

Commentary Notes

David Guzik https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Jhn/Jhn-5.cfm

Steve Cole <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-26-impotence-religion-power-christ-john-51-16>

Tony Merida [Exalting Jesus in John](#) (\$2.99 on Amazon)

A.W. Pink [The Gospel of John](#) (99¢ on Amazon)

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the entire book, and chapters 2–4 reveal how people were interested in Jesus and his miracles, but chapters 5–7 chronicle the shift from curiosity to opposition and from interest to persecution. The shift in attitude toward Jesus corresponds with Jesus’s further establishing his authority. Jesus’s authority is seen as he reveals himself to be Lord over sickness and Lord over the Sabbath.

In our text, we move from a section in John’s Gospel where we saw initial belief in Jesus as the Son of God to a section of mounting unbelief and opposition to Him, originating with the Jewish leaders (whom John often calls, “the Jews”; 5:10), leading finally to the cross. At the root of their hostility toward Jesus was that He confronted their man-made religious traditions, especially their Sabbath laws. Jesus never broke the Sabbath as God intended for the Jews to keep it. But He deliberately violated the human traditions that had grown up around the Sabbath, because many of the Jews mistakenly thought that by keeping these traditions they could be right with God. But no one can gain eternal life by keeping God’s law, because no one can keep it perfectly from the heart, which is the requirement.

And so Jesus deliberately did things on the Sabbath to confront the Jewish leaders. After all, He could have waited 24 hours to heal this lame man by the Pool of Bethesda. He had been paralyzed for 38 years; what difference would one more day make? And, Jesus could have told him to leave his mat there by the pool and come back and get it the next day, so as not to provoke the religious leaders. They had taken the Sabbath stipulation not to carry any burden on the Sabbath (Jer. 17:21-22) so far as to say that you could not carry a handkerchief from one room to the next. But to get around this rule, if you tied it on, then you could wear it into the next room! Jesus could have told this healed man not to do anything that would violate these Jewish traditions, but He did not. He told him to pick up his mat and carry it.

While I do not believe that this healed man believed in Jesus and was saved spiritually, I do think that this miracle illustrates Christ’s power to save, as contrasted with the impotence of religion to save anyone. And so I hope that you understand that coming to church, serving the church, being baptized, taking communion, or any other religious activities can never forgive your sins or gain you eternal life. But Christ is powerful to save you and will save you instantly if you will believe in Him.

Religion is impotent to save anyone, but it is powerful to enslave many.

- Religion is impotent to save because it focuses on outward conformity to manmade traditions, not on inward conformity to God’s Word.
- Religion is powerful to enslave people to its damning system.

Jesus is mighty to save.

- Jesus can speak the word and instantly heal. This isn’t just a story of a physical miracle, but a picture of what Jesus can do for you spiritually. He commands you to do something that you cannot do for yourself, any more than this crippled man could obey Jesus’ command to walk. He says to you, “Believe in Me and you will not perish, but have eternal life.” No matter how long you’ve been crippled by sin, if you will respond to Christ’s command, your response is not from your sinful heart. It’s the gift of God. When you obey His command, He imparts His power to give you eternal life.

5:1 *A feast of the Jews*: We don't know what feast this was, but it was probably one of the major three feasts in which attendance was required.

- The debate centers on if this was Passover, Pentecost, or Purim.
- Almost all the older writers assume it was the feast of Pentecost that is here in view. Pentecost occurred fifty days after the Passover, and the feast mentioned in John 4:1 follows the Passover mentioned in John 2:13. Pentecost is one of the three great annual Feasts which the law required every male Israelite to observe in Jerusalem (Deut. 16), and here we see the Lord Jesus honoring the Divine Law by going up to Jerusalem at the season of its celebration.

5:2 *A pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda*: This pool has been excavated in the area just north of the temple area, and found to have five porches, just as John said.

5:2 *which has five roofed colonnades*. Five stands for grace or favor.

- When Joseph desired to show special favor to his brother, we read, "Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of theirs" (Gen 43:34) and "to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment" (Gen. 45:22)
- Five and its multiples are stamped on every part of the tabernacle.
- It was with five loaves the Lord Jesus fed the hungry multitude.
- The fifth clause in the Lord's prayer is, "Give us this day our daily bread."
- The fifth Commandment was the only one with a promise attached.

5:3a *In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed*. A picture of the Jewish nation at the time.

- Invalid/impotent: They had the Law, made their boast in it, but were unable to keep it.
- Blind: blind to their own impotency, blind to their wretchedness, blind to their desperate need, and so blind to the Divine and moral glories of the One who now stood in their midst "they saw in him no beauty that they should desire him."
- Lame: Israel had the law but they were unable to walk in the way of God's commandments.
- Withered Hands/Paralyzed Hands: Totally incapacitated to work for God.

The natural man is impotent—"without strength" (Rom. 5:6). This sums up in a single word his condition before God: altogether helpless, unable to do a single thing for himself.

Consider them inversely: a man cannot perform good works unless he is walking with God; and he will not begin to walk with God until the eyes of his heart have been opened to see his need of Christ.

5:3b-4 *waiting for a certain movement of the water, 4 for an angel of the Lord came from time to time and stirred up the water. And the first person to step in after the water was stirred was healed of whatever disease he had.*

- Verses 3b-4 are not in the original text of John, but were added by a later copyist to explain the man's comment to Jesus in 5:7. (As early as Tertullian = 2nd century.) That is why most modern translations do not include this in the biblical text but include it in the margin/footnotes. Occasionally the water would bubble up, probably from a spring below, but the people superstitiously thought that it was an angel causing the disturbance and that the first one into the water would be healed. Perhaps someone had once been healed of some psychosomatic disorder after the bubbling of the water, and it led to this myth. So there was probably a mad scramble of these blind, maimed, and crippled people, clamoring over one another to be the first into the water after it bubbled. It's a tragic picture of helpless, sin-wounded people, putting their faith in some religious superstition that cannot save them, rather than trusting in Jesus Christ, who can save the worst of sinners.
- The addition seems to be good clarification as the truth of the perception of a healing received by being first in the water is demonstrated in the words of the lame man in verse 7.
- Many sick and injured people gathered at this pool in hope of healing. Perhaps this hope of healing was real, and God honored a release of faith. Or, it may be that this was merely a hopeful legend; nevertheless, a great multitude of sick people believed it.

- God can and does do things in unexpected ways. But something isn't necessarily from God simply because it is unexpected or unusual.

5:5 *One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years:*

- This man suffered from a paralytic condition for a long time, and apparently was frequently at the Pool of Bethesda in hope of healing. It was a hope that had been long disappointed (thirty-eight years).
- Thirty-eight years was exactly the length of time that Israel spent in the wilderness after they came under law at Sinai (see Deuteronomy 2:14).

The sovereignty of God is strikingly illustrated in the passage now before us. There lay a "great multitude" of impotent folk: all were equally needy, all equally powerless to help themselves. And here was the great Physician, God Himself incarnate, infinite in power, with inexhaustible resources at His command. It had been just as easy for Him to have healed the entire company as to make a single individual whole. But He did not. For some reason not revealed to us, He passed by the "great multitude" of sufferers and singled out one man and healed him.

It is impossible to find any ground in the man himself as a reason for Christ singling him out for special favor. The only explanation is the mere sovereign pleasure of Christ Himself. This is proven beyond the shadow of doubt by His own declaration immediately afterwards—"For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will." (5:21).

5:6a *When Jesus saw him lying there:* For some reason, Jesus selected this man among the great multitude of sick people (John 5:3). Jesus was not about to conduct a healing crusade at the Pool of Bethesda, but He was about to miraculously meet this one man's need.

- **A multitude of needy people were there, yet none of them looked to Jesus. "A blindness had come over these people at the pool; there they were, and there was Christ, who could heal them, but not a single one of them sought him. Their eyes were fixed on the water, expecting it to be stirred; they were so taken up with their own chosen way that the true way was neglected. (Spurgeon)**
- Spurgeon pictured the multitude waiting around the waters of the Pool of Bethesda, all of them waiting – instead of looking to Jesus. He thought of how foolish this waiting is for many people.
 - Some wait for a more convenient season
 - Some wait for dreams and visions
 - Some wait for signs and wonders
 - Some wait to be compelled
 - Some wait for a revival
 - Some wait for particular feelings
 - Some wait for a celebrity

5:6 *"Do you want to be healed?"* This was a sincere question. Jesus knew that not every sick person wants to be healed, and that some are so discouraged that they put away all hope of being healed. Jesus dealt with a man who may have had his heart withered as well as his legs. Jesus therefore attempted to build the faith of this man.

- It is possible that Jesus asked this even as the waters were stirred and people started jumping and diving and rolling into the waters, each hoping for evidence that they were the favored one. The man Jesus spoke with knew that he was not one of the favored, and had no real hope to be healed.
- In this man's particular case, it was reasonable to wonder if he really wanted to be healed. Some people do not want to get well because it means that they will have to be responsible. If he became well, the man would have to stop begging and start working for a living. If he got well, he couldn't complain about his circumstances. He couldn't blame those who didn't care enough to help him into the water. And, he may not have wanted to be healed because, as Jesus later tells him, he then needed to stop sinning so that nothing worse would happen to him. Some people actually love their sin so much that they are willing to risk going to prison or contracting a disease like AIDS or to go on suffering rather than give up their sin!

5:7 *The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me."* The crippled man assumed Jesus knew how things worked at the Pool of Bethesda, and he explained to Jesus why it wasn't possible for him to be healed. Quite naturally, the man couldn't think of any other way for his need to be met.

- The man was an interesting case of hope combined with hopelessness. He had hope, or would never have come to the Pool of Bethesda. Yet once there, he had little hope to be the favored one to win the healing that day.
- **He thought that he had to do something—"While I am coming." How this uncovers the heart of the natural man!**
- **The sick man does what we nearly all do. He limits God's help to his own ideas and does not dare promise himself more that he conceives in his mind. (Calvin)**

5: 8 *Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk."* Jesus told the man to do what he could not do. Being paralyzed, it was impossible for him to rise or to take up his bed-mat or to walk. At this moment, Jesus challenged the man to believe Him for the impossible.

- The bed was not a full-framed bed, but a bed-mat.
- It's easy to imagine that the man's first reaction was, I can't do that – why even try? Yet something wonderful prompted the man to say, *If this man tells me to do it, I will try.* **Jesus guided the man towards a response of faith.**
- He was commanded to take up his bed that he might recognize that the cure was permanent. No doubt many of the cures at the pool were merely temporary. (Dods)

5:9 *And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.* This happened as the man responded in faith and did exactly what Jesus told him to do, though a moment before this it was impossible to do it. The fact of his healing was confirmed in that he had the strength to carry his own bed-mat and walk with it.

- Because Jesus told him, he asked no questions, but doubled up his couch, and walked. **He did what he was told to do, because he believed in him who spoke. Have you such faith in Jesus, poor sinner?** (Spurgeon)
- He healed the man beside the pool, but without his touching the pool, to show that He could heal without the water. (Trench)
- This shows us that the New Testament describes many different ways people may be healed.
 - The elders of the church may anoint someone with oil and pray for them, and they may be healed (James 5:14-16).
 - God's people can lay hands on each other in prayer, ask God for healing, and people may be healed (Mark 16:17-18).
 - God may grant someone a gift of healing – either that they are directly healed, or have the power to bring healing to another (1 Corinthians 12:9).
 - God may grant healing in response to the faith of the person who desires to be healed (Matthew 9:22).
 - God may grant healing in response to the faith of another on behalf of the person who is healed (Mark 2:4-5, Matthew 8:13).
 - God may heal through medical treatment (1 Timothy 5:23, James 5:14 with Luke 10:34).

5:9c *Now that day was the Sabbath:* That all this was done on the Sabbath day will be the source of the controversy that follows.

5: 10 *So the Jews said to the man who had been healed:* Throughout his Gospel, John uses the term *the Jews* (Greek word *loudaioi*) in the sense of the Jewish leaders, not of all the Jews in Jerusalem (also verses 15, 16, 18).

5:10 *"It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed."* Carrying a bed (actually a sleeping-mat or a bedroll) was in fact a violation of the rabbis' interpretation of the commandment against doing work or business on the Sabbath. It was not a breaking of God's law of the Sabbath, but the human interpretation of God's law.

- Jesus persistently maintained that it is lawful on the sabbath to do good. He ignored the mass of scribal regulations, and thus inevitably came into conflict with the authorities. (Morris)

5:12 *They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk?'"*



- The Jewish leaders didn't want to know who healed the crippled man. They wanted to know who told him to carry a bed-mat on the Sabbath day.
- This probably seemed strange, and perhaps confusing to the healed man. "I was carried to the pool today and if I were not healed I would need to be carried home. That's a lot more work than me carrying my little bed-mat. In healing me and sending me home, Jesus was saving work on the Sabbath, not making more work."
- To the religious leaders Jesus was the man who broke the Sabbath. To the healed man Jesus was He who made me well.

5:13 *Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.* Jesus did not want to remain with the commotion surrounding the man's healing. Because He did not intend to heal the entire multitude, it was better for Him to withdraw.

- Jesus spoke the healing words, and then went on among the crowd, so that no particular attention was attracted to Himself, either by the sick man or others. (Alford)

(5:14-15) Jesus warns the healed man of a greater danger.

5:14 *14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."* Jesus found him because He was concerned for his spiritual health (sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you), not only his physical health. Living a life of sin is worse, and will bring a worse result, than being crippled for thirty-eight years.

- *See, you have been made well:* "Employs the perfect of the verb, indicating that the cure was permanent. No doubt some of the 'cures' that were reported from the pool did not last very long. (Morris)
- The man's 38 years of illness had apparently been brought on by dissipation. It was a sin of the flesh, avenged in the flesh, that had given him that miserable life. (Maclaren)
- **Grace does not ignore the requirements of God's holiness: "Awake to righteousness, and sin not" (1 Cor. 15:34) is still the standard set before us. "Lest a worse thing come unto thee" reminds us that the believer is still subject to the government of God.**

5:15 *The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.* The fact that he reported Jesus to the authorities could cast a poor light on the man – or possibly a good one depending on his intentions:

- Possible Negative: showed how intimidated the man was by those same religious leaders.
- Possible Negative: showed how unpleasant the man was... as soon as he found out the identity of his Benefactor he betrayed Him to the hostile authorities." (Morris)
- Possible Positive: gives beautiful completeness to the whole incident. Here we see him who had been healed confessing with his lips the One who had saved him. It would seem that as soon as the Lord Jesus had revealed Himself to this newly-born soul, that he had sought out the very ones who had previously interrogated and criticized him, and told them it was Jesus who had made him whole.

(5:16-18) Jesus defends His Sabbath actions.

The second half of John 5 is one of the profoundest passages in this fourth Gospel. It sets forth the Divine glories of the incarnate Son of God.

5:16 *This was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.* Remarkably, the healing seemed to make no difference to those who persecuted Jesus. All they could see was that their religious rule was broken, a rule that went beyond the command of Scripture itself.

- Inciting others to break the law (as they understood it) was worse than breaking it oneself. Therefore they launched a campaign against Jesus which was not relaxed until his death some eighteen months later. (Bruce)
- The absolute devotion to the traditions of man surrounding the Sabbath can't be understated. For example, Deuteronomy 23:12-14 tells Israel to practice good sanitation when their armies are camped. Ancient rabbis applied the same principle to the city of Jerusalem, which they regarded as "the camp of the Lord." When this was



combined with Sabbath travel restrictions, it resulted in a prohibition against going to the bathroom on the Sabbath.

5:17 *But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."* Jesus did not try and explain that He had not truly worked on the Sabbath. Instead, He boldly explained to the religious leaders that His Father worked on the Sabbath, and therefore Jesus the Son also worked on the Sabbath.

- In some ways, it is strange that the God of the Bible is a working God. "In the old world, it was hardly an honorable thing to work. It was a think for slaves and serfs and strangers, not for freeborn men. Hence work and greatness rarely went together; and nothing could be more alien to the genius of paganism than a toiling God. It was a revolution when Jesus taught 'God loves.' But it was hardly less revolutionary when He taught 'God works.'" (Morrison)
- Though he rested from creating, he never ceased from preserving and governing that which he had formed: in this respect he can keep no sabbaths; for nothing can continue to exist, or answer the end proposed by the Divine wisdom and goodness, without the continual energy of God. (Clarke)
- The Bible clearly says that God does not need sleep or rest (Psalm 121:3-4, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep). The rest of God on the seventh day was given for man's benefit, not God's, demonstrating a pattern of rest necessary for man's well being.
- *My Father...and I*: "His explanation shows that he did not claim identity with the Father as one person, but he asserted his unity with the Father in a relationship that could be described as sonship." (Tenney)
- **In saying " My Father is working until now, and I am working." He affirms His absolute equality with the Father.**
- We need to understand Jesus's logic. He's not saying that because God works on the Sabbath, anyone can work on the Sabbath. No, he's saying that because God works on the Sabbath, he can. **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. The Jews understand that Jesus is claiming equality with God (John 5:18).**
- The showdown that had been brewing is now taking place. The religious leaders of Israel are faced with a decision. Will they submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, or will they rebel against his authority and choose to live autonomously? **Will they honor his instructions, or will they ignore his commands and elevate their man-made rules above his will? This battle surfaces throughout the rest of John's Gospel, and it's a battle we're familiar with as well. Each day we have to decide if we'll submit to Jesus as Lord.**

5:18 *he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.* The religious leaders did not miss the fact that Jesus claimed to be equal with God. They knew clearly that when Jesus said that God was His Father in this unique way, He declared Himself equal with God.

- He was claiming that God was His Father in a special sense. He was claiming that He partook of the same nature as His Father. This involved equality. The verbs *broke* and *said* are both in continuous tenses; Jesus habitually broke their man-made Sabbath rules and habitually said He was equal with God. (Morris)
- The individual use of 'My Father' by Jesus had a totally distinct, and in their view a blasphemous meaning; this latter especially, because He this made God a participator in His crime of breaking the sabbath. (Alford)
- It should be carefully observed that He did not deny the accuracy of their deduction, but continued to speak as One who claimed such equality of authority. (Morgan)
- Augustine wisely said of this passage: "Behold, the Jews understand what the Arians do not understand." Today, Jehovah's Witnesses are among those that hold the doctrines of the Arians, denying the deity of Jesus.