life as a present possession for those who truly believe (John 5:24).
- Having already “passed from death to life” in Christ.
- Saving faith as living and obedient, not mere assent.
- The freedom from fear and striving this assurance brings.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change today to know you have passed from death to life?
- Where does the fear of death or of condemnation still grip you?
- How might resurrection life already begun reshape your ordinary days?

Question 9

Student Question:

This is the heaviest claim in the chapter: Jesus says He will raise the dead, that all will hear His voice and come out of their tombs, some “to the resurrection of life” and some “to the resurrection of judgment” (vv. 25–29), and He calls four witnesses to confirm who He is (vv. 31–47). How do these claims and witnesses together establish the full deity and divine authority of Jesus, and why is there no room to regard Him merely as a good teacher?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, gathering the climax of Jesus’ self-defense. He claims to be the one whose voice will raise the dead: “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” (vv. 28–29). Raising the dead and judging all people are works of God alone, and Jesus claims both.

Then walk through the four witnesses Jesus summons, since He knows His own testimony alone would be challenged (vv. 31–47). First, John the Baptist, “a burning and shining lamp,” who bore witness to the truth (vv. 33–35). Second, His own works, the signs the Father gave Him to accomplish, which testify that the Father sent Him (v. 36). Third, the Father Himself, who bears witness to the Son (vv. 37–38). Fourth, the Scriptures, which “bear witness about me,” and Moses, who wrote of Him (vv. 39, 46). The case is overwhelming and many-sided.

Draw the conclusion that the chapter forces. Jesus claims to give life to whom He will, to judge the world, to raise the dead, and to be honored exactly as God. These are not the claims of a humble moral teacher; they are either the truth about a divine Son or the ravings of a blasphemer. There is no comfortable middle category of “good teacher” available. A merely good man does not say these things; either Jesus is God the Son, or He is profoundly deluded or dishonest. The witnesses are given so that we may rightly conclude the former.

Bring it home. Jesus turns the trial around: His accusers, who searched the Scriptures, would not come to Him for life (vv. 39–40), and Moses, in whom they trusted, would accuse them (v. 45). The same Scriptures and witnesses that convicted them confront us. The honest response to such overwhelming testimony is not neutral admiration but faith and worship. Help students feel the weight: to meet the Jesus of John 5 is to be summoned to a verdict.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus’ claim to raise the dead and judge all people, works of God alone (John 5:25–29).
- The four witnesses to Jesus’ identity: John, His works, the Father, the Scriptures (John 5:31–47).
- The deity and divine authority of Christ established by overwhelming testimony.
- The impossibility of regarding Jesus as merely a good teacher in light of His claims.

- The Scriptures and Moses as witnesses pointing to Christ (John 5:39, 46).
- The call to a verdict of faith and worship rather than neutral admiration.

Discussion Prompts

- How do Jesus' claims and His four witnesses together establish His deity?
- Why is there no room to regard Jesus as merely a good teacher?
- How should the weight of this testimony shape our response to Him?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this chapter, from a forgotten man by a pool to the Son who gives life and judges the world. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to honor Him as the divine Son and to trust His authority over your life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question asks students to take in the whole movement of the chapter, from a forgotten man by a pool to the Son who gives life and judges the world, and to respond. The aim is honor and trust: to recognize Jesus as the divine Son and to submit our lives to His authority.

Help students connect the high doctrine to daily life. If Jesus is who He claims to be in this chapter, then He has the right to direct everything, our decisions, our relationships, our fears, our future. Honoring the Son is not merely affirming His deity in the abstract but yielding our actual lives to Him.

Make it concrete. Ask each student to name one specific way they will honor Christ as the divine Son this week, perhaps by surrendering an area to His authority, by trusting His judgment over their own, by worshipping Him more wholeheartedly, or by responding to the question "Do you want to be healed?" with a genuine yes.

Close by holding together the two halves of the chapter: the tender compassion that stoops to a forgotten man, and the awesome authority of the One who raises the dead. The same Christ who has all authority is the One who notices the overlooked and asks if we want to be made well. To honor Him is to trust both His power and His heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honoring Christ as the divine Son in the concrete details of life.
- Submission to Christ's authority over every area.
- Holding together Christ's compassion and His authority.
- Specific, personal formation as the goal of the lesson.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one way you will honor Christ as the divine Son this week?
- Which area of your life most needs to come under His authority?
- How do Christ's compassion and authority together call for your trust?