

# **In Spirit and in Truth: Rooted and Established Freedom Church of Denton**

## **John 5**

### **Jesus, the Well-Attested Son of God and Lord of the Sabbath, Mercifully Heals the Disabled Man at Bethesda**

Volume 1, Lesson 18

- **In Devotion** (feel free to highlight, underline, and scribble notes. Take your time, working through the following material over the course of the next week...it would be better for you to get through one sentence with understanding than the whole lesson with no understanding!)

*And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath – John 5:9*

*...truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise – John 5:19*

*There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the witness that he bears about me is true – John 5:32*

What follows in this chapter is the beautiful and tender account of Christ and the healing of the invalid at the pool of Bethesda, that is found in none of the other three gospels. This seems to support well John's attempt to glorify Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, for this account not only demonstrates his power and his lordship, but also provides occasion for one of the clearest and boldest defenses by Christ himself regarding the divine origin of his nature.

The setting was in Jerusalem (which means the *city of peace*) at the pool of Bethesda (which in Aramaic means the *house of mercy*) at the time of an important Jewish festival, most likely that of Passover. Christ had just returned from Galilee in time to make the prescribed feast.

He came upon the pool near the Sheep Gate at Jerusalem that had five porticos and was an apparent aquatic infirmary where the diseased, crippled, and lame came in hopes of healing. We know precious little more of these waters than we learn from this account. Even so, we have learned all we need to know, for these waters contained miraculous powers, stirred by heaven, serving as a token of God's grace in the intertestamental period, and a type, or foreshadowing of the healing power that the Sun of Righteousness would carry in his wings.

It is no accident that Jesus stumbled upon this place, for in all of his piety there was well-intentioned purpose. Compelled by that which repels most men, Christ, in the words of another, was more often found in "hospitals than in palaces." Those that are closest to the heart of God are also closest to the needs of the poor. He is undoubtedly drawn here, as it were, like a magnet to one of the most difficult cases of the ward - a man imprisoned 38 years in his own affliction, who accrued the pity of few, if any.

This was a miracle timed to achieve maximum impact, for the gathering pilgrims would provide the quickest facility to the spread of the report, while also exciting and revealing the spiritual forces that would provide the greatest opposition to Christ and the kingdom he had come to reveal.

For this was the Sabbath Day, a perfect day for Compassion to touch and heal the decades-old suffering of a sinner tormented and oppressed by the weight of his sin and his ancient foe. That is of course, unless you were one of the religious leadership that had so perverted the law of Moses regarding the Sabbath, fashioning it into an implement that could be used to control and bludgeon those that had been given to you to serve. But their abusive traditions did not deter Jesus.

Approaching the man and understanding well his condition, Jesus asked him "do you want to be healed?" Either in virtue or in excuse, the man provided an alibi for why he had not previously entered into the waters. He said to him, "I had not one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred, and...another steps down before me." Were this literally true it would suggest that this case was deserving of the highest of pity, or it may well have been a pitiable excuse, betraying the man's own complicity, in part, in perpetuating his own pain. Either interpretation is plausible, and the ideas that each would suggest are well substantiated throughout the rest of the Scriptures.

The fact is, Jesus saw this man, in his conditioned institutional need, as an object of his sovereign mercy, for he is a friend of the lowliest of sinners. It is also true that sometimes men fail us completely, leaving us nowhere else to turn except to God himself. And finally, it is true that there are times, and probably more than we care to admit, when men (or ourselves) are unwilling to be healed. In all of these cases, however, God is greater, and the solution remains the same. We won't be healed lest he heals us! And it is by his grace that we are invited to participate in our own healing as we exercise the cooperation of our faith!

Grace certainly came to this man when Jesus commanded him to get up and take up his bed and walk. And so he did! What a wonderful day for a wonderful miracle for a fearfully and wonderfully made man. But what takes place next is one of the most daring displays of human arrogance ever recorded in the annals of human history. It was the response from the religious leaders that revealed the double-edge of the force of Christ's love that draws, saves, and heals the broken while simultaneously exposing, indicting, and mocking the self-righteousness of men. And what was their response? They said, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed," which paraphrased means, "how dare you that you were healed!" Can you believe it? Here they are, lecturing this healed man, and

by way of extension, Jesus, the healer and the Lord of the Sabbath, regarding the intention of the law that he had given to serve them and all of humanity before they had ever even been born! Oh, the cruelty and deception of self-righteousness.

Would a man dare say that it is unlawful to receive healing on a day that was designed in part for his own health and healing? This is the sad irony of works-righteousness for it would rather have you in bondage to fear, misery, and condemnation than walking in life, freedom, and the truth.

Jesus did not shrink back though. He upped the ante by appealing to the highest authority, the one they presumed to represent – God the Father. Now they had double-reason to hate him. Now, he was not only a law-breaker (from their eyes) but a blasphemer. They wanted him gone. And while he had the power to exterminate them with a single glance, he chose instead to mount his defense with a moderate discourse regarding the true source, nature, and evidence of his works and teaching. He declared that he was only executing the will of his Father, as evidenced by John the Baptist, the law of Moses, and even the Father himself. This approach had the net effect that their judgment would come, not as a result of a scathing, explicit rebuke from Christ himself, but from the judgment of the their own words and the authorities that they themselves claimed to represent.

What a warning to all that would seek to use God and his name, knowingly or unknowingly, to advance their own agendas. The self-righteous individual revels in pride and hypocrisy and is offended by the humility and power of true godliness. It is frightening the deception of religion that could provoke one to curse such a plain and self-evident work of the one true God.

And such is the force of Christ's life. We must decide if we will continue to scorn his Lordship in the perpetuation of our self-righteousness and self-reliance or simply bow and acknowledge in humble confession that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, the Savior prophesied in the Scriptures, and the Son of the Father that has touched us, healed us, and set us free!

- **In Meditation**

Read and pray through John 5, two to three times with your S.P.E.C.S on. Make sure and record your observations. Begin to ask God how you can not only apply this to your own life, but in the training and instruction of others in righteousness.

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### **John 5:1-16 The Healing of the Disabled Man at Bethesda**

In what ways does the place and setting of this miracle speak to the heart, method, and practice of Jesus?

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We made the statement in the devotional section that Jesus is found more routinely in “hospitals than in palaces.” **Discuss this point in the group.**

It is the nature of man to associate with those that can do us well. However, Jesus admonishes us to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind to the dinners or banquets we host, so that we may be blessed, since they cannot pay us back (Luke 14:13-14).

When is the last time you have done good to those that cannot repay you? \_\_\_\_\_

Pray for and consider who are some of the most neglected people in your area. Record your observations \_\_\_\_\_

Describe ways that you could begin to intentionally reach out to them \_\_\_\_\_

What is the significance of Christ performing this miracle on the Sabbath? \_\_\_\_\_

As best you can, describe the nature of the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders regarding doing good works on the Sabbath \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus asked the man in verse six if he wanted to be healed. Why would he ask a question of which the answer would seem so obvious? \_\_\_\_\_

We often enjoy our mess. The flesh sometimes finds perverse pleasure in reveling in its own pity. Many times we derive false comfort from the pain and attention we receive from others. Describe ways in which you may have exhibited similar self-destructive habits \_\_\_\_\_

**Pray for one another regarding these issues**

There are also times in which the enemy misuses the Word of God against us to keep us in such self-destructive patterns. Identify and discuss ways that you may have been the target of such tactics \_\_\_\_\_

The healing of the man angered the religious leaders. As best you can, try to explain how such an amazing miracle could be lost in the hearts and minds of the leaders. What was their error? How might you have been guilty of similar error? \_\_\_\_\_

**John 5:17-29 Jesus Answers The Leaders’ Criticism With A Defense of the Origin of his Authority**

What evidence can you find in this passage of Jesus view of his own equality with God?

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Describe as best you can the ways that the Father and Son are unified in this passage. Describe the ways that you see them deferring to one another. Describe either commonality or differences that they may have in each of their respective ministries \_\_\_\_\_

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How should the example of Jesus in his unity with the Father inform our personal walk and ministry? \_\_\_\_\_

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**John 5:30-47 Jesus Answers the Religious Leaders' Criticism With a Defense of Independent Witnesses**

What are the four independent witnesses that Jesus mentions in this passage? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why do you think Jesus appeals to John the Baptist as a witness of his authority? \_\_\_\_\_

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In 5:38 Jesus said that they did not have the Word of the Father abiding in them because they had not believed in the "one whom he has sent." Explain why faith in Jesus Christ is necessary for a relationship with the Father \_\_\_\_\_

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How does 5:39 speak to the Jews misuse of the Scriptures? Undoubtedly, the Word of God brings life, so what was he trying to say in this verse? \_\_\_\_\_

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What are ways that we can misuse and abuse with the Word of God? \_\_\_\_\_

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Jesus said that the leaders had set their hope on Moses. Describe what you think it means that they had set their hope on him? In what way will it be said that Moses accuses them? \_\_\_\_\_

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What would have been the proper way for them to have understood Moses and his law? \_\_\_\_\_

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**In Prayer**

**Lord, thank you that you stand ready to heal and to touch us in our infirmity and weakness. Thank you that you did not come to judge us but to save us and to heal us. Thank you that your yoke is easy and your burden is light and that you have fulfilled the requirement of the law in your life, death, burial, and resurrection. Teach us to live in unity with the Godhead in our life and ministry, knowing that all of the witnesses point to and find their fulness in you and you alone. You alone are the bread of life! In Jesus name!**