

What on earth is Jesus doing?

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[0 : 0 0] Today's reading is from John chapter 5, found on page 1068 in the Church Bibles. So it's John chapter 5, verses 1 to 30.

Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate, a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda, and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

Here, a great number of disabled people used to lie, the blind, the lame, the paralysed. One who was there had been an invalid for 38 years.

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, Do you want to get well? Sir, the invalid replied, I have no one to help me get into the pool when the water is stirred.

While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me. Then Jesus said to him, Get up, pick up your mat and walk. At once the man was cured. He picked up his mat and walked.

[1 : 2 0] The day in which this took place was the Sabbath. So the Jewish leader said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath. The law forbids you to carry your mat.

But he replied, The man who made me well said to me, Pick up your mat and walk. So they asked him, Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk? The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

So because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defence, Jesus said to them, My father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working.

For this reason they tried all the more to kill him. Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. Jesus gave them this answer, Very truly I tell you, the son can do nothing by himself.

[2 : 3 9] He can only do what he sees his father doing, because whatever the father does, the son also does. For the father loves the son and shows him all he does.

Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Moreover, the father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the son, that all may honour the son just as they honour the father. Whoever does not honour the son does not honour the father who sent him.

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.

Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come, when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the father has life in himself, so he has granted the son also to have life in himself, and he has given him authority to judge because he is the son of man.

- [3 : 52] Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice, and come out. Those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

By myself I can do nothing, I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself, but him who sent me.

Thank you very much Catherine, and let me add my welcome to Martin's. As Martin said earlier on, we are continuing in our series in John's Gospel, we are looking at the Gospel of John through the lens of water.

Water features very prominently in John's Gospel, particularly in the first half of the Gospel. And this week and next week, we are looking at a pair of healing miracles that both take place at pools in Jerusalem, both take place on the Sabbath, and both provoke considerable controversy.

So we are at the pool of Bethesda this morning. It would be great help to me if you would keep your Bible open at chapter 5 of John's Gospel, and let's join together in prayer as we come to study God's Word.

- [5 : 13] Let's pray. Father, we give thanks to you for your Word, for recording these things that Jesus did and said.

We're thankful that it is your revealed desire for us to stand amazed and marvel at Jesus and honour your Son. We pray that by your Spirit, you would come among us and impress us all the more about who Jesus is, and what he's done for us.

That all here this morning, we'd hear his Word and encounter him afresh and respond rightly. For we ask it in his precious name.

Amen. Well, we're asking the question this morning, what on earth is Jesus doing? What's he doing with this particular miracle, in this particular way?

What on earth is he doing healing on the Sabbath, doing it on the Sabbath, and provoking all sorts of controversy like that? What on earth is Jesus doing?

- [6 : 24] But before we get stuck into that question, I think it's worth our whiles asking yourselves a question. Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

Do you believe that he gives life? Now, you might be thinking, well, of course I do. This is a church after all, and that's what Christians are supposed to believe.

But I don't want to assume that everyone here believes that Jesus is the Son of God. It might be that you're looking in on the Christian things.

You might be sceptical, perhaps, about the claims of Christianity. You might be sitting on the fence. Well, I hope that what you hear this morning, this afternoon now, about what Jesus does and says in this passage will give you cause for thought.

Will give you pause for thought. Most of us here, of course, are Christians, and you would say, yes, I do believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Well, how sure are you that Jesus can give life?

- [7 : 36] How confident are you that your city, your colleagues, your friends, your family, your neighbours need Jesus? So if you really do believe that Jesus rose from the grave and gives life from the grave, then that will profoundly change your thinking.

That will profoundly change everything. How you think about death, how you think about life, how you make your decisions. If you're asking me to base my entire life on this, then I want to be really sure.

And so in order to convince us, John's recorded for us what he calls signs, extraordinary things that Jesus did, miracles to persuade us of the truth.

That's why he wrote the book. So just keep a thumb in chapter 5 and turn on to page 1090. John chapter 20, verses 30 and following.

John helpfully tells us why he wrote this gospel. John 20, verse 30. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded.

[8 : 57] But these signs are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The healing of the man in our passage in chapter 5 is one such sign. And we'll look first at the sign itself and then at what Jesus says afterwards.

Jesus explains the sign in the second part of the passage and the sign illustrates for us what he says. So two parts this morning. The first part, restoration on the day of rest.

The second part, like father, like son. So firstly then, John gives us in verses 1 to 5 the setting for the healing in this chapter.

We're given the main characters, Jesus and the man who's been an invalid for 38 years. And we're told that this takes place near the sheep gate in Jerusalem at the pool of Bethesda, which we're told has five colonnaded roofs.

[10 : 05] And we're told archaeologists reckon that rather than it being a pentagon shape, there were two pools, an upper pool, a lower pool with a colonnaded gallery along the middle of them, dividing them like that as well as a colonnade around the whole perimeter.

It's a bit like if you can imagine a medieval cloister in a monastery, except instead of a garden or a pair of gardens in the middle, there's two pools of water. And it's this kind of grand setting, this kind of theatrical backdrop almost, for what's really a hopeless scene.

The gathering place, verse 3, of a great number of disabled people, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed, we're told. And it's a hopeless scene because they're all there in the vain hope that they'll perhaps be healed by the pool's mysterious waters.

The eagle-eyed amongst you might have noticed that our passage jumped straight from verse 3 to verse 5. That's because scholars now reckon that verse 4 wasn't written by John but added afterwards, a later editorial edition.

It's not in the oldest or most reliable of our manuscripts. And so it's rightly put in the footnotes, but it helps us understand what's going on here.

[11 : 28] And we get the idea from verse 7 anyway. But we're told in the footnote that from time to time, an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters.

The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had. So it seems that there was some kind of strange phenomena at the pool of Bethesda, which they now think is likely that would have been caused by an underground spring, which caused it.

But in Jesus' day, some of these people erroneously thought an angel caused it, a superstition that some of these people had. And some of these people pinned their hopes on this superstition, that the first in the water after it stirred would be healed.

That's why there's a multitude crowded among the colonnades. And then in verse 6, Jesus enters the scene.

When Jesus saw him, Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, Do you want to be healed?

[12 : 47] Do you want to get well? I think this is amazing. So let's think about this. Firstly, Jesus sees him.

Out of this gathered multitude, he notices this one man, notices the details. Notices the details about this one man's life.

We're asking, What on earth's Jesus doing? We might well ask, What's he doing here at the pool of Bethesda in the first place? In the last chapter, in chapter 4, the Samaritans have just declared that this man really is the saviour of the world.

He's just healed an important official's son. This is the Word made flesh, the eternal Son of God. And yet, here he is among a crowd of hopeless and helpless individuals.

And out of this multitude, he sees and seeks out this one man. And he asks him, Do you want to get well?

[13 : 51] And it seems a strange question. It seems a bit of an extraordinary question. A man's been lame there for 38 years. An extraordinary question. Do you want to get well?

I wonder if there's a gentle rebuke there as well in the tone of Jesus' question. Do you want to get well? Do you really think that getting into these waters is going to heal you?

The man doesn't really get what Jesus means. Sir, he replies, verse 7, I have no one to help me into the pool. And this guy's trapped in popular beliefs that are false, immersed in ideas that have no foundation.

And Jesus is prodding these vain hopes. Do you want to be healed? And I think we're meant to see ourselves in this man at the pool.

Our lives, that is before we've encountered Jesus, paralyzed. Not physically, but spiritually paralyzed. Not really going anywhere.

[14 : 57] The only remedy for the man by the pool, the only remedy for him is the only remedy for us. We need to hear the voice of Jesus.

And John shows us, we're shown what brings us true healing. Jesus said to him at verse 8, get up, pick up your mat and walk. And then verse 9, at once, immediately the man was cured.

That man didn't need to be first into the water. That man needed Jesus. He needed Jesus to say the word that it should be so. Imagine witnessing that miracle.

This bedridden, lame man, paralyzed for longer than some of you have been alive. Muscles and sinews long since perished. Miraculously restored in an instant.

This is a powerful, creative, recreative act of restoration. Jesus spoke and the man's healed. On his feet, he's picked up his mat and he's off.

[16 : 04] He picks up his bed and he's walking down the road. Notice this. Only one of the crowd is healed. Only one.

Of all the people crowding the colonnade, only one of them gets healed because the point of it is to be a sign. Signs, by their very nature, are unusual.

They point to something about Jesus. He healed this man, this one particular man, as a sign. Notice, Jesus could have said, get up and walk.

He didn't have mentioned the mat. In telling him to get up, pick up your mat and walk, Jesus is being deliberately provocative.

What on earth is he doing? He knows it will provoke outrage and outcry amongst the Jewish leaders because we're told, verse 9, that day was the Sabbath.

[17 : 07] The Jews held that on the Sabbath you weren't supposed to work. They got that from the Ten Commandments, of course. The problem was they'd taken it to the extreme, adding all sorts of pernickety extra rules and making life miserable for the people like that.

Well, I recall back at school there was one teacher in particular who was an absolute stickler for the rules who would have given the Pharisees a run for their money.

He had a brass plaque proudly displayed on his classroom door. I remember it vividly to this day. It was etched with jock, slaphead Richardson dwells herein.

Enter at your own risk. He would take school rules to the extreme. There would be sock inspections and woe beside anyone who was wearing non-regulation socks, jock, slaphead Richardson, I can tell you, did not appreciate novelty socks.

any uniform infringement was dealt with most severely. And it was terrifying for our first years. By the time we got to sixth year, we realized it was all theater.

[18 : 26] It was just an act. We were having a laugh at our expense. Well, it's a bit like that with the Jewish leaders and their Pharisaic approach to the law. The Sabbath was supposed to be about rest and restoration, a celebration of God's rest because all his work of creation is completed and finished.

A sign of the perfect world we're looking forward to, the Sabbath. Well, they'd taken what the Sabbath was supposed to be and twisted it into something unrecognizably restrictive, paralyzing even, you might say.

So when they see this poor guy walking down the street, I mean, come on, it's first walk in 38 years. carrying his camping mat under his arms, this enrages him.

It's like a red rag to the bulls. It's so petty, so perverse even. What did you notice? They don't deny that the healing took place.

Jesus' opponents grant that it happened. That's evidence for us, I think. Even though they're upset and offended that he did it on the Sabbath, they don't deny that the healing took place.

[19 : 46] But rather than rejoicing in this miraculous restoration, they're on at the poor guy for carrying his mat. When they eventually catch up with Jesus, just consider what answers Jesus might have given them.

Jesus might have said, lighten up, stop being so ridiculous. He's just taking a walk for the first time in 38 years. Jesus could have said, you've misunderstood the Sabbath altogether.

Why are you adding to God's laws with man's laws? Instead, Jesus gives just about the most provocative, confrontational answer possible.

he strikes a match and he flings it on the petrol and whoosh! Jesus says verse 17, my father's working and so I am working.

He's pointing to the truth that God works always to uphold and sustain the universe at all times. Jesus says, my father's working to this day and so am I.

[21 : 03] did you see what I did with that man? Do you see, Jesus says, I put him on his feet, I gave him life. Isn't that just the sort of thing God would do?

Well, Jesus does a sign in front of witnesses at the pool of Bethesda to point to the fact that he is God who brings life, who brings Sabbath restoration.

He's equating himself with God. And the Jews recognize that and they want to kill him for that. And in the verses that follow, Jesus responds to them, adding fuel to the fire and so we turn to our second main heading, like father, like son.

The Jewish leaders ask the right question, don't you think, in verse 12. Who is this fellow who told you to pick up your mat and walk?

who? They've maybe got completely the wrong attitude, they've maybe made up their minds already, they may be prejudiced in what they think about them, but it's the right question, who is this Jesus?

[22 : 12] Jesus himself tells us something about who he is and what he does. And what Jesus is doing in verses 19 to 30 is he's explaining and elaborating on this idea that he can work on the Sabbath because he's equal with the Father.

He's giving us here some of the deepest, most profound truths imaginable about himself, about the Father, and in our remaining time we're just going to think about three simple things, three simple things.

A, who Jesus is, who Jesus is in relation to the Father, who they are. B, what are they doing and why?

And C, how are we to respond? Who are they, what are they doing and how are we to respond? You'll see in the notice sheet that this A, B, C corresponds to the structure of the passage, the A, B, C, B, A structure of this part of the passage.

And so in verses 19 and 30 Jesus brackets this passage with statements about what the Son of God cannot do. Did you know that there were things that the Son of God cannot do?

[23 : 34] In verse 19 Jesus says, very truly I tell you the Son of the Son can do nothing by himself. Do you see the humility of Jesus?

He's humble, submissive to the will of the Father. Remember he's explaining, validating his authority to heal on the Sabbath. Then he restates verse 19 in verse 30.

By myself I can do nothing. These two statements are parallel verses 19 and 30. In verse 19 he can do only what he sees his Father doing.

And in verse 30 I judge only as I hear. It's clear from the context that the basis of his judgment is what he hears from the Father.

So Jesus is not a maverick. He's not some freewheeling agent out there just doing whatever he pleases. In healing this man on the Sabbath he's not gone rogue.

[24 : 43] He's doing the will of the Father. He does what he sees his father do. Because verse 19 whatever the father does the son also does.

He's doing whatever he sees his father doing. This springs from the father's love for the son for the father loves the son and shows him all he does.

This is a special relationship a special bond a unique love exists only between the father and the son. The son does nothing on his own.

The son does only what the father does. The son does all that the father does. In other words they're on the same page aren't they?

They're singing from the same hymn sheet. For some of us we can't seem to square this Jesus with the God of the Old Testament.

[25 : 44] We think mistakenly we imagine perhaps the God of Old Testament is all about wrath and judgment. He better stay out of his way in case he's having a bad day sort of thing. And thank goodness for the New Testament because Jesus finally comes along and it's all about love and grace.

You hear that sometimes don't you? God is simply wrong. There is no discrepancy between what Jesus is doing and what God the Father is doing.

The work Jesus does is God's work. It's a family business like father like son. You want to know what on earth Jesus is doing?

He's doing on earth the will of the father. That's what he's doing on the Sabbath healing the man. That's the first bit of it who they are the father and son together working in perfect harmony.

B the second thing is the what and the why. What the family business is and why they're doing this. We get it from the parallel statements in verses 20 to 23 and verses 25 to 29.

[26 : 56] 25 to 29. expands on verses 20 to 23. And they're in the business of life. Verse 21.

For just as the father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

They're in the business of giving life. That's what they're about. They always have been. Verse 26. For as the father has life in himself, so he has granted the son also to have life in himself.

They're in the business of giving life and resurrection life at that to whom they are pleased to give it.

This involves Jesus raising from the dead and executing judgment. He is a resurrecting God. resurrection and we've seen that already haven't we?

[27 : 58] In terms of the paralyzed man being put on his feet again. That's what resurrection means literally to rise again. That's a great work Jesus doing what the father showed him this man 38 years lame healed up on his feet he's on his feet again.

But when Jesus says end of verse 20 yes and the father will show me even greater works what's he on about? He's talking about the resurrection of the dead and final judgment.

The father has given the son these divine works. thoughts I take it there's a present and future aspect to this the sense that this is what Jesus is already doing raising the man to his feet and giving him back his life and greater than that verse 25 very truly I tell you time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God and live.

in just a few chapters Jesus will call out into the tomb and Lazarus already dead four days will hear his voice and be raised from the dead coming out of the tomb in his grave clothes so there's a present aspect to it there's also a future aspect verse 28 a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out he's talking about the coming day when Jesus will judge us all each of us here so you need to realize your eternal destiny is at stake an eternity not floating about in clouds in some kind of disembodied spiritual existence resurrection life resurrection life is this your dead body comes to life

God puts on you a new resurrection body you're destined for a resurrection body perfectly fitted either to enjoy the glory of God forever or to endure the wrath of God forever we've been forewarned we're not to be amazed it says that's the what what the father and son are doing look at the why why does the father show Jesus what he does why does the father authorize him to heal this man why does he show him greater things raising the dead executing judgment well look at the end of verse 20 so that this is the purpose so that you will be amazed and then on in verse 23 that all may honor the son just as they honor the father do you see what God the father wants from you

[31 : 18] God the father wants you to marvel to be amazed amazed at Jesus God the father wants you to worship and honor and exalt him with all the worship and honor and glory due to God the father God the father is sharing his glory with the son so go ahead and be amazed stand amazed at Jesus the Nazarene stand amazed at the one who says the word and this man 38 years lame is healed and on his feet go ahead and honor and exalt the one who gives you life some people think it's possible to be rightly related to God the father without faith in Jesus without a personal relationship in Jesus you've got Jesus that works for you I've got my way that doesn't work for Jesus he rejects that end of verse 23 what he says there whoever does not honor the son does not honor the father who sent him do you see what that says to reject the son is to reject the father's beloved to refuse to honor

Jesus is to dishonor God that's what the Jewish leaders are doing they think they're honoring the father by being religious and rule keeping but because they won't honor Jesus won't accept Jesus as equal with God they're facing judgment and condemnation they're illustrating for us what happens when we reject Jesus and by the way that's why Jesus says to the man in verse 14 to stop sinning or something worse may happen to you if the man now healed doesn't repent and follow Jesus trust in him for his personal salvation then he too will face God's wrath and judgment you want to know how to please the father you want to know how to avoid the judgment the father entrusted to the son how are we to respond see look at verse 24

Jesus says very truly I tell you whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life whoever hears my word says Jesus if you hear the words of Jesus and believe this means you will not be condemned you will not stand trial for all those things you're guilty of you will not come into judgment you cross over from death to life death has no claim on you God's justice doesn't threaten you so what on earth is Jesus doing he's come to bring life before he brings judgment won't you hear

Christ won't you hear the word of Christ and believe if you're an unbeliever here this morning what we're saying to you is you can have this freedom from condemnation reach out and accept this offer of salvation salvation if you're a believer embrace these words of life don't you know every time you open your bible every morning in your time alone with God in your groups in your roots in your growth groups you open the bible you're hearing words of eternal life if you believe Jesus you will not enter into judgment so embrace the relief you're free hear the words of Jesus the bringer of life believe the father who sent him receive eternal life and be assured of it be amazed and let us honour the son even as we honour and exalt

God the father amen and let's pray father we thank you so much for the amazing truth that through the work accomplished by your son on earth you are a God who brings life a God who brings restoration in the most hopeless of circumstances a God who sees each one of us in our worthless estates we praise you Lord Jesus that your word is powerful and effective to save we are amazed by this grace so would your spirit apply these truths to our hearts help us to hear and believe that we may enjoy eternal life amen amen