

The Gospel of John

Chapter 5:1-17

February 23, 1997

- **The Gospel of John Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Our Lord is the Word, the Light and the Life
- Chapter 2 The Lord of the Wedding Feast; Zeal for the purity of the temple
- Chapter 3 Spiritual Birth, Belief and Salvation vs. Unbelief and Condemnation
- Chapter 4 The Ministry in Samaria, The Harvest, The Faith of the Nobleman
- Chapter 5 Paralytic man healed on the Sabbath

- **Review and Introduction**

Having cured the nobleman's son in the city of Cana, Jesus now has returned to Jerusalem so that He can observe the feast (perhaps Pentecost or another Passover). It is this visit to Jerusalem where the leaders of Israel first become so enraged that they begin their plot to kill Jesus.

- **Exposition**

John 5:1-17

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches.³ In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water.⁴ For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.

- As was customary, all Jews returned to Jerusalem for the observance of various feasts. Jesus does so and demonstrates His high regard for the requirements of the law. Nowhere do you see in Jesus a disregard for the law as though His fulfillment of the law was sufficient reason to set it aside.
- There has historically been debate of the actual name of the location of these five porticoes. However, in 1888 there was unearthed an ancient well with five covered porches that fits the description and possible location of this pool. The porches were very large with the ability to hold hundreds of people. We see from the text that the sick people gathered under the refuge of the porches to wait for the moving of the water.
- This account is rather curious in that we have no other account in the scriptures where God has commissioned an angel to perform such a service. The point of including the details of the pool is to provide a reason of the gathering of so many sick people. Some have accused portions of verse three and verse four of being spurious because there are variations among the texts.

5 Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years.⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"⁷ The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."⁸ Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk."⁹ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

- Again, we see here our Lord knows the man before ever speaking to him. His ability to see the heart and make accurate judgements of the spiritual condition of a person is unique with our Lord. The question provided by Christ is not asked because Christ is unsure of the answer but is to demonstrate the despair of the man and to spark the man's interest.
- Notice though that there was no cooperation of the man necessary in order to accomplish the healing. The man had no idea of what was about to happen. Jesus did not require him to manifest faith in Him prior to the healing. He simply healed him out of a love for him.

10 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."¹¹ He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'¹² Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?"¹³ But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place.

- There are two levels upon which the Jews would have charged the man and Jesus for their actions on the Sabbath. First, the current understanding of the requirements described by Jeremiah (17:21) was that the carrying of the man's mat would have violated the command not to carry one's burden. Secondly, the healing of the man would have been perceived as a violation of the Sabbath work prohibition. Violating the Sabbath was Biblically a capital offense. The Jews were not overreacting to the offense, they were just mistaken about whether the actions really violated the Sabbath.
- The modern discussion of the Sabbath has been filled with centuries of debate over the actual day of Sabbath observance as well as the particular method of observance. The abundance of debate does not prevent us from studying the topic, it does however mean that we should do so with diligence and Christian charity.

- As instituted by God, the Sabbath had at least four purposes:
 - A restful reminder of God's provision - Exodus 16:22-30
 - A reminder of the wonderfulness of God's creation - Exodus 20:8-11
 - A sign and a reminder of the Lord's covenant and that the Lord is the one who sanctifies. - Exodus 31:12-17
 - A reminder of God's redemption of the people of Israel. - Deut 5:12-15
 - The Sabbath was to be properly enjoyed as a delight. - Isaiah 58:13-14
- Initially there was only one Sabbath, but later God instituted many observations (holy convocations) - Leviticus 23.

New Testament Instruction

- Religious observance of a calendar of festivals and days would be a return to the immature and beggarly elements. - Galatians 4:8-11
- The Festivals and Sabbaths were pictures of the true substance of Christ. Colossians - 2:16-17
- The Sabbath was given as a blessing for man. - Matt 12, Mark 2
- The physical rest is a picture of the true rest from our spiritual works which is accomplished by being in Christ through faith. - Heb. 4:1-13.

The Lord's Day

This is a term with extremely limited Biblical evidence but is supported by extra-biblical historical documents which seem to confirm that the term was used by the early church. Rev. 1:10, Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:1-4

- The same liberty granted in Christ which allowed the public gathering to occur on the first day of the week rather than the seventh is the same liberty we have in the physical observance (Romans 14:1-13). It is interesting to note that the term Sabbath was not even equated with the Lord's Day for nearly a thousand years.

The whole may be thus summed up: As the truth was delivered typically to the Jews, so it is imparted to us without figure; first, that during our whole lives we may aim at a constant rest from our own works, in order that the Lord may work in us by his Spirit; secondly that every individual, as he has opportunity, may diligently exercise himself in private, in pious meditation on the works of God, and, at the same time, that all may observe the legitimate order appointed by the Church, for the hearing of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and public prayer: And, thirdly, that we may avoid oppressing those who are subject to us. *John Calvin, ICR 2.8.28-34*

14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."¹⁵ The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶ For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." NKJV

- It is obvious that at this point Jesus did not yet want this particular miracle to be publicly attributed to Him. However, after the leaders had been notified of the healing yet Jesus not identified as the healer, Jesus seeks him out so that He might conclude His instruction to the healed man. Now the man returns to the Jews and clarifies the instruction perhaps so that he can clear his name of the charge of violating the Sabbath.
- It is important to note that Christ's response to the Jews is that He and His father have been working since the creation. The important point that Jesus is making is that the Sabbath was not created for God. God does not observe a weekly Sabbath's rest from His work. The Sabbath was instituted initially as a blessing and a picture of a real rest for the benefit of man by faith.