

John 5: 17-31

For 38 years, the impotent man sitting by the pool of Bethesda had one thing on his mind.

Somehow, he had to be first into the pool. But the longer he sat, and the harder he tried, the more it became painfully evident that his situation was hopeless.

That is, it was hopeless until that wonderful day when the mercy of God came to him --- **"Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."**

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Jesus had given him two commands. First, he was to walk, and then he was to carry his bed.

And, as you can well imagine, he was happy to do both.

However, his compliance with Jesus' commands would soon make him a target for criticism.

It should have been the happiest day of his life, but trouble was just over the horizon.

John 5:10 **"The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed."**

Yes, simply obeying Jesus' commands can often get us into trouble.

And when that happens, we have two choices. You can stand up for Jesus, or you can back off.

When we get to chapter 9, we will meet a blind man, who, in the face of

tremendous opposition, stood up for Jesus, but this man chose the other route.

What about us?

Jesus has saved our immortal souls and has given us new life in Him. Are we willing to walk when He says walk, and bear the burdens He has placed upon us? Will we stand up and be counted, or will we be like the impotent man who quickly switched loyalties.

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Last week, I drew our attention to the fact that we might have been making an incorrect assumption concerning this man.

At least I had always assumed that he had spent his entire 38 years at the pool.

Certainly, that could have been the case,
but we really don't know whether
Bethesda had been his first choice or
his last resort.

Now I don't really think that makes much
difference, but in today's lesson, we
might be making some assumptions that
do make a difference.

Yes, many of us might have come to the
conclusion that Jesus just happened to
heal the impotent man on the Sabbath.

It was sort of an accident, and, as a
result, Jesus got Himself into a lot of
trouble.

Now, many of *us* could have made such a
blunder, but not Jesus.

No, Jesus doesn't just happen to do
anything.

He always moves precisely, and with a
definite purpose in mind.

So what was His definite purpose?

Let's take a few moments and try to discover
what this whole journey was all about,
and, indeed, what it was not all about.

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First of all, let's consider what it was
not.

This miracle was not the result of a chance
meeting by the wayside.

First of all, I don't believe there is any
such thing as chance in a believer's
life, and certainly not in the Lord
Jesus'.

So what I'm really trying to say is this.
Jesus wasn't on His way from point A to
point B when He met this man.

Sometimes, that's exactly what happened.

For instance, there was the incident recorded in John 9:1, **"And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth."**

No, He hadn't gone looking for that blind man; He was on His way to somewhere else when He met him.

Secondly, this wasn't a case of Jesus' compassion being suddenly claimed by a grievous situation, as in the case of the poor mother who had lost her son.

Luke 7:13-14 **"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.**

14: And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise."

Nor was it a case of some poor soul earnestly begging for His help, as we see in Matt. 20:30: **"And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David."**

No, the impotent man's healing was entirely unique.

In this case, Jesus had actually gone looking for him with a definite purpose in mind.

No, He wasn't on His way from one place to another, nor had He been taking a morning walk to get some fresh air.

If He had wanted to do that, I don't think He would have chosen a smelly sheep market leading to a crowd of sick folk.

No, Jesus was headed for a particular place, which He probably hadn't visited before, to meet a man He had never met, but with a definite purpose in mind.

Certainly, the poor man's plight would be much upon His mind, for He **"knew that he had been now a long time in that case."**

So, like all of His miracles, there was a great deal of compassion involved.

However, that compassion had not been solicited by any plea for help.

In spite of the fact that everyone else in Jerusalem knew Jesus, I don't think this man had ever met Him.

No, for 38 years he had lived just outside the mainstream of society, with his hopes entirely focused on the pool of Bethesda.

Nevertheless, Jesus was heading for a specific place for a specific reason. And not only that, but I think He had chosen a specific day.

No, this wasn't an emergency situation. This man had been sick for 38 years, and he would still be there next week.

Jesus could have walked down to the pool on any day of the week and done exactly the same thing.

But, instead, He chose to heal him on the Sabbath.

Why did He do that?

Well, I don't want to be dogmatic, and I must admit this is only my opinion, but here's what I think.

It goes without saying that Jesus wasn't conducting a campaign against the observance of God's holy day.

But not only were His actions well planned--
He wasn't trying to hide the fact that
He had healed on the Sabbath day.
That's another misconception that we might
have fallen into when we notice that
Jesus had faded away into the crowd.
And certainly He had done a good job of
disappearing, for the man had no idea
who had healed him.
However, all of those conclusions are
brought to naught as we read on.
You see, Jesus chose the temple, a place
where He was well known, for their next
meeting.
So, far from wanting to hide the fact, it
almost seemed He wanted the Jews to
know He had healed the man on the
Sabbath.

Yes, I think He was making a point, and not only that, but He was looking forward to meeting His accusers.

John 5:16 **"And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day."**

So, with religious zeal, they had tracked Him down, being fully convinced that they had God on their side.

However, they were making a very fundamental and disastrous mistake.

Oh, as far as the Sabbath itself was concerned, they were correct.

After all, this is one of the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:10 **"But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work---"**

No, they weren't wrong in defending the Sabbath. Their unforgivable error was the same as it had always been.

They refused to believe that Jesus was the Son of God.

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However, before we get into all that, let's take some time to consider this whole issue of Jesus' deity, and how it relates to the Sabbath.

When we began the Gospel of John, we were brought face to face with the fact that it begins in the same time period as the book of Genesis.

Remember the words in John 1:1, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,**" and then in Gen. 1:1, "**In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.**"

This, of course, only applies to the introduction, but it's there for a reason.

And in both cases, we are confronted by the fact that there is a God, and that He is the Creator.

Actually, in the book of John, this second point is made in V 3. **"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."**

So now that we have established the fact that Jesus is God, how does this relate to the Sabbath?

To answer that question, we must go back to Exodus 20:10-11. **"But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor**

thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

11: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."

The first thing we notice is the fact that the Sabbath day was made for man, and even for the animals.

So, if you were the servant, or a slave, or even a beast of burden employed by a workaholic, you could still count on one day a week for rest.

And then we notice that the Sabbath was given in commemoration of God's rest after the six days of creation.

However, for God, it was a single event lasting one day.

Consequently, the ongoing observance of the Sabbath was only meant for mankind, not God.

Actually, God works all the time, consistently upholding and governing all of His creation.

And He doesn't need to rest every 16 hours either like we do.

As Psalm 121:4 says, "**Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.**"

So, with this basic information in mind, we should be better able to understand Jesus' response.

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When the Jews accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, His immediate response, found in John 5:17 was this, "--- **My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.**"

His defence was quite simple. Because He was the Son of God, He had the same privileges that His Heavenly Father had, and one of them was continuing to do good on the Sabbath.

Now, some people might think He had jumped from the frying pan into the fire, but I think He had planned the whole scenario.

Oh, I know He cared for the impotent man himself, but He was also making a point.

V 18 **"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."**

I think their blood pressure had gone right off the chart.

But how did they ever come to the conclusion that Jesus was **"making himself equal with God?"**

Well, this requires a little explanation, as some of us might be scratching our heads and saying, *What's the big deal about calling God our Father?*

Yes, every believer can call God his Heavenly Father, but only because Jesus has brought us into God's family.

It is a privileged position that we have become quite used to, but it is a very *unique* treasure.

You see, in Old Testament times, this family relationship with God was impossible.

The Israelites were very fond of talking about our father Abraham, but not our Father God.

Certainly God had always been a Father to the nation of Israel, and Scripture calls Him **"A father of the fatherless,"** but that's all.

Consequently, when Jesus called God His Father, He automatically made **"himself equal with God,"** which no ordinary man should ever do.

Now, I'm sure there are some people who have come to the conclusion that Jesus, in His attempt to avoid the charge of Sabbath breaking, had inadvertently acquired the much more serious charge of blasphemy.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Certainly the Jews were convinced they had caught Him in a tremendous blunder, but to their astonishment, and I might say consternation, He agreed!

And not only did He agree, but He went on to give them six reasons why they were absolutely right.

I can almost see their faces getting redder and redder, and their eyes literally bulging out of their heads.

V 19 **"Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise."**

Certainly, He had always taken the place of God's servant, and He would continue to do that.

However, I believe these words also pointed out the fact that He and His Heavenly Father always worked in tandem and in full agreement.

Actually, that's true of each member of the Trinity.

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Jesus continues speaking, in V 20, **"For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel."**

As a member of the Godhead, Jesus is on board, so to speak, all the time.

Remember what He said to Nicodemus --- **"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."**

Did you notice the words **"--- which is in heaven"**?

It's my firm belief that while He was talking to Nicodemus, He was fully

aware of all that was going on in the councils of heaven.

No, there would be no catching up to do, when Jesus resumed His seat at His Father's right hand.

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And then He makes another point in V 21,

"For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will."

Jesus was actually claiming to have the very same power to raise the dead that God did.

And this would be painfully evident to the Jews when He raised Lazarus from out of the tomb after he had been dead for four days.

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And then, in V 22, He introduces another subject --- **"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:"**

Yes, Jesus will be the Judge of all.

It is a subject that He will return to in V 27-30, so we will wait until then to talk about it.

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And then He draws another parallel between Himself and His Heavenly Father.

V 22-23 **"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:**

23: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."

Jesus Christ must receive the same honour
that His Heavenly Father does.

Yes, the doors of heaven are fast closed
against those who do not honour the
Son.

No, there are not many ways to heaven.

Mohammed, Buddha, or even the false cults
who rob Jesus of His rightful place,
cannot provide an alternative way to
glory.

No, **"He that honoureth not the Son honoureth
not the Father which hath sent him."**

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And then Jesus makes His boldest statement
of all.

Not only is He **"equal with God"** and
consequently the Creator of physical
life, but also He is the only source of
eternal life.

Listen to His words in V 24, **"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."**

I have no idea what condition the Jews would be in by this time.

It wouldn't be a pretty sight.

But let's forget about them, and concentrate on what Jesus was saying --- **"He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life."**

That's in the present tense, isn't it?

Everlasting life isn't something we work for, hoping we will finally attained it when we die.

No, it's a *present* possession.

That is, it's the present possession of each individual who has trusted Jesus as his Saviour.

And what will be their future condition?

Well, Jesus covers that also. --- **"and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."**

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*Christ has for sin atonement made
What a wonderful Saviour!*

*We are redeemed, the price is paid
What a wonderful Saviour!*

***What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus, my
Jesus!***

***What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus, my
Lord!"***

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Let's read V 24 one more time "--- **He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.**"

Since Jesus was talking about "**everlasting life,**" then He must have been talking about spiritual death when He said "**is passed from death unto life.**"

Consequently, since verses 25 to 27 flow naturally out of V 24, they would also be talking about spiritual death.

V 25-27 "**Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.**
26: For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;

27: And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man."

God's Word teaches us that only born again believers, those who are spiritually alive, can discern the true meaning of Scripture.

However, it is quite evident that there must have been a time in our lives, even when we were spiritually dead, when we heard the voice of Jesus.

How did that happen?

Well, Jesus gives us the answer in V 25 ---

"--- The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."

Yes, not only can Jesus' voice pierce through the grave, which we will be

talking about in a moment, but it can touch the heart of the vilest sinner and bring new life.

Eph. 2:1 **"And you hath he quickened, (or made alive) who were dead in trespasses and sins."**

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And then Jesus begins to speak about a death that we are all familiar with.

Whether we are spiritually minded or completely secular, everyone will agree that physical death is unavoidable.

However, depending on your relationship to Jesus Christ, the prospects of physical death are quite different.

Yes, in these next two verses, Jesus will be speaking about physical death, and more importantly, He will be speaking about physical resurrection.

V 28-29 **"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29: And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."**

Yes, **"all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth."**

An amazing example of this is the resurrection of Lazarus.

Even though he had lain in the tomb for four days, during which time his body would have certainly seen corruption, He heard **"the voice of the Son of God"** and he **"came forth."**

And even the unbeliever, who stubbornly rejects the grace of God to the very end, thinking he can descend into

oblivion, will hear **"the voice of the Son of God" --- "for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice."**

Yes, Jesus' voice will empty every grave, but not at the same time.

Actually, there are two resurrections, and in both of them, Jesus will sit as the supreme Judge.

First, at the resurrection of life, the works of the just (or justified) will be tested by fire ----- **"If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15: If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."**

We read about that resurrection in Rev.20:6 --- **"Blessed and holy is he that hath**

part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

Then, 1000 years later, the unsaved will answer His call --- John 5:29 **"and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."**

It is painful even to think about that resurrection; nevertheless it is graphically described in Rev. 20:11-15 **"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12: And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was**

opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13: And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14: And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15: And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

And the most tragic part of this whole affair is the realization that all those who are standing before that

Great White Throne could have had their
names written in "**the book of life.**"

But now it is too late.

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Awake, thou careless world, awake!
That final judgment day will surely come;
What Heav'n has fixed no time can shake,
Time never more shall sweep away thy doom.
Know what the Lord Himself hath spoken
Shall come at last and not delay:
Though Heav'n and earth shall pass away,
His steadfast Word can ne'er be broken."

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And it's scary even to think of the evidence
that these angry Jews were building up
against themselves even as Jesus spoke.
Yes, we will all hear "**the voice of the Son
of God.**"

The only question is, will it be the voice
of our Saviour or our Judge?

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What a revelation Jesus had poured out
before those unbelieving Jews.

They had eagerly accused Him of making
Himself "**equal with God,**" thinking they
had caught Him in His words, but He had
readily agreed.

They couldn't believe their ears!

Not only did He agree, but He carefully laid
out six reasons why they were
absolutely correct.

To say the least, it wasn't the response
they had anticipated.

And before they could object, He took the
words right out of their mouth.

V 31 "**If I bear witness of myself, my
witness is not true.**"

He wasn't admitting any untruthfulness, only pointing out the fact that He was fully aware that Old Testament Law required two or three witnesses to establish the facts.

We see that requirement in Deuteronomy 19:15

"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established."

Yes, He had beaten them to the punch once more.

He would supply not only two, or even three, but four witnesses to the fact that everything He had said was absolutely true.

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Next week, Jesus supplies His four
witnesses.

It will be a crushing indictment against
their stubborn unbelief.