
Saving on the Sabbath

John 5:1-17

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Introduction People turn to the church, to faith, to “Jesus” for all types of things these days – except, the gospel. For example, you may know that our federal government has an “Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.” This office, established under the second President Bush and maintained under President Obama, “works to build bridges between the federal government and nonprofit organizations, both secular and faith-based, *to better serve Americans in need.*” The funds that this Office grants (\$2.2 billion in 2005) cannot be used to support things such as prayer, worship, or religious instruction. Further, the organization that receives the funding, say a church, must offer the funded services, say a soup kitchen, at a time or location separate from any religious activity that the church might hold. They’ll take the earthly help – just not the heavenly help.

“Thank you for the soup, and the bread is quite nice, but I think I’ll pass on gospel and Bible, I’m watching my waistline.” Is this a critique of a federally funded program? Not in the least. The government is merely turning to entities in society that are able to effectively get things done among needy populations. It is however, a critique on what often happens with faith-based ministry today – separation of the gospel from good work –or, with a more historical twist, word from deed. This also happens at the personal and many times it is not the church separating the gospel from good work, but the recipient of the good work. It can sound like this:

I need financial help and counseling – please don’t try to make this something about the flesh and the Spirit – I just need your help with my money.

I’m trapped by my addiction and my life is falling apart – I want the kind of Jesus mojo that gets me off of these drugs, but let’s not get hung up on repentance, heart change, or pledging allegiance to God Almighty.

My relationship is so messed up with my kid – I need practical help figuring out how to get control. I already know the gospel, can we skip to the ‘what to do about my kid part?’

Or, worst of all, “I want to learn to be able to handle the Bible, teach me tools for understanding the Bible, apologetics, redemptive historical theology, heart theology, New Covenant theology, Biblical theology, teach me to critique other people’s theology, show me how to lead in the church... but no, no, I really don’t want to talk about my attitude at work or my how I live in my home or my pattern of financial giving to the church.

Help me get what I want, what I feel I need, what I must have – and then I’ll let you know if I want the rest. I’ll take the help – but I’ll pass on the gospel, thank you. John 5 highlights a scenario in which we see a glad acceptance of the benefits of the gospel, but, apparently, not the gospel itself. Before we go further, let me make one disclaimer: This morning we

will only briefly consider the *main* point of this passage. We'll spend the majority of our time on the minor points. I'll explain why when we get a little further into our time together. [PRAY].

The Main Point

What is the main point of the passage we are considering this morning? Let us consider a few details about this story. We are on the cusp of a big shift in the book of John. Jesus has returned to Jerusalem, the hub of Jewish life and culture. He goes to a place either at or very near to the temple, the epicenter of Jewish religious belief and practice. Jesus heals just one invalid among a sea of persons with sicknesses and disability. And then he tells the man, "v8 *Get up, take up your bed, and walk.*" Then John tells us one piece of seemingly insignificant commentary from John: "v9b *Now that day was the Sabbath.*" [explain]

I want to try and give you some earthly sense of the magnitude of what is taking place. Imagine you are at a wedding. It is a beautiful high-class wedding in a famous old stone church. Everything is perfect and the ceremony comes off without a hitch. It is off to the reception at a very ritzy country club situated in the loveliest part of the countryside. Waiters are in white gloves, everything is silver, linen, or crystal. Just as the wedding party and guests are about to be seated, there is a small ruckus in the lobby. In comes about 150 very skinny, dirty, smelly, hungry children dressed in rags. They squeeze into the guest seats just as the first course is being served. Everyone is outraged and offended. Now no one would argue that the deed itself was good – hungry poor children need food and it is a humanitarian thing to do to provide it. But in the mind of the guests, this was absolutely the wrong place and the wrong time.

This is a poor comparison, but I hope it begins to give you a taste of the scandal that Jesus was creating. The fact that Jesus healed was not a concern for the Jews at this moment – in fact, they speak not a word about a man being paralyzed for 38 years all of a sudden walking...

10So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed." 11But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.'" 12They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?"

Not a word about the miracle. They focus entirely on the fact that Jesus did this on the Sabbath, just as Jesus knew they would. And it leads to this ominous confrontation: *16And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working.* What did this statement mean to the Jews? John makes it clear in verse 18, *18This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

This! Is *the* major point of the sign performed in John 5. Jesus is taking the revelation of his identity as God to a new level. Jesus' entire life course pivots on this confrontation, the Jews are now prepared to kill him. Ultimately, this declaration seals Jesus' one-way ticket

to his horrible death on the cross. Jesus claimed to be God, through this exercise of his power ON and OVER the Sabbath... and this made all the difference in the world. The whole second half of the John 5 is really the explanation of why Christ did what he did in the first half of John 5 – however, my preaching assignment ends at verse 17. Therefore, we will hold off on preaching any further on this point. And leave it for the preacher next week. As for the rest of our sermon this morning, we will focus on a number of the minor points, from which, much can be learned.

The Minor (But Vital!) Points

We are going to take these minor points as they relate to the interactions we have in the text – Christ and the paralytic, the paralytic and the Jews, and Christ and the paralytic again.

Christ and the Paralytic

Remember that in the book of John we will see vignette after vignette of what true belief and true salvation do or do not look like. In this text we see an example of direct exposure to the kindness of Christ and even the message of the gospel – but no evidence of conversion or transformation of life.

Let's remind ourselves of what the text tells us about the paralytic. He was a Jew, age 38 years or older. It is very likely that the majority, if not all, of his life had been spent with a limited or no ability to walk¹. He had been at the pool for a long time. Jesus finds him, and asks him a profound question – though the man, not knowing who Jesus is, doesn't understand how extraordinary this interaction will be. "6b *Do you want to be healed?*" This question is profound because all at once it exposes the man's heart and begins to reveal the Christ.

The man does not answer with a simple "yes" because he has no idea that Jesus has the power to do this – he does not know who Jesus is! At the same time, he reveals his own view of what needs healed and how it can be done (i.e. his idea of rescue or gospel) when he says, "7a *Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up...*" The paralytic *knows* he cannot heal himself. What he *does not know* is that he has a larger problem than his disability and that he has come to the wrong source of water for healing... just like the woman at the well. In fact, he has placed his hope in the equivalent of a modern day folktale – that an angel comes down from heaven and stirs the water and the first one in after the stirring, wins! That is, is healed.

Let's pause for a moment. Are not many unbelievers like this today? One may be fully aware that something in their world is desperately wrong. One knows that they need help. But, they have misidentified what their real problem is *and* what can save them. Sometimes it almost seems trivial, "If I could just get organized... If I could just lose some weight... If I could just get a different job." Other times, it is more substantial, "If I could just forget the memories and the hurt... If I could just have everything I want... If I

¹ The average life span of a male during this era of history was 40 years.

could just know the Bible better... If I could just escape this marriage..." "But, there is no one to help me get down into the water." ...I cannot save myself, I've tried. Thus we have sick and dying people sitting by pools of misplaced hope waiting for the impossible... all the while, Christ is nearby. You know these people when you meet them. Moving from one pool to another, pinning hopes on failed plan after failed plan, and ever more "stuck." You have studied their faces daily... perhaps, in the mirror.

But back to the paralytic – he has now told Jesus, in essence, what his priorities are, where his hope is placed, and what he needs to realize his hope (help). Jesus chooses at this moment to take the revelation of who he is to the next level. He brings this man face to face with his deity, his kindness, his ability to rescue the needy and fulfill hope. Jesus instantaneously heals the man. The power of the *living Word* is demonstrated to the man in a very real and tangible way. This is nothing more than a foreshadowing of the gospel and its power. But, keep in mind, Jesus' revelation to this man is the minor point. The major point is set into motion when Jesus tells this man to, "**8Get up, take up your bed and walk.**" [could have waited] Jesus knows full well this will draw the attention of the Jews and will precipitate the much more public declaration of his deity. So to this man and then to Jerusalem, Jesus is revealing himself as God.

At this time, this is all we learn. Jesus intentionally melts back into the crowd (v.13). The now-healed paralytic makes no other statement. John does not tell us anything about the paralytic's heart or response to Jesus. At this point he is silent, however, in the next few verses, John, I believe, will *show us* what has or has not happened in the healed man's heart.

The Paralytic/Healed Man and the Jews

As Jesus intended, a man walking in the vicinity of the temple on the Sabbath carrying his mat draws the attention of the Jews. "v10 **So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, 'It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.'**" Recognize that in some way, the Jews are warning the paralytic against losing what they view as salvation – in this particular instance Sabbath-keeping. But just like the pool, Sabbath-keeping cannot save. The healed man responds, "**11The man who healed me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'**" The paralytic tells the truth. He accurately recounts what Christ has done – but, there is little evidence that his heart has warmed to his anonymous miracle-worker. In fact, one wonders if he is not attempting to "blame" Jesus for the charge that the Jews are leveling against him. Whatever the case here, there is certainly no praise or defense of Jesus. And in just a moment, I think we'll see further support for this dim view of the healed man's heart.

The Jews responded, "**12Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk?'**" The Jews have now been confronted, second hand, with the deity of Christ and they deny its truth by refusing to even acknowledge the existence of the sign. Instead, they immediately focus on their own religious system². They simply refuse to acknowl-

² I would offer that this is so often how the witness of common grace is dealt with by modern man (see Romans 1:18-31). In this case, we see this response extended to a special grace.

edge the evidence/sign of God's work. And, of course, the healed man cannot answer their avoidant question because Jesus had pulled away into the crowd before he can learn more about him.

Christ and the Paralytic/Healed Man

Sometime after this interaction with the Jews, Christ intentionally seeks out the healed man in the temple. Physically, a great and good *deed* has been performed. Now, however, Christ will add the *Word* to his deed. First, Jesus prompts the man to reflect on his physical healing, "14b *See, you are well!*" It is almost as if Jesus is pressing the man to consider how this could have happened? Who could have done this? What will your response be? When I clean up the kitchen and my wife has not noticed, it is not beyond me in the slightest to lure her into the kitchen and say, "See, it is clean!" Now my motives are not even remotely as pure as Jesus, but the method is the same. I want my wife to make some recognition of the person responsible for this condition. So Jesus gives the healed man the opportunity to recognize that no ordinary man could do what he had done.

What Christ goes on to say, then, is the point of this whole interaction with the now-healed paralytic. "14b *Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.*" This is the gospel to this man. This is the *word* to accompany the deed. What Christ does here is point the healed man directly to himself, the Savior. Christ has healed him physically, the question now is will the man be healed spiritually? You see, Christ did not come primarily to deal with physical suffering at his first coming. If he had, why not heal *all* those who were lying around the pool? It is at the second coming that Christ will deal with all of our ailments. Instead, he came to deal with the problem of sin and this is exactly why he gives the command to this man – Christ knows that there is no way for the man to deal with his greatest problem, his sin, but turn to himself for salvation. Christ has already demonstrated his power to heal, make new, regenerate in the physical realm. All this man must do is trust Christ for salvation from his sin, for healing in the spiritual realm. For Christ to have done anything less – that is for Christ to simply have addressed the man's physical need – would have been a curse of the worst kind because he would have left the man's greatest need unaddressed. Good deeds done without the gospel proclamation is simply rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic. There is no such thing as a social gospel.

So what is the response? As best as I can tell, the healed man makes no expression of faith. In fact, his next steps, in my opinion, are a strong indication that he neither trusts nor loves Christ. John tells us that, "v15 *The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.*" So here we have it. A man boldly confronted with the power and glory of Christ, but is unchanged in his heart. In fact, he goes to those who were seeking to oppress Jesus and gives them more ammunition – v.16 makes this very clear, it is the result of the healed man's actions: "v16 *And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.*"

This would be hard to believe if it were not so common. Many today, like the healed paralytic experience the goodness, kindness, and compassion of God, first hand,

through the church. They are confronted with the body of Christ, often in the realm of *deed* initially. Perhaps it is counseling that relieves the chaos in a marriage, or financial assistance that helps to meet rent or lawyer fees, or meals for a family that has just lost its home to a fire, or work to restore the dilapidated block on which an inner-city social services agency exists, or even, quite simply, the warm greeting and welcome of group of people meeting on a Sunday morning to hear the preaching of the Word of God. Closely following, or simultaneously, to this deed ministry comes the Word, the gospel. In the case of the paralytic it sounded like “v14b *Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.*” But it may just as well sound like, “*Repent, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out*” (Acts 3:19) or “*...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*” (Romans 10:9) or “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned*” (Marks 16:16).

Unfortunately, many, like the paralytic, neither understand what their greatest need is or what can save them. Instead, they are hyper-focused on issues other than their sin and trying everything under the sun, except turning from their sin to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior to make themselves well. Is this you? [[marketing empire](#)]

Briefly, let me address the last phrase in verse 14 “*...that nothing worse may happen to you.*” What is Jesus talking about? Is this a veiled threat to the healed man that he would get a worse disability if he did not stop sinning? Was it an implication that he had been a paralytic because of sin earlier in his life? If we try to draw these conclusions, we run into many difficulties³. I think Jesus clearly identifies what this “something worse” is just a little later in his conversation with the Jews as he is explaining that God has given him the authority to execute judgment, “v28 *Do not marvel at this, for 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.*” I do not want anyone to leave this morning believing that this passage means that your cancer or other ailment is a result of sins earlier in your life. However, I do want you to leave this morning understanding the truth – that if you do not deal with your sin, you will be judged by Christ himself.

John 5 shows us what it looks like when a man who has experienced the power and kindness of God, turns away from the gospel. In contrast, John 9 shows us what it looks like when a man who has experienced the power and kindness of God recognizes Christ for who he is and believes. As we close, listen to excerpts of the story about the blind man that Jesus heals.

6Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud 7and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing... 13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sab-

³ See John 9 and consider the blind man for one such difficulty. In contrast, consider 1 Corinthians 11 for a clear instance in which sin is directly linked to death and suffering.

bath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." ... 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." ... 4 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" 28 And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" [b] 36 He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." 38 He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

[call to repent] - Pray