

John's Gospel : a study for fellowship groups

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(6) Healing on the Sabbath (John 5:1-30)

Q 1 It is often said by frequent travellers to Mediterranean hotels, that you have to get up really early to get a sunbed before the Germans have their towels on all of them – often by breakfast time. This is not a racist comment in any way, but an observation of German lifestyle and culture: to think ahead and get organised for the day while there is still choice. Are members of the group ones who always achieve their goal by getting in first or the ones that always miss out because someone else beats them to tape?

Read John 5:1-15 (illustration: Pool of Bethesda today – colonnades and pool original)

The scene at Bethesda is a pathetic one by any standards. A man who has been disabled for 38 years could, we might think, be insulted and offended, after spending much time at this spa when asked the question by Jesus “Do you want to get well”. After all why was he at this location where tradition has it that every now and again there is a mysterious disturbance of the water and the first person afterward to enter will be healed. However, Jesus has touched on an important point in the healing process, or indeed in lots of area of life. We need to genuinely need to want it enough to seek with a determination to succeed in finding. It is possible to be comfortable in the condition to which we are accustomed to the extent that it blunts are determination to deal effectively with it. To prefer the situation with which we are familiar to a new one which may perhaps bring with it new challenges and issues. We may go through the motions of seeking remedy yet come away untouched.



Q 2 Are there any areas of our lives where we need healing or areas that need God's intervention and we have almost come to accept that state affairs rather than been determined to get something done about it?

Jesus reinforced the issue of the expression of will, in certain circumstances, being important in the healing process. He could have pronounced the man healed as happened on other occasions but chose to give instructions to be followed and when he obeyed, healing followed. Up to now his only help was to depend on others, now he was enabled to take control of the situation himself.

It could almost be imagined that this was not a healing miracle of Jesus at all, but a command to the man to engage in self-help to obtain healing. This of course is not so. The man did not even know the identity of Jesus, we seem to be told, until Jesus returned to reveal himself to him. However, Jesus was being watched closely by his critics as it was a Sabbath day, and for a healer to practise his craft on a Sabbath was against the Jewish law!

Read John 5:16-30

We have a beautiful picture here of the intimate relationship of the Son with the Father. The miracles which Jesus performs, he performs through a demonstration of the Father's power in him. Jesus during his life on earth was fully God as these verses corroborate, but was fully human as well: being in nature, God, he made himself nothing (Php 2:6-7). Jesus himself explains that he can only do what he sees the Father doing (v19), for the Son can do nothing by himself. If the Son is working on the Sabbath, then so is the Father through whom these miracles come. Jesus said “My Father is always at his work to this very day (a Sabbath day!) and I, too, am working (v17). Clearly we must understand God's rest on the seventh day in the account of creation (Gen 2:1-2) in some other way than as a pattern that God does nothing each Sabbath, or Saturday .. or Sunday.

Q 3 Christians differ in their understanding of what should or should not be done on a Sunday, What groundrules, if any, have mebers of the group put in place to help them get it right in their own lives?

Jesus goes on to describe the way in which he acts as a bridge to eternal life for those who believe in him. They have decisively crossed from death to life. He goes on to make two important prophetic statements. Prophecy can be *foretelling* (predicting what God will do in the future) or *forthtelling* (declaring what God is doing in the present). Jesus does each of these in turn. He had done so in the encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well which was featured in the previous study. To her he foretold with the words ‘a time is coming’ that the worship systems of Jew

and Samaritan alike were going to become a thing of the past, but he also declared, or forthtold, with the words 'a time is coming and has now come' that an era has already arrived for the true worshippers to worship in spirit and truth.

In this chapter he is first *forthtelling* in the prophetic. He is saying it as it is. He says (v25) that a time is coming and has now come. It is this era in which the (spiritually) dead will hear the words of Jesus, and those who hear in the sense of paying attention and responding to those words will live (i.e. will receive eternal life). In the previous chapter we met the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well to whom Jesus had said 'a time is coming and has now come' when the true worshippers will worship (neither on Mount Gerizim nor in Jerusalem)

Then Jesus goes on to say by way of *foretelling* that judgment has been committed by the Father to the Son, in his role as Son of Man (vv22,27) and that the process of judging has been deferred to a future date. He says 'a time is coming' when all in the graves will hear the voice of Jesus in the general resurrection in which the righteous and unrighteous will be separated. In that judgment, Jesus will judge on the basis of the evidence presented by the Father.

Q⁴ Have members of the group had any experience which they can share of the prophetic in the Christian life, whether that is the prophetic in terms of declaration of present realities or in terms of future events?