



SERMON TITLE: Unpredictable Jesus
SCRIPTURE: John 5:1-18

DATE: November 24, 2019
PASTOR: Charlie Boyd

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

If you've been walking with God any length of time, you have no doubt found that God just doesn't do the things the way that you think he should. People die earlier than expected. Some suffer lengthy illnesses, while others experience miraculous healings. The world is full of suffering and violence and evil that God could prevent if he so desired. Even God's own people are splintered and divided when we should be unified. One thing is for certain; you can't put God in a box and say you've got him figured out. And this can be a real hindrance to faith. In this passage from John's Gospel (5:1-18), we see Jesus acting in unusual, unorthodox, unpredictable ways; in ways that don't make a lot of sense. However, he always acts in ways that are consistent with his Heavenly Father's sovereign purposes. And if we look carefully, I believe we find a partial answer to the question of *why God does what he does the way he does*. John 5:1-18—Today, we will walk straight through the passage verse-by-verse. What follows is a brief summary of the storyline.

After the very positive things we saw in John 4—many people coming to faith in Christ—Jesus goes to an unnamed feast in Jerusalem where things go south very quickly. It all starts with Jesus going to a pool called Bethesda where many sick people gathered hoping they would be healed. The popular belief was that from time to time an angel stirred the water and if you were the first one into the water, you would be healed. At the pool, there laid a man who had been lame for 38 years. Jesus sees him and asks, "Do you want to be healed?" which, seems like an odd question. But, Jesus asks this question to get the man's attention and to also help him see that his lack of hope is tied to the fact that he's trusting in the wrong things. The man doesn't answer Jesus' question. He simply says, "I have no one to stay with me to help me into the pool"—hint, hint J. Jesus doesn't answer that statement, he simply says, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And with that, the man stands up and he does what he's not been able to do for 38 years!

In spite of the popular belief that healing is granted only to those who have faith, we see that no faith is exercised by this man. Yes, he stands up, but he can't possibly have faith because, as we will see, he doesn't even know who Jesus is. In the Gospels, we do see times when faith is required, but there are other times when God sovereignly, graciously grants healing to whoever he desires with no conditions.

And contrary to the popular belief that it is God's will to heal everybody, Jesus only heals this man, and no one else lying there that day. What amazes me here is that this man gets up and walks away and that's it. No who are you, Lord? ...No thank you, uh, who did you say you were?

Nothing. It's like, the man has been healed by Jesus but at the end of the day, he wants nothing to do with Jesus. So, off he goes, carrying his mat, and then—verse 9—a bomb explodes. "Now that day was the Sabbath." This is really what this story is about. Sabbath breaking. The moment the religious leaders see this guy carrying his mat, they call him out, "What do you think you're doing? You know you can't carry stuff like that around on the Sabbath." Mark it down, Jesus has intentionally designed this healing on this day to provoke these religious leaders in order to expose their hypocrisy.

Why would Jesus want to purposely antagonize these people? Because, nobody ever comes to God until they are willing to give up on what they have been trusting. The man Jesus just healed was trusting in the only thing he knew—his self-help plan of somehow getting into the pool before anyone else. As the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus could not reach them until he confronted their self-righteousness. He had to punch them in the stomach of their sin, and their sin was self-righteous legalism. They thought being right with God rested on how well they kept rules and rituals and

religious traditions. These pious men were not amazed with this man who had been healed of a 38 year long-term illness. They were only concerned with policing their Sabbath policies. "What are you doing carry that stuff around?" *It's not my fault. The man who healed me told me to do it* (again, no questions about his healing), "Who told you to carry that mat?" But the man didn't know who it was. He had not even bothered to ask. So they let him go and as he's walking around in the Temple complex, Jesus finds him again. "Look at you, healed, and up walked around!" Then Jesus says, "Sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you."

Now, that doesn't mean that the man's sickness was caused by sin. It could have been, but it's not true that all sickness is caused by sin. What Jesus seems to be saying is something like this: continuing in a lifestyle of sin after experiencing God's grace does bring unwanted consequences. Grace means that God accepts you in spite of your sin, but it doesn't mean that God is okay with you continuing in sin. So, what does the man do with that? He goes right back to the religious leaders and he tells them Jesus' name. And that sets off a firestorm of persecution that will pave the road to the cross. There's an obvious confrontation. "What are you doing healing people and then telling them they don't have to obey our Sabbath laws?"

Jesus says, "My Father is working until now and so am I." "God, my father, and I, his son—we—don't stop working on the Sabbath." *Kaboom!* You just can't make statements like that without causing those Jewish leaders head to explode. In no uncertain terms, Jesus was claiming to be equal with God and that is exactly what they understood him to be saying (see v18).

In your life Jesus will not always do things the way you ask. He will not always do things the same way. He will not always do things the way you might expect. He will not always do things the "right" way according to your religious traditions, your religious comfort zones, and your religious boxes. He will not always do things according to your definition of "right." He won't.

But he will always act like God—sovereign in his purposes, gracious in all his ways. Confronting us head on with whatever we're trusting in. Confronting our wrongheaded ideas about how life should work. Confronting false hope in false Messiahs. Confronting whatever it is we feel comfortable with, especially when our comfort zones prevent us from knowing God as he really is, and not the way that we want him to be.

BIG IDEA: Jesus deals with us in unusual, unorthodox, unpredictable ways in order to call us to trust in him and him alone.

Discussion Starters:

- Ask: Share with the group a time when God was at work in your life in ways you could not understand. (maybe, he's doing that right now with some in the group)...How did you feel during that time? ...What struggles with faith did you experience? ...
- Now have someone read 5:1-18.
- Ask: How do we see Jesus acting in unusual, unorthodox, unpredictable ways? ...Don't move off this too quickly. After someone shares, ask the other group members what they think about what was just shared before saying, "Okay, someone else? What other ways do we see Jesus working in hard-to-understand ways? ...Why did he heal the man with no conditions? ...Why did he search out the man after he showed no interest in Jesus? ...Why did Jesus seemingly, intentionally provoke the religious leaders? etc
- When Jesus does act in ways that you don't understand, it is for the purpose of growing your faith. Why is "faith-building" more important to God than granting your every request?
- What else do you need to discuss from this passage? ...additional questions, insights, "aha's" ?