

John 5:1-31

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Preacher: Brian Maiden

[0 : 00] Well, can we turn back to John chapter 5, which was read earlier, where we've got the story of Jesus' visit to the pool of Bethesda.

And unbelieving scholars used to question the existence of the pool of Bethesda.

They used to deny its existence even. And they said that John's Gospel, well, the figure of Jesus in John's Gospel is so exalted that it must have taken many years to develop.

The theology of the person of Jesus, such as you find in John's Gospel. So John wasn't written by John. And it wasn't written until well into the second century.

That's what used to be believed by some unbelieving scholar. But late in the 19th century, a monk was digging in his back garden in Jerusalem. And he found the pool of Bethesda.

[1 : 16] And archaeologists have dug around it. And if you Google pool of Bethesda, or Wikipedia Google pool of Bethesda, you'll find pictures of the excavations of the pool of Bethesda.

And it's just exactly as John describes. And that demonstrates that whoever wrote John, and I believe it was John who wrote John, whoever wrote it was familiar with Jerusalem before it was destroyed in 70 AD by the Roman army.

So when you read John's Gospel, you're reading the account of an eyewitness. He claims to be an eyewitness. He claims to have been present at the crucifixion of Jesus.

He claims to have ran to the empty tomb with Peter. And seen the empty tomb and seen the empty grave club. And he claims to have seen the risen Christ on the shore of Galilee and had a picnic with him, a breakfast with him on the shore of Galilee in the last chapter of John's Gospel.

So when you're reading John, in fact, when you're reading all the Gospels, you're reading the memories of eyewitnesses. So you should take it very, very seriously indeed.

[2 : 33] Don't just write it off as legend. You can't do that with the New Testament. It's not legend. It takes years for legends to develop. Centuries for legends like King Arthur or Robin Hood to develop.

So the New Testament was written in the first century AD. John was probably the last of the four Gospels to be written. The others were even written earlier than that. And Paul's letter is even earlier than that.

So you can't write off Jesus as a legend. Okay. So I just thought I'd mention that. So the Pool of Bethesda. It was one of those sad places often associated with water.

where desperate people gather in the hope of a cure. Think of somewhere like Lourdes in France. Or even some of the spa towns in Britain.

Places like Bath and Buxton and Harrogate. Where the waters are thought to have healing property. And busloads of sick people and hypochondriacs gather at these places.

[3 : 38] Pool of Bethesda was a bit like that. People whose lives had been ruined by illness. They would try anything.

How else can you explain the success of some of the television evangelists? And healers. They would try anything. So they tried the Pool of Bethesda.

And the Pool of Bethesda was a particularly pathetic example of one of these places. Because there was a popular superstition about the place.

And the superstition was that when the water stirred, occasionally the water stirred apparently for no reason. And the superstition was that the first person to get into the water would be healed.

And so there was a crowd of sick people waiting around, hoping that the waters would stir. And hoping that they would be first in.

[4 : 39] And of course if you're sick, or if you're blind, or if you're paralyzed, it's not easy to be the first in. So you can imagine the atmosphere in the Pool of Bethesda. It was a sad place.

Full of people with dashed hope. People just hanging around. Just in case. A solution turned up. Reminds me of the world actually.

A sad place. Full of people whose lives, whose potential, whose hopes, have been ruined by sin. And its effect. People have been handicapped. People have been paralyzed. People have been blinded morally and spiritually. By sin.

All heading inevitably to death. All waiting for a solution. That never seems to turn up. Maybe this week I'll win the lottery.

[5 : 44] I have a friend who does the lottery every week. And he does two actually. The British one and the Euro millions as well. And he rings me up every week and tells me that he hasn't won the lottery.

I've told him to start ringing me up when he has. And he's promised me 10%. I don't know what, well I do know what I'll do if he wins.

But he's not a Christian. But his great hope is he's going to win the lottery one day. Maybe this general election. Things will actually turn out to be different this time.

Maybe things will change. And every new year, every New Year's Eve, we let our fireworks off. And maybe this coming year will be different.

But it never is. And the man encountered by Jesus in this story was a particularly sad cat.

[6 : 48] He'd been there for 38, well I don't know whether he'd been there for 38 years, but he'd been paralysed for 38 years. That's over half a lifetime. And life expectancy in New Testament times was considerably less than it is now.

So for him, it was probably more like a lifetime. And he was still waiting. Still hoping.

Still hoping that the waters would stir. And somebody would take pity on him. And help him down into the water. But it hadn't happened yet. And there wasn't much chance of a paralysed man being the first into the water, was there?

What a terrible place, the Pool of Bethesda was. Thronged with people, turned in on themselves. Seeing other people as rivals. Taken up with their own symptoms.

Just imagine it. People are like that, aren't they? You tell somebody that you're sick, and you can guarantee they'll have had the same thing.

[7 : 56] Worse than you. Always happen. Can't mention any illness or sickness without them saying, ah yes, I've had that. And it was always worse than what you got.

Imagine it at the Pool of Bethesda. What a terrible place. And then Jesus comes. Jesus arrives at the Pool of Bethesda.

For some reason, he picks this man out. And asks him a very strange question in verse 6. You might think it was a very strange question.

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? Do you want to get well?

What a strange question, you might think. But actually, it's probably not as strange as it seems. Because this man had never known any other life than this one that he got.

[9 : 03] He probably relied on begging. Well, he would have relied on begging if you were handicapped, if you couldn't work in those days. You had to rely on begging. That was his life. Getting well would lead to huge changes in his life.

He'd have to find a job. He'd lose all his sympathy. He'd lose his identity. I mean, his identity was the man who had been paralyzed for 38 years and he was at the Pool of Bethesda.

He'd lose that identity. He would no longer be able to think of himself as a victim. He might even lose his social life. All his social life revolved around the Pool of Bethesda.

That's where all his friends were. He may well have built up a reputation at the Pool of Bethesda.

He'd been there a long time. He was made with the life and soul at the Pool of Bethesda.

Everybody knew him.

Did he really want a complete change of lifestyle at his age? It's a question we all need to ask ourselves. People get used to living without God.

[10 : 14] Do we really want our lives turned around by the word and by the touch of Jesus Christ?

When Jesus calls you, he doesn't call you in order for you just to make him a sort of addition to your life, a kind of extra appendage to your life so that your life just basically carries on as it did before but you've got this extra appendage now going to church or believing in Jesus as this kind of extra appendage to your life.

Now when Jesus calls you, he changes your heart. He changes your heart. your life changes at the center. Nothing will ever be the same again if Jesus calls you.

Do you want to get better? Do you really want to know God? Do you want to have eternal life? You don't actually. You don't.

Unless God calls you. John actually says earlier in this epistle, the light has come into the, in this gospel, sorry, the light has come into the world but men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

[11 : 37] They will not come to the light. Do you want to get better? And then comes the miracle.

Jesus says to the man, get up and walk. The word get up there is the word rise. Arise. It's a resurrection word.

It's the word that's used in the New Testament of Jesus rising from the dead or raising other people from the dead. Rise.

Get up. And walk. And 38 years of hopelessness, 38 wasted years came to an end.

He got up and he walked. Wouldn't it be wonderful if someone heard Jesus here this morning say to them, get up.

[12 : 40] Get up and walk. Stop waiting for that solution that's never going to come. stop blaming other people. Get up.

And walk. Verse 14 is interesting. Jesus found him in the temple said to him, see you are well again.

Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. Was this man's disease the result of some sin? Probably not.

So this may well just be a general warning. Jesus is saying here that there's something worse than 38 years of paralysis. There's something worse than that.

And that's the final judgment of God. And the healing of the body without conversion, without repentance, without turning from sin will ultimately therefore do us no good at all.

[13 : 50] So Jesus warns this man. There's more than healing required. Repentance, conversion is required.

So that's the miracle. The miracle is followed by a controversy. You would have thought that a miracle like this would have led the religious leaders to believe in Jesus Christ.

But no. Far from it. like so many of Jesus' healings, it took place on the Sabbath.

Jesus seems to have deliberately gone out of his way to heal people on the Sabbath. He's always doing it in the Gospel. And all work for Jews was forbidden on the Sabbath.

And that included medical work unless it was a real emergency. And this wasn't an emergency. If you've been paralyzed for 38 years, one more day isn't going to make much of a difference.

[15 : 00] Jesus could have waited another day. But he didn't. And he healed this man on the Sabbath day. And then he told him to carry his well I think the King James version used to say his bed.

So you know when I was a kid I used to have this image of this man struggling with a four-poster bed through the streets of Jerusalem. Maybe that's what upset the Jewish religious police so much. Carrying a huge burden on the Sabbath day. I mean Jeremiah 17 actually forbids the carrying of burdens on the Sabbath day. He's actually talking about commerce, business, doing your daily work which would obviously often involve carrying loads on the Sabbath day.

He wasn't talking about a man who'd been paralyzed for 38 years picking up his mat which may have had a bit of straw in. Think of a light flimsy mattress maybe with a bit of straw in.

Something you could roll up and put on your shoulder and hardly notice it was there. The sort of thing you would take to a beach. But he was carrying it and it was the Sabbath.

[16 : 16] So the religious police came to this man and said excuse me it's the Sabbath day you're carrying something. Well the man who healed me told me to carry.

Who is this man who told you to carry? Not the man who healed you. They ignored that. They weren't interested in that. They weren't interested in the fact that he'd been healed after 38 years of paralysis.

they said who is this man who told you to carry your mat on the Sabbath day. You know that's what religion can do to people. That's what religion can do to people.

These people these Jewish religious authorities were in as desperate a condition spiritually as the people in the pool of Bethesda were physically blind.

Handicapped by religion. People like religious people like Richard Dawkins are always going on about what a terrible thing religion is. All the evil it's done in the world.

[17 : 26] I mean it goes a bit over the top about it. He calls it the root of all evil which is just ridiculous. There have been some incredibly atheistic countries like Soviet Russia or Mao's China where there's been no religion at all and the evil in those communities has been far worse than anything in any religious community.

So he goes completely over the top of course. But he's not saying anything we don't know. The Bible says that religion without Jesus is terrible.

Jesus said that religion without him is terrible. It wasn't atheists that crucified Jesus. It was religious people who crucified Jesus.

And here were religious people who couldn't see any further than they know they just heard that a man who has been paralysed for 38 years has been healed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

They ignore that and they said he told you to carry your mat on the Sabbath day. Who is he? Let's get him. So they approach Jesus and they tick him off for doing this on the Sabbath day.

[18 : 54] How does Jesus respond? Well his response is absolutely astonishing. in fact it is so astonishing that the religious leaders take up stones to stone him.

His approach here to the Sabbath day is different from what it is in the Synoptic Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke. In Matthew, Mark and Luke when he's criticized for healing on the Sabbath day he usually says that they misunderstood the Sabbath day.

Like for instance in Mark he says the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath. Or he'll say it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Or he'll say look if your animal, if your ox or your sheep falls into a pit on the Sabbath day you'll pull it out won't you?

Well if you can do that on the Sabbath what's wrong with me healing a person on the Sabbath even if it's not an emergency? That was his approach in the Synoptic Gospels but here he says it's not so much a question of misunderstanding the Sabbath the problem is that you've misunderstood me. You've misunderstood me. Let's look at what he says. He says my father verse 17 Jesus said to them my father is always at his work to this very day.

[20 : 24] he calls God his father. Now we're so used to that that we hardly notice it. But the Jews noticed it because nobody before Jesus as far as we know ever called Jesus father.

You can go through all the 150 Psalms in the Old Testament and never does the Psalmist call Jesus father. There's one or two references in the Old Testament to God being the father of the nation of Israel or even the father of the king of Israel in that he calls the king of Israel his son. But even the kings of Israel in the Old Testament never say to God my father. They never call God father. So here Jesus refers to God as his father.

And he says my father is the exception to the Sabbath rule. My father works on the Sabbath. He never stops working.

And it's a good job he doesn't. Now to be sure Genesis chapter 1 and 2 portray God as ceasing from his work of creation on the Sabbath day.

[21 : 44] But he continues his work of preservation and providence and salvation. He never ceases. creation depends on God never ceasing to work for a single second, a single moment.

So Jesus says my father works on the Sabbath. He's the exception to the Sabbath rule. Well that's fairly uncontroversial.

Next comes the bombshell. my father, verse 17, is always at his work to this very day and I too am working.

I too am working. If God works on the Sabbath, Jesus says, so must I. Because my father and I do everything together.

everything the father does, the son does. And at this, they take up stones to stone him.

[22 : 52] Because they're saying he's making himself equal with God. The father works on the Sabbath day, well then so does the son. Who does he think he is?

And they take up stones to stone him. he's claiming to be equal with God. And therefore, according to the Jews, probably, he's claiming to be a rival to God.

But Jesus goes on to say, look, yes, equality, yes, but rivalry, no. This is a family business. Father and son are in this together.

A father passes to his son the secrets of his trade so that the son does what his father does. And the father does this because he loves his son. And the son delights to work with his father.

Father and son work together. There's no rivalry here. There's only unity and intimacy. And so Jesus, when criticized for working on the Sabbath, says, I've got to work on the Sabbath because my father works on the Sabbath.

[24 : 04] And the father and the son do everything together. We're at one. We do everything together. And at this point, Jesus ratchets up the argument another step or two.

And he mentions two works that the father does, two activities that the father does, that God does, and everybody agrees that these two activities are the work of God and of God alone.

And then he claims that the son does these two activities along with the father, in that the father has handed over responsibility for these two activities to the son.

And what are these two activities? First of all, giving life, and secondly, judging the world. Giving life and judging the world.

First of all, Jesus is the life giver. He claims here to be the source of eternal life. The pool of Bethesda was a place of death.

[25 : 17] People preoccupied with staying alive a bit longer, basically waiting to die. that's what this world is as well. Death casts a shadow over the whole of human life.

There's no getting away from it. God is the source of life. He is the giver of life. Jesus has life in himself.

No one gives God life. He is life. So when we walk out on God, we walk out on life. we die in every sense of the word.

We die physically, we will, every one of us. We die spiritually, we die eternally. Jesus walked into the pool of Bethesda, walked into this place full of people waiting to die, desperately hoping for something to delay it or to prevent it.

And he says to this man, get up. Get up. And walk. And he got up and walked. Jesus gives life where there's death.

[26 : 27] Jesus gives eternal life now. Verse 24, I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned.

He is crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, 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.

He gives life now to the spiritually dead, to the spiritually paralyzed. He can give you life this morning. He can give you eternal life if you will hear his voice and believe in him.

life. He can come where you are and he can give you life. And not only does he give you eternal life now, he gives it in the future.

Verses 28 and 29. Listen to this. Verse 28, 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.

[27 : 27] Those who have done good will rise to live and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. Jesus says, I am the conqueror of death.

Later on, he goes to the tomb of his friend Lazarus who has been dead for four days. He says, roll the stone away and he shouts into the tomb and Lazarus comes out and Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life.

If you believe in me, you'll never die. And then at the end of this gospel, Jesus' own dead body is wrapped in grave clothes and put into a tomb and a stone is rolled over the entrance of the grave.

And John and Peter hear that the tomb is empty and the grave clothes are empty and they run to the tomb and Jesus isn't there. And later that evening, Jesus appears in the upper room and he shows them his hands, he says, peace be unto you and he shows them his hands on his side and he says they were glad, they were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Jesus can give you life. This is a place of death. The world is dying. Jesus can give you life.

[28 : 39] What a tremendous claim. What a tremendous claim this is. And Jesus goes on to say that the other activity that the Father has handed over responsibility to him is judgment.

judgment. Jesus is the one who will judge mankind. Verse 22. Moreover, the Father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.

Verse 27. As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself and he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

Verse 30. 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. Jesus is the judge of mankind.

If the Bible teaches anything, it teaches that there is a day of judgment coming. That we will have to stand before God and give an account of our lives.

[29 : 41] That's how the book of Ecclesiastes ends. That strange book of Ecclesiastes ends like this. Chapter 12 verse 14.

God will bring every deed into judgment including every hidden thing whether it is good or evil. There's going to be a day of judgment. We're going to stand before the judgment seat of God to give an account of these lives that we have lived.

These characters that we have developed. The things we have done. The things we have not done. The words we have said. Jesus said we will be called to account for every careless word that we have ever spoken.

there is a day of judgment coming and Jesus' claim here and in the synoptic gospels is that he will be the judge of mankind.

You haven't seen the last of Jesus Christ. He will be the final judge of mankind. You will stand before him. How do we know it's true?

[30 : 45] Because God has raised him from the dead. Acts chapter 17 verse 31 I think it is. Paul speaks to the philosophers at Athens about the resurrection of Jesus and he says God has appointed a day, God has fixed a day, God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world by the man he has appointed.

And of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead. Jesus who claimed to be the future judge of mankind has been raised from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is either good news or it's bad news. It is good news for those who trust in him as their saviour and their lord. It is bad news.

The worst news you could possibly hear if you're not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. You're going to stand before Jesus one day. You haven't seen the last of Jesus crying. God has raised him from the dead.

And here he says that God has given the work of judgment to him. So here are these two tremendous claims of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 06] And he says, because I do these things that only the Father can do, that only God can do, all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father, verse 23.

You should honour the Son as you honour the Father. What a tremendous claim that is. People sometimes say, well, Jesus was a good teacher.

Or Jesus was a good man, probably the best man who's ever lived. And yes, his teaching, oh, it's lovely, isn't it? The Sermon on the Mount. Actually, if you read the Sermon on the Mount, you won't find it that lovely.

But people think, oh yes, Sermon on the Mount, very nice, if only we could all follow Jesus, what a wonderful place the world would be. Jesus is a good teacher, Jesus is a good man, but all this stuff about Jesus being the Son of God, God incarnate, I can't take that, I can't swallow that.

Look, I mean, C.S. Lewis said this years ago. He said, and he was right, God incarnate, if he wasn't God's equal, he was neither a good teacher or a good man.

[33 : 18] A person who goes around making the claims that Jesus claimed, claiming to be the saviour of the world, claiming to have come from heaven, claiming to be the unique Son of the Father, claiming to be equal with God, a person who goes around making claims like that, if they're not true, not a good teacher, he's a terrible teacher, and he's not even a good man, he's a terrible man.

As C.S. Lewis said, he's either a liar, or he's a lunatic, or he's Lord. And you've got to decide which of those you're going to opt for.

I wouldn't opt for either of the first two, he wasn't a liar, not a bit of it. He certainly wasn't a lunatic, if he was, wouldn't it be great if the world was full of lunatics?

He is Lord, he is God's equal, he is the Son of the Father, and they do everything together.

You've got to decide, what are you going to do about Jesus Christ? You can't just ignore it. What are you going to do with Jesus?

[34 : 44] One day, you'll be asking, what are you going to do with me? He's the life giver.

The gospel and the other gospels will go on to say that he gives us life by dying for us. He gives us life by laying aside his own life, by laying down his own life.

The good shepherd gives his sheep eternal life, and he lays down his own life for the sheep. That's how he gave us life, by giving his own life on the cross for us, by taking the death, the punishment that we deserve upon himself, by absorbing it in himself, so that he could give his life to us.

That's how he gives us life through his own death. And elsewhere in John's gospel he said, look, I didn't come to condemn the world, I came to save the world. I am going to judge the world, but I'm not here this time to judge the world, I'm here to save the world.

I'm here to bear the world's condemnation. On the cross he took the condemnation that you and I deserve, he took the death that you and I deserve, the punishment that you and I deserve, so that we could be free from condemnation, so that we could live.

[36 : 06] What are you going to do with Jesus? One day you will be asking, what is he going to do with me?

let's pray. Father, we thank you for the difference that Jesus made when he arrived at the pool of Bethesda, that place where nothing was happening, that place where everyone was waiting for the solution that would never come.

and we thank you for the difference that Jesus made when he came. And may there be those here this morning who will hear Jesus, the life giver, say, get up and walk.

Follow me. May they hear his voice and follow him. amen. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.