

Life Through Jesus  
John 4:43 – 5:47  
by Dellen Ludwig

“Who is this fellow?” the Jewish leaders asked of the healed paralytic. Who indeed could heal someone who for thirty-eight years had been paralyzed. That is the question we will seek to answer in our lesson today. Who is this man, indeed?

Today our lesson examined John chapter 4:43 through chapter five. We will study:

1. Acts of Healing: 4:43 – 5:15;
2. Accusations by Leaders: 5:16 – 18
3. Authority of Jesus: 5:19 – 47

John chose two acts of healing as examples of Jesus’ divine authority. Previously this unorthodox rabbi, named Jesus, did many signs or miracles from the onset of His public ministry (John 2:23). He challenged the profiteering of the money changers during Passover in Jerusalem (John 2:13-17). He preached about God’s kingdom and the nature of true worship as He traveled through Samaria (John 4:4-42). In chapter four verse 41, John explained, “And because of his words many more became believers.”

As this study opens, Jesus and His disciples were traveling toward the more familiar territory of Galilee. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, which was along their route from Samaria, but that was not where they stopped. “Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.” [John 4:44] Luke chapter 4 explained that Jesus was almost stoned and thrown off a cliff when He spoke in Nazareth, because He claimed that the Scriptures He read in their synagogue from Isaiah 61:1&2, were referring to Himself.

So, Jesus and His disciples by-passed Nazareth and stopped in Cana, the town in which He had done His first miracle, turning water into wine. The people of Galilee were excited to see Him. Many of them had been in Jerusalem for the Passover, and had seen Him over-turn the tables of the money changers. They heard Him preach and many saw Him heal people. So, the word spread quickly that Jesus was back in the Galilee area.

One particular man, described as a royal official also heard of the miracles Jesus had done. He lived in Capernaum, which was about 25 miles east of Cana. His son was very ill, close to death. Knowing there was nothing more that doctors could do for his son, he left him at home dying and set out to find Jesus. He walked as quickly as he could up-hill to Cana, where the word was that Jesus was staying. He found Jesus and “begged him to come and heal his son.”

Jesus however, seemed to scold him, saying, “Unless you people see signs and wonders...you will never believe.” [John 4:45] Perhaps this was said more generally to the crowd in which the man stood. But he was undaunted and asked again, respectfully, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” [John 4:49]

Have you ever prayed such a prayer to Jesus? Asking Him to heal your child, or your friend, or yourself? There may have been others who in doubt said, “There’s nothing that can be done.” Perhaps your doubts almost stopped you from going to Him in prayer to ask for that healing. But the urgency you felt pushed you up the hill of doubt to fall before Jesus, begging Him to come near; to please heal.

This man felt that urgency, even though Jesus seemed to be chiding the people eager for a sign. “‘Go,’ Jesus replied, ‘your son will live.’ The man took Jesus at his word and departed.” [John 4:50,51]

The royal official had come to Jesus because he heard that Jesus could heal people. His belief was based on the stories he had heard from others. But standing face-to-face, hearing Jesus' voice and seeing His compassion, the man left in belief that at His command, his son would be healed. He didn't need to see a sign first. He encountered Jesus and he believed that what He said was true.

But John recorded more of the man's story. "While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, 'Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him.' Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' So, he and his whole household believed." [John 4:51 -53]

The people of Galilee had heard Jesus preach with an uncommon authority in Jerusalem. They had seen Him heal many who came to Him, believing His touch could make them well. But now, even at a distance of about 25 miles, Jesus healed a boy He didn't even see!

An encounter with Jesus that begins with little faith, can build to a saving faith. Saving faith can't be hidden in silence. Saving faith bursts out of our heart to splash onto others, and the man's whole household believed because of his encounter with Jesus in Cana.

When we approach God in our little faith, He does miracles that can grow into a "sharing faith" in us too. I have prayed for God's healing many times. God has sometimes answered with unexplained healing for others. Sometimes He sends the word, "wait," and His healing comes in time.

But I have also experienced "no" for an answer. That one is the most difficult answer of all to my prayers. I have lost dear friends and family, after long fights with cancer, or a sudden downturn of health. I have cried to the Lord to ask for healing, only to receive "no" as the answer.

I have asked, "why" and grieved that He did not heal this dear one. However, in time He revealed that by His taking them to be with Him for eternity was His most precious gift of mercy. Psalm 116:15 says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants."

This act of healing the royal official's son, caused people to seek Jesus out, even more than before. After some time in Galilee, Jesus returned to Jerusalem. A year may have passed, so that it was again time for the Passover feast or perhaps this may have been a different feast. But Jesus traveled once again to Jerusalem with His disciples.

On this instance Jesus, led His disciples to a pool near the sheep gate of Jerusalem. It is described as having five covered colonnades. (5:2) Some commentators believe it was near or part of the pool of Siloam. That pool was said to be divided by a wall in the middle, making two pools, which could give it five walls. Apparently, it was believed that one part of this pool was intermittently fed by an underwater spring, that "troubled the water." Some thought that an angel made the water bubble, and if someone got into the pool when that happened, the angel would heal their ailment.

Therefore, as Jesus entered these porches around the pool, he saw many infirm people, lying in the shade of the colonnades, waiting for the water to be "troubled." This place was called Bethesda, or "house of mercy", but while so many ill and hopeless people saw no mercy from any angel there, they were about to see true mercy from the Son of God.

We are not told why Jesus approached this particular man. He may have led His disciples past other blind, lame and paralyzed people. The Scripture explained, "One who was there had been an invalid for

thirty-eight 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?” [John 5:5,6]

“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.’” [John 5:7] The fact that he was waiting near this pool seemed to say yes, this man wanted to be made well. But his answer also seemed to say that he may be giving up hope.

Jesus didn’t wait for any further discussion. “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.” [John 5:8,9] He who had not walked for thirty-eight years felt the strength return to his legs, immediately found the balance of his youth, and began to happily walk all around, carrying his mat with joy!

As excitement followed this once-lame man in his joyous stroll, Jesus walked off into the crowd, heading for the temple. Never seeking attention by such miracles, Jesus changed the whole trajectory of this man’s life. Jesus slipped away, during the tidal wave of amazement, to go and worship in the temple. This is not the action of a “nobody”, seeking to make Himself a “somebody,” as was believed by the religious leaders. This was the quiet self-assurance of a Man comfortable in His own authority.

But out of the joy of this healing, the Jewish leaders found something to criticize. “The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 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.’” [John 5:9, 10]

The healed man 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.” [John 5:11-13]

The religious leaders missed the point. This man had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years! Suddenly, he could walk again. But the leaders were upset that he carried his mat on the Sabbath.

Yes, there was a regulation that people were not supposed to do any work on the Sabbath. In Exodus 20 verses 8 through 10, Moses recorded the fourth commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work...” [Exodus 20:8-10]

The paralyzed man probably knew this commandment from his youth. But in the celebration of his healing, his mat had become a sign of his healing. He wasn’t in rebellion of the Law, but rather was obeying the One who had given the Law in the first place.

Later, Jesus approached the healed man in the temple. The Lord said to him, “See you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” [John 5:14] There must have been some instance that caused this man to be lame. During his years of paralysis, he surely had self-pity, jealousy, and perhaps feelings of hate inside, for those who walked away healed, when he couldn’t get to the water by himself. Jesus saw the need to challenge this man to stop sinning.

In that day, there was a common belief that if someone became ill or hurt it was because of sin. We see an example in the book of Job. His friends spent days trying to persuade Job to confess his sins that surely must have caused the calamity he faced. And yet, the Scripture revealed that Job was a righteous man.

Is sickness a sign today that there is sin in one’s life? The answer is maybe. There are instances where illness results from sin. For example, when a person abuses drugs or alcohol, they may destroy

their bodies and bring sickness that may even result in death. Diseases can result from sexual immorality. Harm can be caused by someone driving recklessly under the influence of alcohol.

But not all illness is caused by specific sin. When God created the earth, Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with their environment. But when sin entered into the world, so did aging, sickness and emotional anxiety. The curse God placed on the earth because of the original sin made it contain hazards and diseases we all face.

When we read John chapter 9, the text reveals that the disciples ask this very question about a man born blind. “‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.’” [John 9:2,3]

Sickness will come to all of us. It may be the consequences of sinful practices we do, or those just found in our sinful world. But sometimes sickness is an opportunity for God to reveal His glory! He may answer our prayers for healing with a miraculous cure. He may have the tumor disappear.

He may use the application of medicines and physical therapy to heal far beyond any prognosis. He may use our physical or mental weakness to bring glory to Himself because of our testimony during our trial. The Lord may use our life as a memorial to Himself after we have succumbed to our illness.

But one day, there will be no more diseases, illness, disabilities or broken or worn-out bones. When Christ comes back and establishes His Kingdom, and then creates a new earth, it will no longer be under the curse of sin. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” [Revelation 21:4]

I believe one of the purposes of the miraculous acts Jesus did was to give a glimpse of how God originally wanted life to be for mankind living in faith. Jesus came to save the lost sinners out of this cursed world. He came to give abundant life to those who believe in Him. Therefore, He wanted this man to change his attitude toward sin, so that the “lame man” would become a walking testimony to who Jesus was.

As they talked in the temple courtyard, the healed man discovered that the One who had made him well was named Jesus. So, he found the Jewish leaders and told them the answer to the question he had not known before. And what reaction did the leaders have to this information?

“So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his 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.” [John 5:16-18]

The religious leaders had the right to investigate this miracle. They may have had the responsibility to authenticate this rabbi and His work. But they didn’t even question Him about what had happened at the pool of Bethesda. They skipped right to persecution and condemnation for daring to have familiarity with God! Their accusation was that Jesus did not have the right to call Himself equal with God.

Because His authority was challenged, Jesus gave them His answer. First, He explained His relationship with His Father. “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. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these.” [John 5:19-20]

The Father shows the Son the work He should do. So, Jesus' choice of this man, who had been paralyzed thirty-eight years, out of all the infirm people by the pool, was made by the Father. The Father loved and cared for all people, but He chose this one healing to be a sign to bring many to faith on this day.

The relationship of the Father to the Son existed from eternity past. The Godhead, consisting of three distinct Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, made the universe and chose to make mankind, "in our own image, in our likeness." [Genesis 1:26] The Unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is their essence, their divine identity.

We were made in God's image. Therefore, we have a body, soul and spirit; yet how can we understand God? We can only know Him by learning to know the Son. How profound this is! Theologians and simple seekers like us have pondered this relationship for all of time. We even gave it a title: the theology of the Trinity.

But even though the Jewish leaders had dedicated their lives to study Scriptures, they couldn't bring themselves to accept the Son of God when He stood right before them! Jesus, however, next went on to explain that the Father had even bigger plans for the Son than the signs He had given so far.

The Father planned for the Son to -1) Give life to whom He is pleased to give it. (v.21) 2) Bring judgment to mankind. (v.22) and 3) Receive honor as the Father Who sent Him. (v.23)

As to giving life, He said, "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." [John 5:24] That is the criteria for eternal life. The Father sent the Son to offer life, eternal life to all who believe in the Son. This early in His ministry, Jesus explained His mission to save all of mankind. His mission was not only to save those living then, during the era of His walk on earth, but to save all who would believe in Him after His resurrection.

He explained, "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." [John 5:25] Jesus' sacrifice that would be realized in His crucifixion in just a few short years, was the very foundation the Old Testament saints believed upon.

His death for all our sins was the act of sacrifice for those of us living now, that we may believe upon Him for salvation. And future generations shall be faced also with their need of this same Savior. Eternal life is dependent on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for all people, past, present and future, because life is through Him alone.

Jesus, the Son of God had been given the authority by the Father to determine who would live and who would be judged. "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." [John 5:26,27]

Do you see the great mystery of God's plan? The Divine chose to place Himself in a human body and become the Son of Man as well as the Son of God. As God, He established that sinful man has fallen short of God's holy standard. As Man, He experienced our weakness but remained sinless Himself. Therefore, Jesus is the perfect One to judge all people.

"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 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.” [John 5:28-30]

We studied Jesus’ words to Nicodemus in John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” When one believes in Christ’s finished work, they have eternal life. That belief saves us from God’s judgment. We have begun a life of doing good in His name. But those who have rejected Christ’s salvation, will be raised to be judged by God for all the evil they have done. Without Christ’s sacrifice for sin, they remain guilty for all the sin they have ever done.

The Jewish leaders had doubted Jesus’ authority. They accused Him of breaking the Sabbath by healing this man on the Sabbath. They chose to judge Him and the man He had healed. They had no idea that they were challenging the very One God had authorized to judge all men, themselves included!

Now about this time I believe these leaders were asking themselves again, “Who does He think He is, acting as our judge? Why would anyone believe what He says about Himself anyway?” So, Jesus brought forth witnesses to His authority, on His own behalf.

Jesus called John the Baptist as His first witness: “If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true. You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony, but I mention it that you might be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.” [John 5:31-35]

Many religious leaders went out to see John and hear him preach in the wilderness. They heard him announce that he was a forerunner of Messiah. He announced that Jesus was the Son of God and sent his own disciples to follow Jesus. The religious leaders argued even about John’s authority – Was he a prophet? Was he a crazy man? Was he the Messiah himself?

Although a man’s word about his own veracity would never be held as enough evidence in a trial, the word of a man like John should be held in high esteem in such an earthly trial. Man’s opinion would never hold authority against God, however. Therefore, Jesus brings up His second witness.

In verse 36 Jesus continued. “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish – the very works I am doing – testify that the Father has sent me.” [John 5:36]

The Jewish leaders had missed the point of the once paralyzed man walking around, carrying his mat. They were so focused on finding any breach of the Sabbath, that they missed the purpose of this miracle! This man had been incapacitated for thirty-eight years – but now he was healed! Instead of asking, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”, they should have wondered, “Who had the power to possibly make you able to walk after all this time?”

They should have given glory to God! They should have joined into the celebration of the miracle! They should have followed the “sign” of this miraculous healing and given praise to God who was verifying the authority of His Son in this work.

But the signs and wonders Jesus did were not the only testimony from the Father. He also gave testimony in His Word, the Scriptures, about His Son. “And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you

have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” [John 5:37-40]

The Scriptures revealed abundant testimony about Who Messiah would be. He would be born from a woman; of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; descended from David; destined to be King of Kings; a Man of sorrows acquainted with grief; Who would in innocence be pierced for our iniquities; the Savior of the world; the Judge of all nations.

These leaders dedicated their lives to studying and teaching the Scriptures, yet they had fixated on the Law of Moses and missed all of the Father’s testimony about Messiah. They were so intent on the minutia of every possible infraction of the law that they couldn’t see the Son of God, standing right before them.

Furthermore, they had become trapped by their own vanity over their knowledge of the law. “I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father’s name and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only one God?” [John 5:41-44]

The accusers stood accused. The leaders constantly argued the details of their interpretation of the Law and aligned themselves with others who agreed. Certain teachers became famous for their views and were leaders of sects with followers who praised them and gave honor and glory to them for their positions.

However, they hadn’t recognized that when they gave glory to each other, they were stealing the glory that belongs only to God. The first commandment given by Moses states: “You shall have no other gods before me.” [Exodus 20:3] Seeking to have the glory of fellow leaders, would be to condemn themselves in craving honor for themselves, and thereby breaking the law of Moses.

His closing statement before His accusers would be brought by Moses. “But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?” [John 5:45-47]

By the very Scriptures they dedicated their lives to uphold, they stood condemned. They saw before their eyes the evidence of a miracle. But rather than following the “sign” by which the Father offered to lead them to faith, they had sought to condemn both the man who had been healed and Jesus, the Healer.

If the Jewish leaders had believed all of the testimony offered that day, how different would this story of the gospel of John be? But the Father knew the hearts of these leaders were so ingrown that they would never believe His Son. And so, from the beginning of His ministry, the religious leaders refused to believe Jesus was the Son of God.

Each of us need to answer the question posed by those leaders. “Who is this fellow?” Who is Jesus to you? Song writers have recorded their answer: Walter Chalmers Smith wrote: “Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise.” In our generation, Sinach, a Nigerian gospel singer wrote that He is the “Way-Maker, Miracle Worker, Promise-Keeper, Light in the Darkness, My God, that is who You are.”

John the Baptist called Him, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” There is no one name that can fully answer our question. But He declared Himself to be the “I AM”.

As we study further in the Gospel of John about: the Acts of Healing, the Authority Jesus revealed and even the Accusations by the religious leaders, may we learn more about who this “fellow” is, and believe in Him who always was, always is, and always will be the great “I AM”; that we may receive the eternal life only available through Jesus.

Closing Prayer