

## ***Jesus: Equal with God?***

John

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### **OPENING PRAYER:**

Our gracious God and Father, how we praise You for the joy of worshipping you. For the marvel of your presence with us. For the ministry of Your Holy Spirit in our hearts. And now we come to listen to your voice in your word. We pray that by Your grace you will speak to us, make us conscious that it is your voice that we hear. Know us and search us we pray. And speak to us the very words that we will then realize we really did need to hear from you, our heavenly Father. And bless our study together for Jesus our Savior's sake. Amen.

Please be seated,

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

We are studying together in the Gospel according to John these Sunday mornings. And we've come to John's Gospel chapter five. You'll find the scripture reading on page 890, of the Pew Bible. It will be a help to you to turn there. It will also be a great help to me as I refer to various parts of this passage if you have the Bible open before you. John's gospel, chapter five. We're going to read the first part of the chapter. Let us hear God's word.

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**13** Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.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.”

**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.

**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** 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.

## **SERMON:**

We are blessed in our congregation — Some of us, I suppose, have reason to feel particularly blessed in our congregation, that we have many physicians and surgeons in our church family. I wonder — I think it is actually possible — but I wonder how many of them have ever had a patient sitting before them and have asked them the question that Jesus asked this sick man, in John chapter five, verse six. “Do you want to be healed?” “Do you want to be healed?”

I wouldn't be surprised that some of them had to put on their roughest and gruffest accent to somebody whose lifestyle has been destroying their health. And, and they've said to them, *Now do you really want to get better?* That's the issue. But you would hardly expect any of our physicians with their marvelous bedside manners to say to a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years, Do you want to be healed? And yet, that was the mysterious question the Lord Jesus asked this paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda. He had been paralyzed, we are told for 38 years. He was there at the pool. And there seems to have been some tradition, a little like Lourdes in France, that there were occasions when people who were sick but went to the waters there were by some amazing divine event, marvelously healed. And who knows, but there were people who had been there and had been carried into the waters and had actually been healed.

But this man had been paralyzed for 38 years. How could Jesus possibly say to such a man, *Do you really want to be healed?* Well actually, that incident that Jesus encounters the man, and tells him to pick up his bed and walk. And the man picks up his bed and carries it home first time, in almost four decades, that he's been able to walk. Perhaps if he was only 38, or 39, the first time in his whole life that he'd ever been able to walk. But it is an event that brought upon the Lord Jesus Christ a thunderstorm of controversy. And it's this that the rest of the passage turns our attention to. We will come back soon to the man himself.

But look at what his healing caused. Look at the repercussions of this marvelous event. They begin as John continues with the story with a controversy over the nature of Jesus' activity. And the interesting thing is that it wasn't about the healing. It was about the day that healing took place. And so John highlights for us — do you see in the middle of verse nine, as the man was healed and took up his bed and walked — you can imagine him almost quietly smiling at people who must have been astonished to see this man walking home with his little bed mat wrapped under his arm. But that day was the Sabbath. And as the story unfolds, it's quite clear that the Jewish Sabbath police force were out in strength that day. And they carried a little book — I can imagine somewhat whimsically - the last thing on a Friday night— because Saturday, of course, was the Sabbath day. Last thing on the Friday night before, before the sunset, they would, they would place their little booth 39 possible ways somebody else may break the Sabbath. They would place that little book by their bedside. Because they'd this whole list of different ways in which you could break the Sabbath, and then they would put it in their pockets or in their skirts. And apparently, on the Sabbath day, they were making their way around Jerusalem with their binoculars. They were looking for anyone who who might just possible be breaking one of these 39 special ways in which it was possible to breach the Sabbath command. And here is a man carrying his mat form. And you can imagine whimsically them looking up the book number 16, subsection two, sub-subsection B. And they pounce upon him. What are you doing — carrying your bed on the Sabbath day?

Now we need to be very clear about this. This man was not breaking the Sabbath commandment. Jesus did not encourage him to break the Sabbath commandment. If he had been the seller of beds and a furniture remover and was doing this for gain, he would have been breaking the Sabbath commandment. But he had been healed. He was carrying his little bed home, for the first time in his life. He was not breaching *any* Sabbath commandment. But there in their little book of rules—

Do you know if he'd had wit about him and he actually doesn't seem to have had a great deal of wit about him, he would have said to them, *But doesn't the scripture say, "We're to call the Sabbath a delight." Is this what gives you delight on the Sabbath? When you could be praising God for His goodness — When you should be worshiping Him for His grace to his*

*people that you're prowling around Jerusalem pouncing upon poor little people like me for breaking your little book of rules that you guard so carefully. And you see the whole tragedy of the situation was this, that instead of them keeping the Sabbath commandment they had lost sight of what that Sabbath commandment was for. It was for the praise of God, the worship of God, the love of God, the joy and the blessings of God. Glorifying in what God does in his saving mercy to his people.*

And you notice, if you read through this passage, again, at your leisure, you'll notice that they just can't bring themselves to refer to Jesus as Jesus who healed him. Here is this man has not been able to walk for 38 long years and they don't even notice his legs and his feet. The only thing their binoculars are tuned on is the way according to their petty regulations. This man is breaching their little man made laws.

And we all naturally and rightly stand in judgment over them, and say, *Away with you*. Except, of course, that we remember that these were probably the Pharisees. These were not the liberals, who didn't believe in the supernatural — who didn't believe in the Bible — who didn't believe in the resurrection. These were the conservatives. These were the ones who wanted to treasure what God had taught in His Word. And so anxious were they to treasure what God has taught in his word that they would safeguard you from ever having the possibility of breaking any of the regulations that God had taught in His Word. And so they had built up their own traditions, so much so that they had lost sight of the person of the Lord Himself. And they were far more concerned with things not being done than how God in His grace and His mercy wanted things to be done.

My friends, that doesn't usually happen among liberal people that happens among people like us. Christians like us, who are conservative in nature and commitment. And who value the past. And yet, it's so easy for us, isn't it, to lose sight of the Lord as we, as we focus on the details of how, how we manage our church life or our personal Christian life. So that we point the finger at people who do things not quite right when we actually don't ever do these things ourselves.

I remember a man who was scathingly critical of the way people prayed at a church prayer meeting to which I went — who never darkened the door of the church prayer meeting. I remember the words of the great evangelist DL Moody when somebody was so critical of him for the way in which he evangelized the downtrodden masses and you may know Moody's great reply, "Sir", he said, "I prefer the way I do evangelism to the way you don't do evangelism."

And you see what the Lord Jesus was doing in the midst of this. He knew it was the Sabbath day. He knew it would be all around Jerusalem before nightfall that he had healed somebody

on the Sabbath day. And you know why he did it on the Sabbath day? He could have turned up the next day. He could have come early on Friday. He could have done it any day of the week that he was in Jerusalem for the feast. Why did he do it on the Sabbath today? Because he knew that that deed of God's gracious healing of this man would expose what was really in the hearts of these Jews.

The nature of Jesus's activity brought this tremendous controversy. And you notice Jesus's responds to the situation.

He says, in verse 17, "My father is working until now, and I am working." He's saying, *if my father is caring for the needy, if my father is pouring down blessings on the Sabbath day, it cannot conceivably be wrong for me to pour down my father's blessings upon his people on the Sabbath day.*

*Ahh, they say. Gotcha!*

*Got you on the Sabbath. And now we've got you for saying that God is your Father.*

Notice verse 18. This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him. Can you take that in? They were seeking to murder Jesus. To destroy Jesus. Because not only was he in their view, breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making Himself equal with God.

So the controversies that began with the nature of Jesus's activity, now moved on to the question of Jesus identity. Notice the question they had already asked in verse 12, "Who is this man?" That's a great question, isn't it? If only they'd pursued it to the end? "Who is this man?" And Jesus answers the marvelously, from verse 19, following. He says, "Truly I say to you", and he begins to explain to them in this marvelous description of how he is the Son of the Heavenly Father, and everything that he is saying is what he's heard his father say. And everything that he's doing is what he's seen his Father do. That he is one with the Heavenly Father. And it's so evident that he is actually laying clear claim to deity. He's not withdrawing one iota. He is saying, *I and my Father work together in this glorious work of salvation that you've seen physically in this poor man.*

And then he goes on to say more, you'll notice, in verses 20, through 29. He says, *And more, there is in my authority the power to raise the dead on the last day. And there is in my authority the judgment that will determine your eternal day. And there is in my power the ability to give you everlasting life in the present day.* And rather than backing off from the claim that he is himself one with God, that He is indeed the Son of the Father, indeed the eternal son of the

eternal Father, Jesus emphasizes that God has placed into the hands of his Son the determination of the eternal destiny of every single one of us.

And you see what he's saying? He is saying, our, our destiny in the Day of Resurrection depends on our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our destiny in the final judgment that is determined by our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. And whether we enjoy eternal life in the here and now — that new quality of recreated life that Jesus gives to those who trust in Him — is determined by our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. And as it were before our very eyes, he unveils his own majesty and glory. And speaks about the awesomeness of the issue that lies before us as we wrestle with the question, How have we responded to the Lord Jesus Christ? And in the midst of it, in the midst of all the solemnity of it, he opens out to these Jews as well as to this man he has just feel healed, the most glorious, glorious privileges. Eternal life now. That sense of the joy and the glory and presence of the Lord in our lives that is eternal life. And a, and a confidence in the resurrection. And a confidence that at the last day we'll be able to stand before God's throne and be accepted by Him, because we're trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ who has died for us and has been raised again.

And before the words are out of the mouths of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem Jesus immediately moves on to a third thing. The nature of his activity. The question of his identity. And now do you notice in the verses that follow, the issue of Jesus's authority. He knows what they're going to say. He knew his old testament better than they did. He knew that in Deuteronomy 17 and Deuteronomy 19, God had laid down very clearly that in a Jewish law court it was essential to have two witnesses to validate your claim. And he knows that in their hearts, they're saying, *You are talking about yourself. Your testimony does not stand. Away with ya!*

And you notice how he speaks to them. He says, verse 31, "If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not deemed true. But there is another who bears witness about me. And I know that the testimony he bears about me is true." Now, who is this other who bears testimony to the Lord Jesus? Of course, it's his Father. And he goes on to show in these verses how his Father has born testimony to him, pointed the finger at him and said, "This is my Son, listen to him." And so he refers to the witness of John the Baptist who had pointed to him, and you remember how in his baptism, the heavens had opened — the Spirit had come down. The Tather had said, "This is my Son." So there was the testimony of John the Baptists. And then he says, *There is the testimony of the things that I do. That my heavenly father is working through me. Don't you see that I'm fulfilling all the promises that my Heavenly Father gave to His people?*

And then do you notice in verses 39 and 40, he says, there is the testimony, yes, the testimony of God's prophet, John the Baptist. There's the testimony of God's works in Jesus miracles.

And there's the testimony of God's word in the Holy Scriptures. *Oh, he says, Why haven't you listened to the Scriptures that you spend so much time reading?*

Now do you see this? These were people who read the Bible. Indeed, many of those to whom he spoke, probably knew the Old Testament scriptures off-by-heart. That was how they were educated. Almost all that education was about memorizing and understanding the Old Testament scriptures. And they poured over the Old Testament scriptures. I doubt there's anyone in the church building this morning so diligently religious as these men doubtless were — but, do you notice what Jesus says? He says, *You can spend all your life searching the scriptures and never be saved?* And he's really saying you can spend all your life in these religious disciplines and duties and still miss the main thing.

My friends I know a little of where I speak. When I was a young boy, somebody told me to be a Christian you read the Scripture. And I read the scriptures. Year, after year, after year for five long years. I read the scriptures every single day, bar five. From the age of nine to the age of 14. And then I came to these verses in John chapter five, verse 39 and 40. "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them, you have eternal life. And it is they that bear witness about me. Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." And the words came off the page as though to say, *this is the Lord. And I am speaking to you.*

Now, do you begin to see the connectedness between the experience of this lame man, and what Jesus was doing in his engagement with these Jewish religious leaders? He had been sick for 38 long years. He'd been paralyzed for 38 long years. And Jesus said, *But do you want to be made well?* "Do you want to be made well?" Ahh, you might think, *Of course, I want to be made well.* But think about the changes. Think about the uncertain future. Think about the fact that he'd probably been able to make a living begging. And he wouldn't be able to make a living doing anything else. Think about this feeling he must have had over these years, there's no possibility that anybody can make me better. And we see Jesus is saying that, what he was saying about that man's physical condition can be true of somebody's spiritual condition. You can be so accustomed, as these Jews were so accustomed to the religious round, to the religious duties, that when Jesus Christ comes — I can remember it as lower yesterday — when Jesus Christ comes and says,

*My dear, my dear one, you've been doing these things. You've been searching the scriptures you've been, you've been trying to live a Christian life for all these years. But do you want me to make you well? Do you want me to say to you by my power, I'm able to make you stand up spiritually and live.*

And, and you know what your hearts response is? Lord, this is, this is, I never expected this. I never bargained for this when I started reading the Bible and coming to church. I thought, that's all there was to it.

*And he says, No, I've come. I've come to bring you forgiveness, and new life. I've come to change your life. Now, you must come to Me, you must rise and walk to me.*

So the Savior who had stood before the man and said to him, do you really want to be made well, was now standing before the Jews and he was saying, *Do you want to be made well?*

I was speaking yesterday afternoon in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania at the memorial service for a dear friend who died at the beginning of last week and many people spoke at the service. One was his youngest brother, who said speaking so thankfully of the testimony of his eldest brother, that he was in his 30s and in the darkness and he realized it was like Christ standing before him, I think. That the question was being asked him, *Do you want Jesus Christ? Really? To save you?* It was a moment.

And that's where these people were. *Do you want Jesus Christ, really?*

*Ahh but Jesus, you'll change my life so much.*

*Yes, my child I will change everything in your life.*

*Ahh but Jesus, what, what will I do now? I don't know what I'll do if I give myself unreservedly to you?*

*I will look after that my child. I've never failed anyone who has come and unreservedly given themselves to me.*

Maybe it's not 38 years in your case. Maybe it's, maybe you've been really spiritually sick for the last 38 days. And spiritually, you become paralyzed. You're bound in some particular form of sin. Maybe it's thirty-eight months. And Jesus comes, and he says to you, "Do you want to be made well?"

I love that story of George MacDonald, whose name many of you will know because CS Lewis once said, he'd never written a book without referring to George MacDonald. He has a lovely story entitled *The Golden Key*. And in that story, the main character, the hero faces a challenge to experience what MacDonald calls the "good death." And the good death in MacDonald is, is that giving of ourselves to the Lord that leads to newness of life. And the character finds himself with the Old Man of the Earth in a cave, and the Old Man of the earth raises a great stone over a huge dark hole in a cave, and the Old Man of the Earth says to the hero:



“Down there, that is the way.”

And the hero says, “But there are no stairs.”

And the Old Man of the Earth says, “Yes, you must throw yourself in. There is no other way.”

And when Jesus comes and he says, *Do you want to be made well?* You might be tempted to say like this man, *Well I've got nobody to help me. I'm not sure what to do. I want to try and be better if only somebody would teach me. Or if I had a guide. Or if something was different in my life.*

And he insists, and he says, *No, I'm the one who can make you well.*

And you say, *But it's dark. I don't know what that means. Is there no other way?*

And he says, *No, you must throw yourself in. But I am here and I will hold ya. And I will lead you into everlasting life.*

Some sickness spiritually in your life? And Jesus is probing, probing, probing, probing. He says to you: *Stand up and trust me. And walk with me into everlasting life.*

May it be so. May it be so.

### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

Our Heavenly Father, how we thank you for the marvels of your word in story, in controversy, in the glorious portrayal you give to us of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you that He is here in our midst and that we hear him say, even to us, *I can make you whole.* We come with gratitude to trust afresh in Him. In His name, Amen.