

Chapters 5-7 record the shift from mere reservation and hesitation about Jesus to outright and sometimes official opposition (see Carson, 240; Tenny, 103; Morris, 297-298 for more details). Up to this point, John has been almost exclusively concerned with Jesus' dealings with individuals. In this next passage, there is still individual contact, but the healing of the lame man leads to a conflict with the religious leaders. This important theme is now seen throughout the Gospel of John. Jesus performs His signs, but instead of faith, strenuous opposition is aroused among the national leaders. It grows and intensifies, climaxing in the crucifixion (Morris, 298). On a human level, what Jesus did and said that day cost Him His life. They never forgave Him (Morris, 299, n. 3).

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

5:1 After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

5:2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes.

5:3 In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, waiting for the moving of the waters;

5:4 for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.

John repeatedly ties his narrative to the Jewish feasts (2:13; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22; 11:55), but this is the only one that is not identified.

The fact that John uses a present tense verb, "there is in Jerusalem," is significant for it helps us date the Book of John by showing that it was written *before* the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

The actual pool being spoken of is in question (Bernard I, 227), but some respected commentators believe it was located in the north-east quarter of the city where there were two pools surrounded by four covered colonnades (NAS = porticos) with a fifth colonnade separating the two pools (a colonnade is a set of columns that support a roof; Carson, 242; Morris, 301-302; Bruce, 122). The twin pools were fed by large reservoirs called Solomon's pools, and possibly by intermittent springs which caused a disturbance (Bruce, 123; Kent, 88). Some ancient witnesses speak of the redness of the water which may have been thought to be medicinal (Carson, 242). It is fairly certain that verse four was not written by John (it is missing in the most reliable ancient manuscripts), but was added later to explain why the people were there (Morris, 302). If this is correct, then this may not be reflecting a fact, but a common belief of the day, namely, that the stirring of the waters was caused by an angel and that the first to enter the water would be healed.

5:5 A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

5:6 When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?"

5:7 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."

5:8 Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk."

5:9 Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day.

There was a man by the pool who was ill for 38 years. Verse 7 implies that he was an invalid (i.e. paralyzed, lame, or exceedingly weak; Carson, 242). The length of the ailment is mentioned to show that it was not a temporary condition and that the man was an ideal person to receive the miracle for he would be well known by the people (Kent, 88).

The sovereign initiative is with Jesus; *He* approaches the man and asks him if he wants to be healed. There is no reason given for the choice (Bernard I, 230; Carson, 243). The answer to Jesus' question would seem obvious for that is the reason he had been there waiting for so long. But the question served to focus attention on the man's need and to reveal something about the hopeless condition he was in (Tenny, 105).

The man did not regard Jesus as a possible healer; he didn't even know who Jesus was (v. 13). He explains that the reason he hadn't been healed was because when the water was stirred, someone else entered ahead of him (Morris, 303).

Jesus ignores the sick man's comment about the healing waters and commands the man to walk. He does so instantly. There was no need for rehabilitation or muscle learning, for the cure was immediate and complete.

The mat, normally made of straw, was light enough to be rolled up and carried on the shoulder (Bruce, 124). The healed man didn't stagger off in ambiguous health, but left with enough bodily strength to carry his own mat (Carson, 244).

The cure is different from many other healings, for there is no mention of the man's faith. In fact, there seems to be no room for it. Until Jesus commanded the man to rise, he was only thinking about the waters. We must conclude that while faith was commonly the prerequisite of healing, it was not absolutely necessary. Jesus is not limited by man as He works the works of God (Morris, 304).

Although the healing is important, the real issue is the day upon which the healing occurred. The literal rendering, "there was a Sabbath on that day" suggests that it was not a regular weekly Sabbath but a feast day, which was treated as a Sabbath regardless of the day of the week.

It was not essential that Jesus cure the man that day, as the nature of the illness did not require immediate attention. This leads us to believe that He chose to do it on that day in order that the real issues might be made clear (also see Matt. 11:9 ff.; Lk. 13:10 ff.; 14:1 ff.).

5:10 So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet."

5:11 But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'"

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

5:13 But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place.

According to OT law it is not clear that the man was doing anything wrong, for he did not normally carry pallets around to make a living (i.e. as a job). However, he did break the law of the elders, since carrying his mat was one of the 39 categories of prohibited "work".

Originally, the rabbinical legal regulations were dealing with what is also a modern social problem. They began as a laudable attempt to safeguard the holiness of the Sabbath day, and keep it free from worldly pursuits. The religious authorities were aware of the fact that the destruction of a Sabbath rest-day created a real danger to the higher values of human life. It is well that we should remember this when we criticize their methods. However, the original meaning was lost in the legalistic manner of observance (Morris, 306 + n. 29). In Jesus' mind the Sabbath was to be a blessing for man, not a burden. Jesus viewed acts of healing and relief not as permitted exceptions to the prohibition, but as deeds which should be done in preference for the day (Bruce, 125).

The man defends himself by putting the whole blame on the shoulders of Christ (Carson, 245). He was not the stuff of which heroes are made (Morris, 306). He is clear that if anyone should be criticized, it is the one who told him to pick up his pallet and walk.

Since Jesus had rarely been to Jerusalem, He was not immediately recognized (Bernard I, 233; Alford, 744), and the multitude that swarmed around the healed man would have made concealment easy (Morris, 307; Bruce, 125).

5:14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."

5:15 The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Jesus later finds the man at the temple and draws attention to the completeness of his healing ("You have become well" is a perfect tense verb indicating the permanent results of the action). But Jesus is not satisfied with simply giving him health. In the same breath, He connects the healing with the urgent need for moral reform (Carson, 245). The implication is that the man's illness was caused by sin that the man had not yet given up.

The man had reason to fear the authorities for he would face a severe penalty despite his excuses; nevertheless, it's hard to understand the man's action. He was either ungrateful, willfully betrayed Jesus,

or was incompetent and did not know that he was bringing trouble on his benefactor. In any case, one has little respect for him (RWP). Self-preservation still rules as Lord.

5:16 For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees will watch His conduct on the Sabbath from now on (Mk. 2:23; 3:2) (RWP) and become openly hostile toward Christ.

5:17 But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

5:18 For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

Jesus "answers" their deed of persecution, not a particular question or comment they had made (Morris, 308).

The idea of Sabbath rest comes from Ex. 20:11 and Deut. 5:15, but in reality, God never stops working. If God stopped working, the universe would cease. Jesus works in the same way because of His closeness with the Father. In charging Jesus with breaking the Sabbath, they were in reality charging God (Dods, 738).

It is crucial to understand that Jesus didn't argue that the Jew's interpretation of the law was incorrect (which He could have done); instead, He made two claims that explained His actions. First, He insisted that whatever factors justify God's continuous working on the Sabbath justify His own actions as well (Jn. 5:17, Carson, 248). Then He claimed that God was His own Father (Jn. 5:18), and by virtue of that unique relationship, He had the privilege to act on the Sabbath.

Infractions of the Sabbath were serious and could result in death, but Jesus' comments were considered even more serious; by claiming that His works were the works of God, the Jews felt that Jesus had broken down the distinction between men and God. Then, by saying that God was His own Father, He was claiming to have exclusive sonship, which the Jews could not tolerate.

One might wonder how claiming that God was His Father could be construed as Jesus making Himself equal with God. We often call God our Father and yet we are not claiming equality. The answer lies in the Jewish understanding of how God could be addressed. The Jews could address God as "our" Father in prayer or qualify it with the word "in heaven." Jesus didn't do this here or elsewhere. He habitually thought of God in terms of the closest relationship to Himself. He called God "His own Father" in the sense that He possessed the same nature as God. This explained how Jesus could do the work that God does. Unity, in essence, implies equality, which the reader was already informed of in John 1:1. Jesus' "Sabbath breaking" wasn't an isolated incident or a mistake; it was rooted in who Jesus perceived

Himself to be (Morris, 310). In the Jews' mind, such thinking was blasphemous. For that reason, the Jews sought to kill Him.

To sum it up, the Jews had understood Jesus to be claiming equality with the Father in nature, privilege and power (as also in John 10:33 and 19:7). If this had been a misunderstanding on their part, it would have been easy for Jesus to deny it and to clear up the misapprehension. This is precisely what He does not do. On the contrary, Jesus gives a powerful apologetic in defense of His claim to equality with the Father in verses 19-47 (RWP).

Jesus Reveals His Authority

John 5:19-47 turns its attention to the person of Christ. This passage is of critical importance, though the significance of it is not always realized. Nowhere else in the gospels do we find the Lord making such a regular, formal, systematic statement of His unity with the Father. It was His claims in this discourse that ultimately resulted in His death.

The Father and the Son (5:19-24)

5:19 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does likewise."

Verse 19 explains in what sense He claims to be equal with God (Bruce, 128). There is a continual contemplation of the Father by the Son, an uninterrupted communion. The result is that the Son does as the Father does, not simply by imitation, but due to the sameness of nature.

The reason the Son can do nothing of Himself is *not* because He chooses not to act independently of the Father or because He is limited in His freedom to act, but because His actions are the same as the Father's actions (Westcott, 189; Carson, 251). This in itself is an oblique claim to deity, for anyone who can do whatever the Father does, must be as great and divine as the Father (Carson, 251).

The most important statement in this verse is, "*Whatever* the Father does, that the Son does likewise." "Whatever the Father does," Jesus does. When the Father acts, Jesus acts. Perfect Sonship involves perfect identity of will and action with the Father (Westcott, 189). The activity that originates in the Father is manifested in the Son. In healing the lame man, He was doing what the Father wished him to do (RWP).

The verse also contains the thought of subordination, for the Son is pictured completely obedient to the Father. Though Jesus can truly be called God (Jn. 1:1, 18; 20:28), take divine titles (Jn. 8:58), and have divine rights (Jn. 5:17), He is always submissive to the Father. He does what He sees the Father doing. In this sense the relationship between the Father and the Son is not reciprocal. It is impossible to say that the Father sees only what He sees the Son doing (Carson, 250). Even so, the claim that the Son does "whatever" the Father does is a mighty assertion; the implication is that the authority which Christ has in His actions and teaching is nothing less than the authority of God (Morris, 313).

The comment by Leon Morris in His commentary on John is worth mulling over carefully. In his footnote (n. 6) on page 313 he comments on how one man paraphrased verse 19 as, "What He does the Son copies." Morris responds, "it is not a question of the Son copying: the Son does the same deeds as the Father does. . . 'The things that God does are the things that Jesus does; and the things that Jesus does are the things that God does. The great salient truth about Jesus is that in Jesus we see God.' . . 'the union, therefore, is absolute. It is not, for instance, as though the Son reveals the Father in certain particular ways or in certain remarkable actions; no moment of His life, and no action of His, but is the life and expression of the Father.'"

5:20 "For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel."

The "for" explains why the Son can do whatever the Father does; It is because the Father loves the Son (present tense verb signifying continual habitual action) and shows Him all that He is doing (again, a present tense stressing continual action). The Son is able to do what the Father does. It is implied that the Son does all that He sees (Morris, 313).

The Father is not passive in the matter of self-disclosure. He does not make Jesus work to discover what He can from the Father's will; rather, the Father's love is so complete and unreserved that all of His works are being displayed to the Son as they are wrought (Bernard I, 240; Carson, 251-252).

Furthermore, if the Father reveals all to the Son and the Son does it, then the Son is revealing the Father by doing His deeds and revealing His will (1:18). This marvelous disclosure of the Father depends, in the first instance, not of God's love for us, but of the love of the Father for the Son. The climax of the cross is simply the outflow of love between the Father and the Son (Carson, 251-252). Jesus' actions do not proceed from human motivation but in accordance to divine revelation.

John often uses the word "works" for the miracles of Christ (Jn. 5:36; 7:3, 21; 10:25, 32, 38, etc.; Bernard I, 240), though it refers to all He does (Morris, 314, n. 62). In its usual context it does not denote something spectacular, but speaks of normal daily work. What we see as a miracle is no more than "work" to Christ (Morris, 314, n. 63).

Jesus had performed some spectacular works including changing water into wine and a number of healings. But greater works than these lie ahead. The following verses show what the greater works are; Christ will assume the prerogatives that God alone possesses by giving life to the dead (v. 21) and judging at the final judgment (v. 22; Carson, 252).

Men will marvel at these works. This does not mean that Jesus derives some cheap thrill from people's amazement over what He can perform; rather, Jesus is dealing with opponents here. They do not believe in Him. It is, perhaps, through further revelation of the Father through Jesus that they will marvel and take the first step of faith (Jn. 14:11; Morris, 314 n. 65; Carson, 252).

5:21 "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes."

This third "for" introduces an example of the principle found in verses 19 and 20. The OT presupposed that raising the dead was a prerogative belonging to God alone (II Ki. 5:7; Ezek. 37:13; Deut. 32:39; I Sam. 2:6). Christ's ability to give life to the dead is possible because the Son does what the Father does and discloses the Father's will.

Some may think of Elisha and his act of raising the dead (II Ki. 4:32-35), but Jesus' ability is far different than Elisha's; Elisha was a tool used by God to accomplish His will, but it was God's will that caused life to enter into the boy once again. Jesus was not just an instrument of divine power. He gives life to whomever *He pleases*; it is *His will* that determines who will have life. Although He can do nothing apart from the Father, His will, pleasures, and choices are so completely attune to the Father's that one can say that the decisions are His (Carson, 253).

5:22 "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,"

The last "for" now appears. "Moreover" is a proper translation. That is, the demonstration that the Son does whatever the Father does is seen not only in the Son's authority to give life (V.21), but also in His authority to judge on the last day (v.22, Acts 17:31). I take verse 22 to mean something like "The Father judges no one [on his own]."

God has long been recognized as the judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25) for it requires omniscience to be perfectly administered (Bernard I, 241). This tremendous prerogative has been given to the Son (Bernard I, 241).

The tension between 3:17 (God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world) and 5:22 is only apparent. John 3:17 refers to the purpose of the Son's coming; Jesus came to save, not judge. John 5:22 refers to the roles of the Father and the Son. An inevitable result of His coming is that those who are not saved must be judged (Carson, 254).

5:23 "so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."

The reason why the Father has entrusted the ability to impart life and all judgment to the Son is now given; it is so that all might honor the Son as they do the Father (Bruce, 130; Bernard I, 241). As the Lord of Life and the Judge of the world, all must honor Him with equal honor as they honor the Father, and whoever does not, does not honor God at all (Alford, 747).

In other words, Jesus declares that not only is He one in activity with the Father, but He must receive the same honor as well. In 3:44 Jesus declared that His own people did not even honor Him as a prophet,

but this goes beyond making Jesus a mere ambassador, for the same honor is never given to the envoy as it is given to the head of state. Jesus does not diminish God by claiming equality to Him. On the contrary, it is precisely the glorification of the Son that honors the Father (as Phil 2:9-11; Bruce, 130). The God who declares that He will not give His glory to another (Isa. 42:8; 48:11) is not compromised when divine honors are given to the Son (Carson, 255). Rather, when the Son is exalted, the Father is glorified (Bruce, 130). The whole stress is on the unity of the Father and the Son. In this case, whatever is done to one is done to the other also (Morris, 315).

It is a small step in saying that the one who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father. But such a comment belongs only to one who is God or it is stark insanity. The one who says such things should either be dismissed in pity or worshipped as Lord. The same options confront us. Either John's witness of Christ is that of a fool, or it is true and Jesus should be honored as God (Carson, 255). The great peril threatening the Jews was that they did not honor the Son. In denouncing Him for breaking the Sabbath, they were dishonoring the Father (Dods, 740).

5:24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

There is a movement from the relation of the Son to the Father to the relation of the Son to men (Westcott, 192), but at the same time this develops the theme already introduced (Carson, 255); the unity of the Father and the Son is also seen in the way that men are saved (Morris, 315).

Hearing Jesus' word is like hearing God, for all that the Son says has been revealed to Him by the Father. Hearing is acknowledging Christ's words as true, as having come from God (Westcott, 193); it is synonymous to believing and obeying what is heard (Carson, 256). The object of one's belief is the Father. Though it is not improper to view Christ as the object of faith (3:16; 14:1 etc.), in the present context Jesus is trying to demonstrate how He mediates the Father to us. The words and deeds of the Son are the words and deeds of the Father.

Judgment as it is used here has the idea of being condemned (being found guilty). In a different sense both the believer and the unbeliever will be judged (that is their lives will be evaluated), but the believer will be acquitted.

Eternal life points to permanent safety. It is a present possession. Believers have already passed out of death into life. To have it now is to be secure for eternity (Morris, 316).