

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Studies in John's Gospel: The Healing at the Pool of Bethesda - John 5

Today we start a series of talks on John 5-8. We'll consider chapter 5 this morning. First of all, let me remind you that John only selects specific incidents from the life of Christ to show us who the Lord Jesus is: "these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31, New King James Version). In these chapters of his Gospel, John also tells us when these signs occurred. They took place at Jewish feast times. Consequently there were plenty of people around in Jerusalem with whom Jesus had discussions about these miracles. The main dissenting group of Jews were the Pharisees.

The first sign in this Gospel was of water being turned into wine in Cana of Galilee, 2:1-11. "Jesus...manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him", verse 11. The second sign was the healing of the nobleman's son at Capernaum, 4:46-54. The pool of Bethesda, near to the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem, was the location of the third sign, 5:1-2. Here a large number of infirm people waited for the opportunity to be the first into the pool, and so be healed, whenever an angel stirred up its water.

Amongst this crowd at the pool of Bethesda was a paralysed man who had been there for thirty eight years. His case was tragic. He could never move fast enough and missed out on every occasion of blessing! He's a picture of man's inability to solve the problem of sin in his life by his own efforts. Just as that man needed someone else to help him, so everyone in the world needs Jesus as Saviour. "Jesus said to him, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk.' And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked" (verses 8-9). This brought trouble for the man from his fellow-Jews because Jesus had performed this miracle on the Sabbath day. They wanted to know why he was violating their rules concerning the Sabbath. The man explained that he was doing what Jesus, his healer, had instructed him to do. So "the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath" (verse 16).

Jesus had disappeared into the crowd after healing the man. Afterwards He met up with the man in the temple and told him not to continue in a life of sin. The lesson for us is that sin mustn't be tolerated in the Christian life because it's displeasing to God. The Gospel message, however, tells about deliverance from the power and practice of sin. Believers are instructed to "Walk in the Spirit, and...not [to] fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16, New King James Version). This contrasts with a life of works-of-law, by which no one is justified in God's sight, see Galatians 3:10-11. However, the Jews in this story were entangled in the traditions and doctrines of the Pharisees, whose interpretation of religious adherence to that commandment about the Sabbath was more important to them than the Lord of the Sabbath!

At this point, the incident developed into a remarkable discourse by Jesus with these Jews. He showed how far away they were from any appreciation or understanding of the grace and goodness of God in action. "Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working'" (verse 17). The sign had highlighted the debilitating effects of sin and its blight on mankind. Jesus, by performing the miracle on the Sabbath day, revealed that God hadn't rested from the very first day when sin invaded His creation through Adam's disobedience in the garden of Eden. There and then the world became a place where men were suffering the consequences of sin. God the Father and God the Son had both been at work without any rest since then, as was demonstrated in the giving of strength to the lame man. And God will only stop working in the Sabbath-keeping rest which remains for the people of God, when "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful'" (Revelation 21:4-5, New King James Version)

But by calling God His Father, the Lord Jesus further incensed the Jews. "Therefore [they] sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (verse 18). For the first time in John's Gospel, this wonderful truth is publicly stated by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Even though the Jews were antagonistic against Christ, they clearly understood the implications of such a statement. He was asserting that He's one in unity and in equality with God the Father!

So important is this truth of what I would call "equalities within the Godhead" that I want to focus on verses 19-27. There are several important points in these verses concerning the essential oneness, in nature and in being, of God the Father and God the Son:

- Jesus had already said in verse 17 that the Father and the Son work together in absolute unity. Therefore, the Son's works are actually His Father's works, verse 36.
- In answer to the renewed hostility of the Jews in verse 18, Jesus states He, the Son, **never** acts of His own volition. He's always directed by His Father.
- The Father and He **always** act together, verse 19. This joint action happens because there is equality in knowledge within the Godhead, verse 20.
- Even in the matters of the resurrection of the dead, and in the giving of life to people, the Son acts with the Father.
- There is equivalence of ability between the Father and the Son, verse 21. The Father is fully capable of judging, but He's committed all judgement to the Son. The Son acts as the Judge of all on behalf of the Father, verse 22
- Therefore the demand of God is that the status of the Son is acknowledged by all. Any honour and dignity given to the Father, are also due to the Son, verse 23.
- There is equality of Father and Son in the imparting of spiritual life, verses 24-25.
- There is equality in their self-existence: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself", verse 26.
- The judgement and authority of the Son is exactly the same as that of the Father, verse 27.

The Lord Jesus responded to the callous indifference of the Jews to the grace of God in action by saying: "My Father has been busy at work up to this very moment in time, and so am I". This reply not only increased their hostility towards Him, but it also gave Him the opportunity to explain what God had, and was, doing. He emphatically stated that it was impossible for Him, the Son, to act independently of His Father when He said to them: "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of [or from] Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner." (verse 19). In the perfect unity of the Godhead, it's God the Father who instigates any activity of God. It's God the Son who carries it out. He does exactly what He has been shown by, or has heard from, the Father, because "the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does" (verse 20). Love is the very essence of eternal relationships within the Godhead. In the Lord's Prayer to His Father we discover the eternal nature of this love: "Father... You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (17:24).

But the Father would show the Son greater works than those already displayed there at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. Such works will cause men to marvel. Jesus explained that these works were to be the raising of the dead, the giving of life to people, and the judgement of men, verses 20-23. These are some of the "all things" given into the hand of the Son by the Father, see 3:35, where there's another occurrence of the statement: "The Father loves the Son". The Father knows that His Son will carry out these important tasks as He, the Father, has shown Him. The Son has been assigned these duties because the decree of God is: "that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him" (verse 23). The situation was very serious for those Jews who were listening to Jesus. Instead of honouring Him as God, they accused Him of blasphemy!

Jesus the Son of God was the Sent One from the Father. This special Name describes the mission He was sent to achieve: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (3:17). He completed that work of salvation at the Cross. He said that eternal life is available through Him: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." (verse 24). Anyone can be saved by hearing and believing the Gospel message, His word. Today you can receive life through hearing the Saviour's voice and by believing in God the Father who sent Him and who raised Him from among the dead, see Romans 10:9 and 1 Peter 1:21-25. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, assures everyone: "[Truly, truly], I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (verse 25). The present time is the "now is", the Gospel age, in which everyone has the opportunity of hearing and responding to the Saviour, the Giver of Life. Those who do accept Him receive spiritual life. When they do so, they pass over from the state of

spiritual death (that is, of not knowing God) into the permanent state of eternal life (that is, of communion and life with God). They're made alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord, see Romans 6:11.

Many believers were saved when they heard these very words from John 5:24. One person I knew was in his mid-twenties when he heard an open air preacher quoting this verse. He'd never heard the Gospel before then, nor did he know anything about the Bible! But that day he heard the voice of the Son of God when the verse was spoken by the preacher! He believed in Christ as Saviour, then he went home to his wife, took out the Bible and showed her the verse. She also was saved because, as she read the words in the Bible, she also heard the voice of the Son of God. If you hear His voice **today**, you too will be saved!

Not only does the believer in Christ possess spiritual or eternal life, but he also receives the assurance of not having to face the judgement of God. God the Father has authorised God the Son to execute this judgement because He is the Son of Man. That means that it will be just and fair, in accordance with God's standards. It will also be righteous because, as Man, Jesus knows everything about the human condition. The Jews were startled at this announcement by the Lord. Therefore He said to them: "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (verses 28-29). In the future, at the time of the resurrection of the dead, everyone will respond to the voice of the Son of God, and they will come alive again. There will be two, but entirely different, types of resurrection:

First of all, everyone who has, received spiritual life and therefore has practised good, will take part in what is called in Revelation 20:5-6 "the first resurrection". This will be a resurrection of all living and all physically dead believers, people who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It'll be a resurrection to life with God in heaven.

Then afterwards all spiritually dead people, those who **never** have had faith in Christ or in God, will be summoned in the second resurrection, the resurrection of condemnation. That's the great white throne judgement of Revelation 20:11. Spiritually dead people are those whom the Lord Jesus describes in verse 29 as "those who have practised evil". They'll be judged according to their works. "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire...the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:8, New King James Version). The second resurrection leads directly to the second death.

Again Jesus emphasised that He'll judge in a way which originates with God the Father: "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." (verse 30). God doesn't want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). But His perfect will ensures that any who do, will only do so after being judged by the absolutely righteous judgement of the Son of God.

In the final part of His response to the Jews, the Lord Jesus insisted that the truth about Him and His actions is verified in, and by, four testimonies:

The first was that of His own Father: "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true...And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me" (verses 31-32 and 37). This testimony was given at the Lord's baptism when God the Father said: "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Men will be tested on their attitude towards this primary testimony. Sadly, for the Jews listening to Jesus that day, He had to conclude that they'd neither heard the Father's voice at any time, nor seen His form, and they didn't have His word abiding in them, because they refused to believe in Christ, see verses 37-38.

John the Baptist was His second witness, verses 33-36. Very graciously the Lord mentioned John to provide the Jews with a further opportunity to be saved, for they'd already sent a delegation and heard from him. However, although John had been the burning and shining lamp, in whose light they temporarily rejoiced, their hearts were hardened to his testimony about Christ, see 1:19-36. Later, other Jews did accept John's testimony: "Many came to [Jesus] and said, 'John performed no sign, but all the things that [he] spoke about [You] were true'" (10:41).

But there was a greater witness than John's, the works of Christ which the Father had given Him to complete. They were so obviously divine that they proved Him to be the Sent One of the Father, verse 36.

Finally there were the Scriptures, for they testified of Him, verse 39. This would be the ultimate condemnation for these Jews: "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you - Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (verses 45-47).

The Lord concluded that these Jews didn't have the love of God in them, verse 42. They had their laws and their traditions, but these had taken them away from the true knowledge of God. Neither did they see Christ in all the Scriptures! When God sent His best gift, His only begotten Son, who came in the Father's name, they refused to receive Him! 1:11. Jesus predicted that when Antichrist comes in his own name, he'll be accepted! verse 43. They were more concerned about their reputation with each other: "How can you believe, who receive honour from one another, and do not seek the honour that comes from the only God?" (verse 44).

What about each one of us today? Do we fully accept the authority and testimony of Scripture, that they're about Christ? Or are we more concerned about our own religion, or our particular brand of Christianity, than we are about the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, His love-gift to the world? Is the Lord's judgement of us: "you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (verse 40)?!

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