

# The Gospel of John

## The Power of False Religion

John 5:1-16

### INTRODUCTION:

#### All Stand and Read Scripture.

#### **John 5:1-16 (NASB)**

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

<sup>2</sup> Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. <sup>3</sup> In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; <sup>4</sup> 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.] <sup>5</sup> A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> 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?" <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> Jesus *said* to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." <sup>9</sup> Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk.

Now it was the Sabbath on that day. <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.'" <sup>12</sup> They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up *your pallet* and walk?'" <sup>13</sup> 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*. <sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. <sup>16</sup> For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.

#### Prayer

Two weeks ago, we looked at this same portion of scripture from the perspective of the distinction between merit and mercy. That we cannot save ourselves. We are only saved by the blood of Christ.

Now think about this: everybody believes that the first person in the pool will be healed. So, what do you think everybody does? They all crowd to the edge of the pool. They push and shove one another to get that prime real estate down close to the water. This guy doesn't stand a chance.

It's always the stronger more agile people who get in ahead of him. And this points to the irony behind the pool at Bethesda. The name Bethesda means "House of Mercy". It might have been named that because of its reputation for being a place of healing, but in reality, Bethesda was not a "**House of Mercy**"... it was a "**House of Merit**".

If you weren't quick enough, strong enough, fast enough – you weren't going to get healed. It was a place that was literally designed for the survival of the fittest. The ones who made it into the water were the ones who could **MERIT** their own healing.

The weak were left with little hope. There was no mercy shown there down at this pool. Because, if you weren't strong enough to get in the pool first... you were out of luck.

## **I. THE COMPASSION OF JESUS.**

But then Jesus came to Bethesda. The **Lord of Mercy** came to the **House of Mercy**. And He chose a man who had no chance of ever being healed... and He healed him.

Many people in this world have their own little "**Pool of Bethesda**".

It's the place where they think they will be healed of the heartaches of this world. It's a house of "**merit**" where they believe - if they can just be strong enough, smart enough, connected enough - they will be able to fix whatever's wrong in their lives.

Just like the people at that pool 2000 years ago, people still today vainly believe their little pool will bring the hope and change they long for. But it never quite happens. After a while they realize they're not as strong, quick, or smart as they thought they were and they're left with a life without hope and change.

This is a very important portion of Scripture and not for the reason that most people think. It **is** a story about a man whom Jesus healed. And for that man it **was** a remarkable experience. But this healing is a little different than other healings in the New Testament. Jesus **came** to this man instead of the man **seeking** out Jesus. So the lame man was not healed because of his faith. He is not a believer. He doesn't even know who Jesus is.

The story does show the compassion of Christ.

### **John 5:8-9a (NASB)**

***<sup>8</sup>Jesus \*said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." <sup>9</sup>Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk.***

But there's so much more to the story than just that. This is not just another story about a healing. This is a story about the power of false religion, the devastating grip of false religion, the damning force that false religion exerts on people's minds and souls, even in the face of the truth.

Now, I want you to see what is written in the last half of verse 9.

### **John 5:9b (NASB)**

***Now it was the Sabbath on that day.***

That is the point of this whole miracle. Jesus could have done this miracle the following day. This man did not have a terminal illness. This man had a lingering problem. This man could have been healed three days later or two days earlier. Jesus picked the Sabbath because that's the whole point of what's happening here. He picked the Sabbath for the very purpose of creating a confrontation with the leaders of Israel.

He told the man, “**pick up your pallet**” and carry it on the Sabbath. Didn't He know that would rattle the Jewish leaders? Of course He knew that! They had perverted the Sabbath law that had been given to them by God. They had added dozens and dozens of other rules that had to be followed on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was such a burden to people that they could not carry it out. The Jewish leaders didn't give them any help...it was just an impossible burden. And they had therefore perverted the Sabbath into the worse day of the week, the day of the greatest amount of bondage.

The scribes and Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath so they might find reason to accuse Him. So Jesus accommodated them. He knew what they were thinking, as He always did.

When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders were filled with rage and discussed what they would do to Jesus. They wanted Him dead because of what He was doing on their precious Sabbath. The Sabbath was the focal point of their apostate, self-righteous, legalistic, religious system.”

Jesus even declared to them that He could do whatever He wanted on the Sabbath.

### **Mark 2:27-28 (NASB)**

<sup>27</sup> Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

<sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

So Jesus purposely brought about a Sabbath confrontation. This was never about the faith of the man. This was about the confrontation with the leaders.

Jesus deliberately heals this lame man on the Sabbath, deliberately tells him to pick up his bed, deliberately tells him to walk. He knows He is defying the Jews that are always around watching Him. He has no interest in Jewish tradition, only the Law of God. He knows that they have substituted the **traditions of men** for the Law of God. He knows the Sabbath is a means to glorify God and honor God. It is a gift to mankind. They have turned it into a burden and a way in which they can demonstrate their false righteousness. And so He attacks them at the heart of their system and He does it by an act of compassion to a man who is lame for such a long time.

## **II. THE CONTEMPT OF THE JEWS.**

The amazing compassion of Jesus is then followed by the amazing **contempt of the Jews**. He could simply have told him – “Get up and walk.” **But no...** He says “Get up, **PICK UP YOUR PALLET...** and walk.”

### **Why is that important?**

Well, this is the Sabbath, and according to the Jews, no one was to work on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees (the legalists of the day) had a whole list of things they believed you could not do on the Sabbath...and apparently, on that list, was carrying your mat around.

Jesus was baiting the Pharisees. He was getting their attention. When they see this man walking around with his mat they get upset. When the Jewish leaders find out it was Jesus who healed the man...they come after Him. Look at verse 10.

**John 5:10 (NASB)**

<sup>10</sup> 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.”

The Jews were throwing their weight at him with their man-made rules.

**John 5:11 (NASB)**

<sup>11</sup> But he answered them, “He who made me well was the one who said to me, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk.’”

They couldn’t care less whether the man could walk. They had nothing but contempt for that man, believing that he was in that condition because God had punished him for a previous sin.

I want to remind you that the scriptures tell us that the miracles of Jesus were signs that God was approving what Jesus was teaching and claiming. But the Jewish leaders totally ignore the fact that a miracle has been performed and have nothing but contempt for the man. But more importantly, they have nothing but contempt for Jesus and what He has done.

**John 5:12 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup> They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Pick up *your pallet* and walk?’”

They want to know who did this? Who told you that you could carry your bed? Ignore the miracle! Who told you that you could carry your bed?

**III. THE COMPLACENCY OF THE MAN.**

He’s intimidated. This man is intimidated. And that’s what leads to the third and most compelling part of the story, the complacency of the man. We have seen the **compassion of Jesus**, the **contempt of the Jews**, and now the **complacency of the man**. This is really amazing.

**John 5:14a (NASB)**

<sup>14</sup> Afterward Jesus \*found him in the temple...

Now remember there would have been tens of thousands of people in the Temple because of the feast. But Jesus knew the heart of people and He knew where they were physically and spiritually. He knew their past and their future. So Jesus finds the man among the crowd in the Temple. The man is no doubt talking to everybody he can find about what has happened to him. He has no idea who caused him to walk or where his power came from.

### **John 5:14b (NASB)**

...and said to him, "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."

What is the implication of that? It suggests that his 38 year illness **was** connected to sin just as the Jews believed. They believed that the perils of all men was due to some sin in their past and they would have nothing to do with them. But Jesus makes it clear in other passages that this is not always the case.

In chapter 9 we see Jesus bringing eyesight to a man born blind.

### **John 9:1-3 (NASB)**

9 As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, "*It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*"

So how did Jesus answer? **Neither!** Sometimes you're sick or handicapped and it's not a direct punishment for sin. But as we see in the case of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda sometimes health or frailty **is** a direct punishment for sin.

Then Jesus gives a final warning to the man. You have been made well, now you need to go a different direction, away from the sin that has hampered your life. That suggests to me that the man was unsaved. And Jesus is saying that he has spent **thirty-eight** years of lameness as a result of sin, but that is nothing compared to the wrath of God that you could experience forever. You've been made well. Go and sin no more."

Here's the most shocking part of the story.

### **John 5:15 (NASB)**

<sup>15</sup> The man went away, and **told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.**

He picked sides, didn't he? Whose side did he pick? The Jews. Amazing! Even after four decades of terrible suffering and then being healed and warned to sin no more, he chose to go back to the Jews. I am sure, he walked away from Jesus and declared his loyalty to the Jews who hated Jesus. He **knew** they hated Jesus. He **knew** they were after Jesus. Everybody knew they were after Jesus. And, just like Judas, he turned Jesus in.

## **CONCLUSION:**

**That is the power of false religion!**

That is the point I want to stress this morning.

In the face of the compassion of Christ, in the face of an amazing miracle, in the face of healing, this man declared his loyalty to the Jews who hated Jesus and wanted Him dead. This has to be the most startling act of ingratitude and unbelief in all the healings that Jesus did. He has no intention of following Jesus. He knows the Jews are hostile. And in order to put himself back in good graces for having violated **their** Sabbath he turned Jesus in to the religious establishment.

**This is the power of false religion!**

### **John 5:16 (NASB)**

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

As a result the Jews were persecuting Jesus because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.

Yes, it is a miracle story, but it is a tragically sad miracle story. Not a story about a man who was **healed and then became a believer**. But a man who was **healed and became a rejecter**. And if that surprises you, keep this in mind. Almost all the people Jesus healed rejected Him because He healed massive numbers of people and there remained only a few believers at the end. That is the power ...the damning power...of false religion. He took his side with the religious establishment. That triggers the persecution of Christ that then follows...all the way to the cross.

I want you to briefly look at this story from the perspective of the Jewish leaders. They felt that they were the elite of God's chosen people. They were the **leaders** of the Jews! They were physical descendants of Abraham. They truly believed in God and read and studied the scriptures rigorously. But the problem was that they had corrupted God's law with man-made legalism. The intent of the Sabbath was a time of rest to worship God not set of rules that dictated what you could or could not do on the Sabbath.

Jesus told them...

### **John 5:39-40 (NASB)**

**39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;** **40 and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.**

The very scriptures that they were reading was telling them about the Messiah. They did not understand that the scriptures were prophesying about a **suffering** Messiah that was going to die for our sins. A Messiah that was going to bring salvation to mankind by being the ultimate sacrifice for OUR sins. They thought that the Messiah was going to be an earthy king who would free them from the bondage of the Romans. When Jesus did not meet their expectations they refused to accept Him as deity. Despite the fact that Jesus tells them here in the latter part of chapter 5 of His deity and at many other places, they refuse to believe Him and consider Him as one Who will not obey their laws concerning the Sabbath and as a blasphemer. A "**man**" Who was claiming to be God.

He heals a man. He warns him about living in sin and the need to turn from sin and the man goes right back to his damning religion and turns Jesus in.

What about you? Do you love Christ? Do you embrace Him as your Lord and Savior? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the living God, or are you captive to a belief system that rejects Christ making you a prisoner of its deception?

Man once believed that the earth was flat, but believing it did not make it true. Some have said that the moon is made of cheese, but believing it does not make it so.

What we **believe** MUST be based upon truth. The Bible (God's Word) has proven to be ultimate truth.

The Jewish leaders refused to listen to the truth of Jesus. They believed in a lie. Despite the fact that they were physical descendants of Abraham and that they were very sincere in their believe in God and that they studied of the scriptures, they did not accept the truth of the scriptures that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah and they were lost!

**John 5:23b (NASB)**

<sup>23</sup> ... He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

This is a tragic story. The lame man made his choice...a wrong choice...a tragic choice. He was much like Judas who walked with Jesus, saw His power, heard His words, heard His warnings, and chose eternal punishment separated from God.

I warn you as Jesus warned. There's only one hope of salvation and that's in Jesus Christ. Reject Him and you are lost forever. Accept Him and you will live eternally with Him in Heaven.

**The Family of God.**