

## *Like Father, Like Son*

### WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

4<sup>th</sup> in a six-part series

Feb 26, 2012

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*John 5:1-18 (NIV2011)*

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> 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?”

<sup>7</sup> “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

<sup>8</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” <sup>9</sup> At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, <sup>10</sup> and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

<sup>11</sup> But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

<sup>12</sup> So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

<sup>13</sup> The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

<sup>14</sup> 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.” <sup>15</sup> The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

<sup>16</sup> So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. <sup>17</sup> In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” <sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup> that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

*Yet another confrontation with the Jewish authorities. Why does Jesus do what he does? What gives him the authority to take on the powers of his day? Just who is he?*

After leaving the Samaritans and the woman he had met at the well, Jesus headed on north to Galilee. On the journey, he met a royal official (a Jew, perhaps from the court of Herod Antipas) who pleaded for Jesus’ help. The man’s son was deathly ill. At first, Jesus was skeptical of the man, figuring he had been attracted only because of the stories that had spread of Jesus’ miracle-doing. But, nonetheless, Jesus pronounced that the boy would live. Like the Samaritans, this official believed Jesus’ word. There was more to the man after all than just fascination with Jesus’ “signs and wonders.”

Some time later, Jesus went to Jerusalem. This trip would lead to the most intense and dangerous confrontation yet in Jesus’ ministry, during which Jesus would reveal the truth about his identity in unmistakable terms.

*A healing pool indeed!*

In the Broadway musical, “Chicago,” Roxy Hart’s husband is inconsequential and insignificant. In a revealing moment, he sings a lament to his invisibility:

Cellophane  
Mister Cellophane  
Shoulda been my name  
Mister Cellophane  
'Cause you can look right through me  
Walk right by me  
And never know I'm there...

The crippled man lying by the healing pool might as well have been made out of cellophane. As people enter and leave the pool, he is simply ignored. Surely people see him, but it is easier to simply look away than to help this man into the water. And don't imagine it is just a few folks who ignore him. Such pools were popular throughout the Mediterranean. Indeed, because the healing pool was more like the Greco-Roman cultic pools than anything Jewish, the temple authorities tolerated the pool only because it was so popular. Yet, despite the crowds, this man, crippled for longer than many people lived in the ancient world, was ignored by all.

But in strides Jesus, who sees the man and after hearing his story of neglect and adversity, tells the man to rise, pick up his mat, and walk. As always with Jesus, there is more here than the man's physical healing. Jesus seeks to heal the whole man -- in body, spirit, and relationship. Jesus calls the man to repentance even as he heals him. The crippled man may be invisible to everyone else around the pool that day, but not to Jesus, not to the Messiah and Lord. No one is invisible to God.

#### Sabbath Law

The Jews were a most peculiar people in the ancient world. First, they believed that there was only one god, when everyone else believed in many gods. The citizens of the Roman Empire devoted a good bit of energy to staying out of the way of the many capricious and unpredictable gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon.

Not only did the Jews believe that there was only one god who had made the entire cosmos, they believed that this God had chosen them. Not the influential Greeks or the powerful Romans, but this small community of Semitic people.

The Jews didn't eat what everyone else ate – no pork, no shellfish. They didn't even work like everyone else. They took off an entire day each week! From sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday not one bit of work happened among the Jews. How odd these people must have seemed to men like Pontius Pilate, sent from Rome to be the face of Caesar before the Jews.

In the eyes of the Jews, all these “peculiarities” set them apart as God's people. Sabbath, food laws, and the rest were boundary markers, badges of membership as it were, in the people of God. In a world dominated by Greco-Roman language, culture, and religion, there was always pressure on the Jews to assimilate, to be more like everyone else. In response, the Jews, led by the Pharisees, clung evermore tightly to these boundary markers, such as the keeping of the Sabbath.

All this helps us to understand the vehemence with which the Pharisees attacked Jesus over perceived Sabbath violations. The cripple in today's story had been crippled since birth – couldn't Jesus have waited a few more hours?

Jesus' hope was that the Pharisees and all the Jews would see that their fixation on these boundary markers had not led them toward God, but away from God. The problem was not with the Law of Moses, which is grounded in love of God and neighbor, but on the all-too-human tendency to fixate on the wrong things, usually the easy stuff. After all, is it easier to keep Sabbath law or to genuinely love God and neighbor?

### *An announcement*

The now-healed man is quickly confronted by Jesus' opponents. They accuse the man of sinning by working on the Sabbath – picking up his mat and carrying it. And they demand to know who caused him to do this. Rodney Whitacre writes: “The opponents ask, *Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?* (5:12). On one level they are simply asking for his name. But on another level this question epitomizes their basic problem: nothing that Jesus does makes godly sense to them because they do not know who he is. The major question of this Gospel is *Who is this fellow?* One's answer to that question makes the difference between eternal life and death.”<sup>1</sup>

Oftentimes, the man's response is misunderstood. It is easy to read v. 15 as if the man snitched on Jesus, turning him in to the authorities demanding to know who dared to heal on the Sabbath. But, in the Greek, the man announces (*anangelo*, part of the word group from which we get “angel”) to the opponents that Jesus is the healer. *Anangelo* is used four other times in the gospels, and it is always positive and significant.<sup>2</sup> Here, the man's announcement of Jesus as the healer sets up the confrontation with the Jewish leaders<sup>3</sup> over the Sabbath law.

Here and elsewhere, Jesus defies the authorities of the day who insist that they know best how to interpret and administer God's law. Jesus not only sets himself up as an interpreter of the Law, but the Law-giver.

### *Blasphemy?*

When challenged near the pool about what he had done, Jesus replies, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” Among the Jews of Jesus' day, “Father” was a common way to speak of the LORD God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the creator of the cosmos who had met Moses at the burning bush. Jesus is not only breaking the Law in their eyes, he is “making himself equal to God” (v. 18). In their estimation, Jesus has moved from being a trouble-maker to being blasphemous.

Then, rather than try to defuse the situation, Jesus makes himself even more clear, “Whatever the Father [God], the son also does.” Just as God will one day resurrect the dead, so Jesus also gives life! All Jews knew that God [the Father] was the ultimate judge; but Jesus claims that God has entrusted all judgment to him. Of course, if Jesus does whatever God does . . . then it all makes logical sense.

As Jesus goes on in this lengthy discourse, his claim becomes crystal clear. He does the will of God, perfectly. His authority is God's authority. You can't draw a line between Jesus and the Father [God] because there is no division. As Jesus will say in the midst of a later confrontation, “I and the Father are one.”

I imagine that those who heard Jesus defend himself had little idea how they could make sense of these claims. It would be easy to dismiss Jesus as a crazy man, but he didn't seem crazy. He seemingly made himself into a god, but the Jews were fiercely monotheistic. No . . . I guess they remained clueless and I'd guess that had I been one of those that day, I would have been clueless too.

But you and I are not in that crowd. We have the witness of all the apostles and the gospel writers to the truth. We have the 2,000 year-old witness of the church. If we remain clueless, what is our excuse?

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<sup>1</sup> Whitacre, R. A. (1999). *Vol. 4: John*. The IVP New Testament commentary series (121). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>2</sup>from Gail O'Day's commentary on John in the *New Interpreters Bible*. This set is in the St. Andrew library.

<sup>3</sup> John often uses “Jews” (e.g., v. 10) as shorthand for the group of Jews who oppose Jesus, the most important of which are the leaders such as the temple priests and the Pharisees. John can't mean all Jews, for Jesus and his disciples are Jews also.

“Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.”

What does Jesus mean by saying this to the crippled man after healing him? Is Jesus implying that the man’s disability was brought on by his sins, or perhaps his parents’ sins?

In a word, no. But that takes some explaining.

In the ancient world, the gods were understood to be the first cause of all events. The sun rose and set because Apollo pulled it across the sky. The harvest was bountiful when the gods were pleased but failed when they were displeased. If your ship reached its destination safely it was because one or more gods had favored your safe arrival. If your ship sunk, well, perhaps you had prayed to the wrong god or done something to make the gods unhappy with you or perhaps the gods were unhappy with someone else on your ship (read the story of Jonah to see this played out.)

It is a natural step then to the conclusion that if a person has been injured or struck by tragedy or felled by illness, they must have done something wrong to bring it on. This is the perspective of Job’s friends. The reader knows that Job has done nothing wrong, that he is truly upright and blameless. Yet, his friends assume that when Job’s world falls in on him, it must be because of something that he or his family did to offend God. But of course, they are wrong. All Job ever knows is that bad things simply happened to him – he did nothing to bring it on. In the end, he gets no explanation for his misfortune. And often, like Job, neither do we.

Just because misfortune befalls someone, we cannot assume that it happened because the person did something wrong. Sometimes, bad things simply happen.

So what does Jesus mean? When we sin, we engage in thoughts, words, and deeds that diminish the image of God within us. We pull away from God, giving into the darker side of ourselves. When we sin, we are not living as God created us to live. Thus, we shouldn’t be surprised that sin leads to bad, often tragic consequences. Consider, the so-called seven deadly sins. Who doubts that pride, gluttony, lust and the rest demand a high price from us. Jesus wants the man’s healing to be whole, encompassing not only his body, but his spirit, and his relationships with God and others.

We can’t assume that misfortune is the result of sin, but we can sure say that sin leads to misfortune. The equation works in one direction, but not the other.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Our Connection Groups have been watching segments of the film, The Gospel of John, each week. Chapter 5 of John’s gospel begins at 34:15 of the film and ends at 42:43.

1. Both this week’s story of the crippled man and last week’s about the Samaritan woman are about people who exist on the margins, ignored and even shunned by others? Why do you think that so often in the gospels it is to these very people that Jesus reaches out? What does this say about our own discipleship, this “curriculum in Christlikeness” that you and I are seek to live?
2. Try to imagine yourself as one of the many people gathered around the pool. You are there for your own healing or you are there with someone you care about. The crippled man on the mat may have caught your eye and you may have felt a twinge of guilt as you looked away. Perhaps you never really saw the man at all. After all, you’ve got your own problems to deal with – it’s why you are there. Now, try to imagine yourself witnessing the scene between the man and Jesus. Surely, this would have attracted your attention. Talk would be buzzing around the pools as people struggled to see what was happening. Or perhaps not. Might people even have missed this amazing work of God’s? The story hints that might the case. What effect do you think Jesus’ healing would have had on you if you had witnessed it. Might you have thought, “Why not me? Why not my loved one?”
3. You might discuss what this story says to us about the invisible among us. How many times have you welcomed someone to worship whom you didn’t recognize? Have you ever seen someone sitting alone and sat down next to them? How can we improve our ability to see the people that are too often invisible to us? Have you ever been invisible to others when you really wanted them to see you? What was it like?

## *Daily Bible Readings*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p><b>Monday, John 5:19-46</b> Typically, Jesus delivers a discourse after a confrontation with the Pharisees. What do the Father and Son share? What do you think Jesus means when he says that the hour is “now here, when the dead will hear the voice of God” (5:25)? What and who testifies to Jesus?</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, John 6:1-21</b> Jesus feeds thousands (it is five thousand men) with a few loaves and fishes and he walks on water. What does the miracle of the feeding have in common with our practice of Holy Communion?</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, John 6:22-71</b> Jesus takes the OT imagery of God’s feeding his people and reshapes it around himself. It will be helpful to read Exodus 16. Why do people reject Jesus? He is even abandoned by some of his followers!</p>	<p><b>Thursday, John 7</b> Chapter 7 is a series of episodes depicting the rising opposition to Jesus. How bad do things get? Find three statements by Jesus that you think many of the people would have found most upsetting. Why don’t the people think Jesus is the Messiah? Why don’t the temple police arrest Jesus?</p>
<p><b>Friday, John 8</b> The confrontation continues to build, There are disputes over Jesus’ testimony, his identity, and even the identity of his opponents. What do you think Jesus means when he says, “Before Abraham was, I am!”</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weekly Joys and Concerns</b></p>

## Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying Gospel of John

We meet from 11:45 to 1:00 in room 127 on Tuesdays.  
Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands in its own.  
This is very "drop-in." Bring a lunch if you like. Bring a study Bible.

### Monday Evening Class – now studying Paul and the Galatians

We meet from 6:45 to 8:00 in Piro Hall on Monday evenings.

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## Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.  
The class is usually led by Dr. Scott Engle and is organized into series.

### February 26:

*A Brief History of Religious Freedom and the Conscience Clause*

### Beginning March 3:

*The Vampire Defanged:*

*How the embodiment of sin and evil became a romantic hero*

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Scott's Weekly Bible Studies are available at [www.standrewumc.org](http://www.standrewumc.org).  
Just go to "worship" and then "sermons." You'll find the study with  
each week's recorded sermon

There is also an archive of nearly 500 studies at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org)

They are posted as easily downloadable pdf files. Your browser can search the  
listing for studies on specific books of the Bible or Scripture passages. They are  
suitable for individual study and for biblically-oriented small group discussions.  
You will also be able to join the Yahoo group (sa\_studies) so you can get the Bible  
studies e-mailed to you each week.

## Sermon Notes

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