



Disciplers Bible Studies

JOHN
LESSON 6

The Lord of the Sabbath John 5:1-47

Introduction

As we have followed John's account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ in the first 4 chapters, we are seeing that, in presenting Jesus as the Son of God, John deals with specific historical events. In addition, he gives us the stated or implied explanation of their meaning or significance.

A. Review of Chapter 1

In Chapter 1, the Word - the Son of God - became flesh and dwelt among us. John the Baptist identified Him as the Lamb of God. The first disciples acknowledged Him as the Messiah and followed Him.

B. Review of Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, Jesus manifested His glory by changing water to wine. This first sign miracle symbolized the replacement of the Jewish ceremonial washings and traditions with the creative work and transforming power of Jesus Christ. He also cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem of corrupt activities and related the Jewish questions about His authority to the temple of His body being raised after three days.

C. Review of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 covered the interview with Nicodemus and the absolute essentiality of being born again. The second part of the chapter explained John the Baptist's role with respect to Jesus and emphasized that belief or disbelief in the Son of God was a matter of life and death. To the believer, Christ's coming is the supreme revelation of God's love bringing the assurance of eternal life. To the unbeliever, His coming is the sign that he or she remains the object of God's displeasure.

D. Review of Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, Jesus compassionately and lovingly drew the Samaritan woman at the well into His kingdom. Her neighbors joined her in calling Jesus the Savior of the world. Later on, He executed a second sign miracle by healing the royal official's son, showing the healing power of His life-giving word even at a distance of some twenty miles.

E. This Week's Lesson

John 5 describes a turning point and change of atmosphere in Christ's public ministry. A real conflict has developed. Up to this time, there have been some individuals who have seen His miraculous healings and heard His great teaching discourses and have responded in faith. But now, there is a deep darkening of unbelief among the multitudes, spurred on by the self-righteous Pharisees. The Lord of the Sabbath is condemned for "working" on the Sabbath and claiming equality with His Father God. These issues have caused the Jews to be determined to seek and kill Jesus.

Outline of John 5:1-47

- I. Third Sign: The Healing of the Lame Man (5:1-9)
- II. The Accusation of the Jews (5:10-18)
- III. The Claims of Jesus (5:19-30)
- IV. The Evidence for the Claims (5:31-40)

A. The Sheep Gate Pool

1. Many Infirm People

Jesus left Galilee and went up to Jerusalem for one of the religious feasts of the year. Since there is no mention of the disciples, He may have been alone. At the Sheep Gate pool (Bethesda), He saw many blind, lame, and paralyzed people awaiting the periodic "troubling of the waters". These infirmed people thought the water movement was the work of an angel and that it had peculiar healing powers.

2. Direct Gift From God

It is not known whether or not the water was impregnated with minerals of medicinal value. Probably the best explanation is that the water movement was caused by a subterranean spring periodically gushing water into the pool below the surface. The water probably had a high mineral content with "healing" benefits for people suffering from arthritis and other muscle and joint problems. Whatever the situation, these people knew that God was the Source of all good and that He gave intellect to man

and healing influence to matter. They therefore accepted the Bethesda pool as a direct gift from God.

B. The Hopelessly Lame Man

1. Paralyzed for Thirty-Eight Years

Jesus noticed one man who appeared to be helpless, lonely and apparently resigned to his hopeless condition. He had been lame and paralyzed for thirty-eight years and was physically, psychologically and spiritually sick. From vs. 14, his condition may have been the result of sin. Jesus' supernatural knowledge pointed to this man as one among many invalids who wanted healing. For His own purposes, Jesus was selective as to whom He would heal physically.

C. The Physical and Spiritual Healing

1. Take Up Your Bed and Walk

Jesus asked him, *“Do you want to be made well?”* It may seem strange to ask a sick man if he wants to be well, but Jesus wanted to make sure the man was not satisfied with his condition of being helpless and was avoiding responsibilities. His self-pity answer implied that he did want to get well, so Jesus challenged him to exert himself in faith – to risk himself by obeying Christ's next command, *“Rise, take up your bed and walk.”* Immediately, the man took up his bed and walked. He experienced a complete change of life with new energy, power and wholeness. It all occurred on the Sabbath.

2. Obedience and faith

The power to obey was inherent in Christ's command. The lame man's obedience and power occurred simultaneously. If the man had not obeyed in faith, he would have been powerless to get up and walk. What Jesus did for the lame man is a sign of what He will do for anyone who will believe in Him spiritually with “mustard-seed” faith (Matthew 17:20.)

Application:

The spiritual significance of this miracle is that Jesus has come to restore men and women to His call of total wholeness. This physical healing is a sign of what He will do for anyone who will believe in Him on the spiritual level. Do you have a situation in your life, health or otherwise, in which you really want Jesus to help you? Tell Him of your desire. Confess and repent of any sin in your life and believe in your heart that He can and will help you.

II. The Accusation of the Jews (John 5:10- 18)

A. The Jew's Sabbath Law

This passage instigated the issue which antagonized and ignited the Jewish authorities – healing and commanding this man to walk on the Sabbath and claiming to be personally equal with God. The Jew's Sabbath law contained thirty-nine prohibitions, one of which was carrying a load from one place to another. When confronted carrying his bed, the man told them he was acting on another man's command, suggesting that the main responsibility for his violation lay with the man who told him to do it. He did not know who Jesus was at this time, but later Jesus found him in the Temple and told him not to continue in sin or something worse might happen to him. This implies that the man's paralysis had resulted from his own sin. He then identified Jesus to the authorities as the one who had cured him and told him to carry his bed and walk on the Sabbath.

B. Legalistic Interpretation

The Jews started persecuting Jesus, not only for breaking the Sabbath, but for inciting others to violate the law. The Old Testament prophets had predicted that when Messiah came, He would heal the lame (Isaiah 35:1-7.) Here was proof right in front of them that the Messiah had come. But the self-righteous Jews could not see beyond their legalistic interpretation of the law. God gave the Sabbath to be a blessing, not a burden, to people. Jesus taught and showed the Jews that the Sabbath was most worthily kept when God's purposes for it were most actively promoted.

C. Sought to Kill Jesus

Jesus' statement, *“My Father has been working until now and I have been working,”* really enraged them. These words put Him on the same level as God. It was unthinkable to them that anyone should be comparable to Jehovah God. So the Jews sought all the more to kill Him.

III. The Claims of Jesus (5:19-30)

A. Perfect Unity and Love

In vs. 19, Jesus began explaining the meaning of His previous words, including why He claimed to be equal with God. He was the Son of the Father in a unique sense and in no way did He act independently. He was in perfect submission to the Father, who initiated, while He, the Son, obeyed. Their re-

lationship and unity of action were based on perfect love.

B. Power Over Death

The Son manifested the Father's mind by His (Christ's) words, work and signs. He proclaimed that He had been given authority from the Father to raise the dead and to impart eternal life. The Jews said that only God could raise the dead (2 Kings 5:7; Ezekiel 17:13). Here, Jesus claimed the authority of overcoming the forces of sin and death and raising people from the dead. Later, He demonstrated this authority and power (John 11:41-44.)

C. Eternal Life

Concerning eternal life, Jesus said that, beyond the physical life He gave to the lame man, He could give spiritual (eternal) life to anyone who chooses to trust in Him and commit themselves wholly to Him. He alone was the means by which one passes from death into the sphere of everlasting life immediately in time.

D. Final Judgment

Further, Jesus claimed to have authority to execute final judgment, which authority the Father had given as the Son's sole jurisdiction. This may seem to conflict with John 3:19, but later we will see how these two statements reconcile. The Father was committing all judgment to the Son so that He might receive the same honor as given to the Father. When the Son is exalted as the final judge, the Father is glorified.

Jesus, the Son of Man, will sit on the judgment throne when His hour comes. Everyone in the graves will hear His voice and will be resurrected either to the group called "*of life*", or into the group called "*of condemnation*". In these verses, "*to do good*" means to choose to come to Christ, the source of all goodness and life; "*to do evil*" was to choose to reject His light and His offer of eternal life.

Application:

The kind of resurrection we will have for eternity is determined by our choices in this life. If in your heart you aren't sure you have chosen to follow Christ, please do not wait. If you have made that choice, pray each day that the absorbing passion of your personal inner life will be to completely surrender your life, obedience and will to Christ.

IV. The Evidence for the Claims (5:31-40)

A. The Law of Moses

After Jesus stated His claims, the Jewish authorities were saying to each other, "*What evidence can He give us to support these unheard of claims? Who gave Him the honor of such a witness?*" So Jesus first acknowledged the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:25) which stated that before something can be proven, there must be at least two witnesses. Jesus then began to discuss the several witnesses who knew Him as God's unique Son.

B. The First Witness: the Father.

The "*another who bears witness of Me*" in vs. 32 is God the Father. Jesus may have been referring to the Father's voice at His baptism, "*This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" Later, in vs. 37-38, John writes again about the Father's witness.

C. The Second Witness: John the Baptist.

The Jewish authorities knew John the Baptist and Jesus reminded them of his witness. Over and over, the Baptist had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the One who baptized in the Holy Spirit, and the One who took away the sins of the world. John had been empowered by God to be a bright lamp to illuminate the path of the Coming One. He repeatedly told the Jews that he, John, was not the light of the world, but that he came to bear witness of the light.

D. The Third Witness: His Works from the Father.

Jesus then spoke of the supernatural works the Father sent Him to do. He explained to them that all of His works, signs and words were given to Him by the Father, including the healing of the lame man, His life of perfect obedience and His work of redemption on the cross. They were for the purpose that all might see, hear and believe that He was the Son of God.

E. The Fourth Witness: the Scriptures.

After Jesus told the Jews that the Father, whom they don't know, bears witness of Him, He said the Scriptures testify in detail about Him as the Coming One, the Messiah. He said, in effect, "*You people search the Scriptures and read in the Law and the Prophets concerning your Messiah, and still you are unwilling to come to Him in order to have life.*" He reminded them that Moses wrote about Christ (Deu-

teronomy 18:18) and by rejecting Jesus, they were refusing to believe Moses.

Dr. Constable writes, “The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day were serious students of the Old Testament, but they studied it for the wrong reason, namely, to earn eternal life through their effort” (Romans 7:10; Galatians 3:21.)

V. The Rejection of the Evidence (5:41-47)

Jesus ended this tense discussion with a severe chastisement, “*You do not have the love of God in yourselves.*” He had told them about John the Baptist, God the Father, His own works and Moses in the Old Testament: all witnesses to His authority as the unique Son of God. Still, they refused to believe Him. The main reason why they would not trust and honor Him is because they sought glory from one another. They loved their own reputation more than anything else and they sought approval in the eyes of men rather than God. They were so immersed in the Law and their added rules they could not see the core of God’s truth. They did not understand that the Law was given to expose their sinfulness and would not give them eternal life. They considered Moses’ ordinances and sacrifices as ends in themselves and were not receptive to his prophecy of the great Prophet and Priest who alone could fully atone for the sins of mankind.

Application:

Here before the very eyes of the Jewish authorities was their Messiah showing and telling them how they might have eternal life with God. But they were too hung up on their own lifestyle and belief system to grasp the significance of God’s testimony concerning His Son. Would you have responded to these witnesses and evidence like the Jews? Are there still parts of God’s Word that you may be interpreting in your own self-interest?