

John 5:1-16

The Bible contains everything the Lord wants the world to know about God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, mankind, sin, salvation, sanctification, glorification, Satan, angels, the Church, and the future. The Bible has been maligned, criticized, dismissed, misunderstood, misinterpreted, and misapplied on every level known to man — including the Church.

However, God is gracious to leave us a book that contains His very words and that we are able to hold in our hands and read in our own language. This book sets up the true believer for spiritual success in their relationship with the Lord (***cf. 2 Peter 1:2-4***).

One of Satan’s tactics to infiltrate the truth and veracity of Scripture is to lie, ever so slightly, about its content. Satan accomplishes this through religions that outwardly have all the right rituals and human requirement but inwardly lead one to an eternity apart from God. Satan speaks religion fluently. Jesus’ confrontation with false religion and its devastating effects is seen clearly in the gospel of Matthew. (***cf. Matthew 23:1-15; 23-27***)

It is in this highly corrupt religious environment that Jesus makes His clearest statement about the reality of God and how to worship Him properly. The Jewish people were thoroughly trapped in a misapplied, misunderstood, misinterpreted religious prison from which Jesus compassionately attempted to free them. The Jewish people were under the damning influence of legalistic Judaism that propelled them into a real contempt for the truth and an ultimate outright rejection of God Himself.

Let’s revisit this story in **John 5:1-16**.

Last week we noted that Jesus demonstrated compassion for people everywhere He went. His love and concern for those imprisoned by sin, sickness, disease, demon possession, and even death itself was overwhelming. Jesus was also intentional about everything He did. Nothing was done in a flippant, haphazard, random manner. The healing of this man in John 5 is the classic example of Jesus’ passion for the truth and His use of healing on the Sabbath to expose the damning influence of false religion.

The mishandling and abuse of the Sabbath by the Jewish leaders in Israel serve as a clear reality of their contempt for the truth that ultimately resulted in their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. (John 5:9b-16)

John’s mention that the healing of this man at the Pool of Bethesda took place on the Sabbath may seem incidental. However, it is in reality the key to the entire event. It sets the stage for the open hostility that the Jewish religious leaders would have for the Lord.

Jesus' refusal to observe the legalistic and man-made Sabbath regulations of rabbinic tradition was a major point of contention between Him and the religious establishment. John MacArthur comments: ***"The man's condition was not life threatening, and he was constantly at the pool. Jesus could have easily chosen another day to heal him. But the Lord not only wanted to show mercy to this man; He also wanted to call the nation to repentance by confronting the self-righteous and unbiblical stipulations that led to their illusion of spiritual life."*** (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 1-11; John MacArthur*)

The Sabbath had become a prevailing theme in Jewish life. It had become so significant that a major section of the Mishna (written collection of rabbinical tradition known as the "Oral Law") was devoted to the Sabbath rules. It was believed the coming of Messiah was linked to the perfect keeping of one Sabbath. The rules of the rabbis were a complete misunderstanding of God's design for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not a means to God's approval. The Sabbath was not merely a rule for humans, but a gift to humans. It was to be used to honor God and to benefit His people. More importantly, Jesus Himself is Lord of the Sabbath, and it was His right to act on the Sabbath anyway He chose. (**cf. Mark 2:23-28**)

The Old Testament prohibited working on the Sabbath (*Exodus 31:12-14; 35:2*), but it did not specify exactly what kinds of works were forbidden. It would seem it referred to one's regular employment. The Israelites were not to participate in their normal, weeklong occupations on the Sabbath day.

Rabbinic tradition went far beyond that, listing thirty-nine (39) forbidden categories of work, including carrying goods. The man who was healed did not make an occupation out of carrying a mat around — he had no capability to do so — thus these man-made rules of the rabbis did not apply to him. Instead of rejoicing over the man's healing, they condemned him for breaking their trivial rules. They were far more concerned with legalistic regulations than with the man's well being. They truly could care less about him — a typical characteristic of religious legalists.

The false religion of Judaism, like all false systems, cannot change the inside, so it is left to manipulate life on the outside. The reaction of the man healed is a perfect example of the damning effects of false religion. He, unlike others healed by Jesus on the Sabbath, as we will see in John 9, was so fearful of the Jews that he shifted onto Jesus all the responsibility of his seemingly breaking the Sabbath by carrying his mat. Sadly, this man was more concerned with following the false religious system of his day than following Jesus.

It is staggering that he would accept this healing after nearly four decades of terrible distress, then walk away from Jesus and show his loyalty to the Jews who hated the man who healed him. This has to be one of the greatest acts of ingratitude and obstinate unbelief in Scripture. He did not intend to praise or worship Jesus for healing him. This shows that Jesus was kind and compassionate toward those who would eventually reject

Him in unbelief. Jesus still shows compassion toward people who will reject Him in unbelief today. It again confirms the truth of Scripture concerning the sinfulness of man. **(cf. Romans 3:10-18)**

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Application Questions:

What does John 5:1-16 teach about God?

What does John 5:1-16 teach about me?

Are there any examples in John 5:1-16 to emulate in my life today?

Does John 5:1-16 communicate any commands for me to follow? If so, which ones and why?

What truth about Jesus does John 5:1-16 teach me to share with others?

Notes: