

JOHN

Chapter 5

The Healing at the Pool on the Sabbath

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. 5 One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, **“Do you want to be healed?”** 7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” 8 Jesus said to him, **“Get up, take up your bed, and walk.”** 9 And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. 10 So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” 11 But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, **‘Take up your bed, and walk.’**” 12 They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, **‘Take up your bed and walk?’**” 13 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, **“See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”** 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. 16 And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. 17 But Jesus answered them, **“My Father is working until now, and I am working.”**

5:1 *Some time later.* An indefinite expression (cf. 6:1; 7:1). (CSB)

a feast of the Jews. Probably one of the three pilgrimage feasts to which all Jewish males were expected to go—Passover, Pentecost or Tabernacles. The identity of this feast is significant for the attempt to ascertain the number of Passovers included in Jesus’ ministry, and thus the number of years his ministry lasted. John explicitly mentions at least three different Passovers: the first in 2:13, 23, the second in 6:4 and the third several times (e.g., in 11:55; 12:1). If three Passovers are accepted, the length of Jesus’ ministry was between two and three years. However, if the feast of 5:1 was a fourth Passover or assumes that a fourth Passover had come and gone, Jesus’ ministry would have lasted between three and four years. (CSB)

Some manuscripts have “the feast.” Possibly the Feast of Booths, commemorating Israel’s 40-year wandering, or the Feast of the New Year. (TLSB)

5:2 *there is.* Not “was.” This may mean that the pool was still in existence at the time this was being written, i.e., that John wrote before the destruction of Jerusalem. However, this falls short of proving the time of writing (see Introduction: Date). (CSB)

sheep gate - This was a small opening within the north wall of the temple, where the sheep were washed in the pool before entering the sanctuary. (TLSB)

Bethesda. The manuscripts have a variety of names (see NIV text note), but one of the Dead Sea Scrolls seems to show that Bethesda is the right name. The site is generally identified with the twin pools near the present-day Saint Anne’s Church. There would have been a colonnade on each of the four sides and another between the two pools. (CSB)

It means “House of grace” or “house of mercy,” signaling the miracle that Jesus was about to perform. (TLSB)

five roofed colonnades - This was four sets of columns that enclosed two separate pools, and a fifth set stood between the pools. These five sets of columns were capped to form porches for the people who gathered by the pools. (TLSB)

5:3 The disabled gathered here because of the popular Greek cultic belief that the pool had healing powers, with angels present at the water’s first stirring. (TLSB)

5:5 *invalid*. John does not say what the trouble was, but it was a form of paralysis or at least lameness. (CSB)

5:6 *Do you want to be healed ?* The question was important. The man had not asked Jesus for help, and a beggar of that day could lose a sometimes profitable (and easy) income if he were cured. Or perhaps he had simply lost the will to be cured. (CSB)

5:7 *when the water is stirred*. The man did not see Jesus as a potential healer, and his mind was set on the supposed curative powers of the water. (CSB)

The man was still focused on the pool, hoping Jesus might help him reach it in time. (TLSB)

5:8 *bed* – Mat or pad that could be rolled up and carried. (TLSB)

5:9 *the man was healed* † Ordinarily, faith in Jesus was essential to the cure (e.g., Mk 5:34), but here the man did not even know who Jesus was (v. 13). Jesus usually healed in response to faith, but he was not limited by a person’s lack of it. He wished to show the healed man that the restorative grace of God had touched his life and that this gift should not be received in vain (see v. 14: “Stop sinning”). (CSB)

5:10 *it is not lawful...bed* – It was not the law of Moses but their traditional interpretation of it that prohibited carrying loads of any kind on the Sabbath. The Jews had very strict regulations on keeping the Sabbath, but also had many curious loopholes that their lawyers made full use of (cf. Mt 23:4). (CSB)

Jewish leaders interpreted the man carrying his mat as a violation of the Sabbath law against carrying burdens from one domain to another. Cf. Ex. 31:12-17. Necessary works, however, were not forbidden. (TLSB)

5:12 *who is this man*. The Jews were contrasting the authority of the law of God, which in their view prohibited the action, and that of a mere man (as they considered Jesus to be) who permitted it. (CSB)

5:14 *nothing worse*. The eternal consequences of sin are more serious than any physical ailment. (CSB)

Warning against persisting in unbelief, lest consequences worse than a physical handicap follow. (TLSB)

5:16 *were seeking*. The continuous action points to more than one incident, and the Jews apparently discerned a pattern. (CSB)

persecuted. John does not tell us what form the persecution took. (CSB)

Some Jews were now continually hostile toward Him and constantly considered how they might get rid of Him. (TLSB)

5:17 *My Father is working.* Jesus' justification for his action was his close relation to his Father. The Jews did not refer to God as "My Father," regarding the term as too intimate—though they might have used "Our Father" or, in prayer, "My Father in heaven." Jesus also exemplified the way the Sabbath should be observed. God does not stop his deeds of compassion on that day and neither did Jesus. (CSB)

God does not stop sustaining His creation on Sabbaths; the Son was simply working as the Father does. (TLSB)

5:1–17 After Jesus heals an invalid, Jewish leaders accuse Him of breaking Sabbath law and begin to persecute Him. Legalistic rigidity can also keep us from showing mercy to those in need. The Lord calls us to repentance, sincere faith, and compassionate service. Jesus cares deeply for us, helping us in our physical and spiritual needs. • O Lover of my soul, help me to extend Your mercy to others. Amen. (TLSB)

Jesus Is Equal with God

18 **This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.**

5:18 *kill him* - The Jews plotted to kill Jesus, not only for violation of the Sabbath law, but also for blasphemy. (TLSB)

his own Father. Referring to a special relationship. The Jews did not object to the idea that God is the Father of all, but they strongly objected to Jesus' claim that he stood in a special relationship to the Father—a relationship so close as to make himself equal with God. (CSB)

Calling God "Father" was rare in Jewish literature but did occur in the OT (cf. Ps. 89:26; Jer. 3:4). (TLSB)

equal with God - The Jews realized Jesus was claiming divine status and headship over all things. They regarded such a claim as usurping God's authority. Ironically, Jesus stood before them in obedience to His Father and in humble service to the world, especially to the Jews. They did not understand Christ's humble service or His exalted status. (TLSB)

5:18 The Jews plot to kill Jesus for what they understand to be a blasphemous claim: equality with God. Failure to acknowledge Christ's deity despite Scripture's clear testimony places one in opposition to the Lord. Jesus is indeed God and has given us the right to become God's children (1:12); nothing will ever take us from His hand (10:28). • O God, forgive me when I have questioned Your authority, and lead me always boldly to confess Your holy name. Amen. (TLSB)

The Authority of the Son

19 **So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. 21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. 22 For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 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. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from**

death to life. 25 “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice 29 and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

5:19 *can.* Because of who and what he was, it was not possible for Jesus to act except in dependence on the Father. (CSB)

Jesus’ Sonship is enacted in obedience. (TLSB)

them. Jews in Jerusalem (vv 1, 16–17). (TLSB)

5:20 *the Father loves the Son.* Therefore the Father revealed to the Son his plans and purposes, and the Son obediently carried them out. (CSB)

greater works. The Son’s activities in raising the dead and judging (see following verses). (CSB)

Raising the spiritually dead, judging human beings, and raising the physically dead (vv 21–29). (TLSB)

5:21 *the Father raises the dead.* A firm belief among the Jews. They also held that he did not give this privilege to anyone else. Jesus claimed a prerogative that, according to his opponents, belonged only to God. (CSB)

Restores to life the spiritually dead (vv 21–25). (TLSB)

the Son gives life. Probably refers to Christ’s gift of abundant life here and now, though possibly also to the future resurrection (see 11:25–26). (CSB)

5:22 *given all judgment to the Son.* The Jews believed that the Father is Judge of the world, so this teaching seemed heretical to them. (CSB)

5:24–29 In this section of John’s Gospel the evangelist relates the rising unbelief and opposition of the Jewish leaders. The words of our text follow Jesus’ healing of the invalid/paralytic at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (Jn 5:1–16) during “a feast” (5:1), most likely either Pentecost or Tabernacles. Though breaking the Sabbath-day law was reason enough for their persecution (5:16) of Jesus, it was the words of v 17 by which they perceived “he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (v 18) that increased their anger. The words of Jesus that follow, then, have to do with, first, his person and, second, his work. Immediately preceding our text, Jesus speaks of the unity of the Father and the Son in action and love, the shared authority to give life and to judge, and the requirement of giving the Son the same honor as the Father. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

5:24 *believes him ... has eternal life.* Faith and life are connected (cf. 20:31). (CSB)

The words of verity and authority begin both vv 24 and 25. “Hearing” and “believing” go together with “my word” and “him who sent me.” In hearing, the Holy Spirit creates saving faith. “Death” is judgment of sin. “Life” is forever through the forgiveness of sins. By faith a person has passed or departed (metabevhken) out of death to life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

has eternal life. A present possessio. (CSB)

has passed.† The decisive change has taken place, and the believer no longer belongs to death. (CSB)

Scripture teaches two “resurrections.” Augustine: “Hence a resurrection does place now, and men pass from death to life; from the death of infidelity to the life of faith; from the death of falsehood to the life of truth; from the death of iniquity to the life of righteousness... The Lord Jesus, then, was willing to make known to us a resurrection of the dead before the resurrection of the dead” (NPNF1 7:125). (TLSB)

5:25 *is coming and has now come.* A reference not only to the future resurrection but also to the fact that Christ gives life now. The spiritually dead who hear him receive life from him. (CSB)

The second statement of verity and authority concerns the “time” or “hour,” of such hearing of the voice of the Son of God. This is the time of the New Testament beginning already then as Jesus reached out to his enemies in these words and continuing to this day. Jesus is forthright as he refers to himself as the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

Eternal life begins when a person comes to saving faith in Christ. (TLSB)

dead will hear. Hearing with faith brings spiritual life (Gal 3:2, 5). (TLSB)

5:26-27 No one doubted that the Father, the Creator, has life in himself. It is because of the unity of persons that “he has granted the Son [also] to have life in himself.” It follows that the Son has also been given authority to execute judgment. The issue is upon Jesus’ human nature possessing this authority because of the communication of attributes. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

5:26 *has life in himself.* Must be understood against the background of the OT, where life is spoken of as belonging to God and as being his gift (Dt 30:20; Job 10:12; 33:4; Ps 16:11; 27:1; 36:9; etc.). The Son has been given the same kind of life that the Father possesses (cf. also 1Jn 5:11 for the benefit to man). (CSB)

As true God, Jesus is the giver of life through creation and redemption (1:3–4; 14:6). (TLSB)

5:27 *authority to judge.* Granted to the Son by the Father. (CSB)

Son of Man. See note on 1:51. (CSB)

5:28–29 A reference to the future raising of the dead. (CSB)

qaumavzein is to “marvel” or “wonder with astonishment” that this authority to judge has been given to a human being. They are not to marvel, however, because Jesus is not just any human being, but the Son of God in the flesh. Again, the hour is coming (but is not here yet) “when all who are in their graves will [also and finally] hear his voice and come out [of their graves].” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

5:28 *all who are in the tombs.* Describes the resurrection of the body. (TLSB)

5:29 *done good ... live ... done evil ... condemned.* As always in Scripture, judgment is on the basis of works, though salvation, of course, is a gift from God in response to faith (cf. v. 24). (CSB)

All flesh will be raised at the Last Day: those who have “done” good to the resurrection of life—the simple aorist participle of ποιέω, indicating the good works of faith done by believers in obedience to God. The word πράξαντες”, however, is chosen to describe the self-chosen works of the evil or wicked unbelievers. They are raised to the resurrection of judgment. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 4)

“All passages about works can be judged according to this rule. When eternal life is granted to works, it is granted to those who have been justified. Only justified people are led by the Spirit of Christ, can do good works. Without faith and Christ as Mediator, good works do not please, according to Hebrews 11:6: ‘Without faith it is impossible to please (God)’” (Ap. V 251-52). (TLSB)

5:19–29 Equal to the Father in deity and honor, God’s Son makes people spiritually alive through His Word and raises believers from the grave at the hour of His coming to judge. Those who refuse to believe in God’s Son will come under judgment, and their evil deeds will become known. Christ has the authority to give you life now and on the day of your resurrection to everlasting life. • O Son of God, with joy I praise You, that by Your grace I have passed from death to life. Amen. (TLSB)

Witnesses to Jesus

30 “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. 31 If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. 32 There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. 33 You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. 34 Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. 35 He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. 36 But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, 38 and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. 39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. 41 I do not receive glory from people. 42 But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. 43 I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. 44 How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? 45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

5:30 *do nothing on my own.* Jesus stresses his dependence on the Father (see note on v. 19). He judges only as he hears from the Father, which makes his judgment fair. (CSB)

Christ did not act independently but was in perfect communion with His Father. (TLSB)

seek not My own will. Because Jesus did as He saw (vv 19–20) and judged as He heard, He was consulting and following the Father’s will at every moment. (TLSB)

5:31–47 This section stresses the testimonies (see note on 1:7) of John the Baptist (v. 33), of the works of Jesus (v. 36), of God the Father (v. 37), of the Scriptures (v. 39) and of Moses (v. 46). (CSB)

5:31 Jesus’ testimony about himself required the support of all God’s revelation. Otherwise, it would have been unacceptable. (CSB)

The OT required more than one witness (Dt. 19:15). (TLSB)

5:32 *another*. The Father testifies concerning the Son. The Jews might not accept this testimony, but it was the testimony that mattered. (CSB)

Jesus cites John the Baptist (v 33), but He will rest on the witness of the Father Himself (v 37). (TLSB)

5:33 *You have sent to John*. A reference to the delegation from the Jewish leaders to John the Baptist (see 1:19). (CSB)

he has borne witness. The testimony of John was important, though not, of course, equal to the testimony of the Father. But had the Jews believed John, they would have believed Christ and would have been saved. (CSB)

5:35 *he was*. The past tense may indicate that John was dead or at least imprisoned. In any case, his work was done. (CSB)

burning and shining light. John's giving light was costly to him. (CSB)

while in his light. The Jewish leaders never came to grips with John's message, and their responses to him were always at best tentative and superficial. (CSB)

5:36 *testimony*. The miracles of Jesus, which testified to what he is and to his divine mission (see 10:25). (CSB)

Jesus has a legal witness even greater than John: the Father. (TLSB)

works ... bear witness about Me. All Jesus' works, including His miracles, attest to His identity, that people may know Him, trust in Him, and thereby be saved. (TLSB)

5:37 *the Father ... has borne witness ... his voice*. Probably a reference to God's voice in the Scriptures (see vv. 38–39). God had also given his voice of approval at Jesus' baptism (see Mt 3:17). (CSB)

Through prophecies and the signs of Jesus' ministry. (TLSB)

never seen. Probably refers to their lack of spiritual perception of who Jesus really is. (CSB)

5:38 *you do not believe*. The Jews did not recognize what God was saying, as their failure to believe Jesus shows. (CSB)

abiding in you. The Word abides in the heart of a person united to Christ by faith. (TLSB)

5:39 *search the Scriptures*. The Jewish leaders studied Scripture (OT) in minute detail. Despite their reverence for the very letter of Scripture (see notes on Mt 5:18–21), they did not recognize the one to whom Scripture bears supreme testimony. (CSB)

The Scriptures give eternal life only by and through Christ, not through the mere act of studying them. The entire scriptural testimony centers on Jesus (cf. Rm., 15:4; 16:25–27). (TLSB)

5:41 *glory from people*. Jesus did not accept human praise any more than human testimony (v. 34). (CSB)

5:42 *love of God*. May mean God's love for them or theirs for God. Probably it is the latter, but people's love for God is in response to his prior love for them (1Jn 4:19). (CSB)

5:43–44 The Jews had their attention firmly fixed on people. Their emphasis on self-seeking and on human praise showed that they did not accept the one who came from God, and therefore they missed the praise that comes from God. (CSB)

They sought their own honor through one another's praise. (TLSB)

5:45 *Moses*. The Jews prided themselves on their attachment to Moses, their great lawgiver. So it was an unexpected thrust for Jesus to say that Moses himself would accuse them before God. (CSB)

The Jews desired to follow the Law of Moses, which actually accused them and revealed their sins (Dt. 31:19, 21, 26; cf. Rom. 3:19) (TLSB)

5:46 *he wrote about me*. All the NT writers stressed, or assumed, that the OT, rightly read, points to Christ (cf. Lk 24:25–27, 44). Jesus applied this truth specifically to the writings of Moses. (CSB)

John Chrysostom: "If they believed Moses they ought to have done homage to One of whom Moses prophesied" (NPNF1 14:149). (TLSB)

5:47 Because the Jews did not believe that Moses pointed to Christ, they did not believe Christ's explanation of Moses (cf. 2 Cor. 3:15-16). (TLSB)

5:30–47 The Father gives binding witness to His Son's true identity, which is revealed in the works He performs and in the Scriptures that everywhere speak of Him. Those who fail to see Christ in the pages of the Bible, including the OT, are blind to its central purpose. Through Scripture's testimony of Christ, God reveals His great love toward all people. • O heavenly Father, I praise You for the testimony You have given me of Your Son, my Savior, through Your life-giving Word. Amen. (TLSB)