

The Gospel of John

Lesson 8: Healed on the Sabbath: The Authority of the Son -- John 5:1-47

For thirty-eight years he has been lying by this pool. Thirty-eight years is longer than many people in that day lived at all. The pool of Bethesda is surrounded by a crowd of the broken, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed, all of them waiting for the water to stir, all of them believing that the first one in when it moved would be healed. And this man cannot be first. He has no one to help him, and someone always beats him to it. Year after year after year, he watches his chance ripple and vanish. He has stopped expecting anything. And then a stranger stops in front of him and asks the strangest question: "Do you want to be healed?"

It almost sounds cruel until you realize how many of us have grown so used to our brokenness that we have made peace with it. The man does not even answer the question. He just explains, wearily, why it can never happen for him. No one to help. Always too late. And Jesus, without water, without ceremony, simply says, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And the man who had not walked in thirty-eight years stands up, rolls up his mat, and walks. Just like that. The One who spoke creation into being speaks strength into withered legs.

But here is where the story takes its dangerous turn. It is the Sabbath. And the religious leaders, instead of rejoicing that a man who suffered for nearly four decades can finally walk, are scandalized that he is carrying his mat on the holy day. They have buried the mercy of God under a mountain of their own rules. And when Jesus defends what He has done by saying, "My Father is working until now, and I am working," they understand exactly what He is claiming, and it enrages them. He is calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. From this point on, they are not just annoyed with Jesus. They want Him dead.

What follows is one of the most stunning self-revelations in all the Gospels. Jesus does not back down. He stands before His accusers and claims to do what only God can do: to give life to whom He will, to judge the world, to be honored exactly as the Father is honored, to raise the dead. And then He calls four witnesses to back up the claim, John the Baptist, His own works, the Father Himself, and the Scriptures. This chapter is Jesus on trial, and it ends with Him turning the tables and putting His accusers on trial instead. Read it slowly, because by the end you will not be able to think of Jesus as merely a good teacher. He is either telling the truth about being the divine Son, or He is the most blasphemous man who ever lived. There is no middle ground.

Group Discussion: Jesus asked the paralyzed man, "Do you want to be healed?" (v. 6), a question that exposed how easily we can settle into our brokenness. In what ways do people make peace with conditions God wants to change, and why is real change sometimes frightening even when we long for it?

Personal Reflection: The man had focused for years on what he lacked (“I have no one”) rather than on the One standing in front of him (vv. 7–8). Where have you been fixed on your obstacles instead of on Christ, and what might change if you turned your eyes to Him?

Read John 5:1–47

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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”?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Daniel 7:13–14, the Son of Man given everlasting dominion and authority to judge; John 1:1–4, the Word who was God and in whom was life; Philippians 2:9–11, every knee bowing and confessing Jesus as Lord; Acts 17:30–31, God appointing the day of judgment through the risen Christ; Deuteronomy 18:15–19, the Prophet like Moses to whom God's people must listen.