

Lord of the Sabbath

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[0 : 00] It's an interesting fact that the first commercially distributed bottled water in the U.S. was sold here in Boston by Jackson Spa in 1767.

And that was in fact the origin of bottled water and carbonated water in particular was imitation spa water. And because people believed that mineral springs had therapeutic properties and drinking from them or bathing in them could bring healing.

And this is the case even today. It's called balneotherapy where you assign that doctors prescribe people bathe in mineral water in particular.

It is very common in Europe and Japan. It's for healing from certain ailments. Because hot water can dissolve more minerals than cold water. For that reason they do contain more calcium, sodium bicarbonate as well as other things.

And reputable journals that you can find do talk about how hot springs increases blood circulation, relaxes tense muscles, alleviates chronic joint and muscle pain. Could treat arthritis to a degree and eczema as well because of its silica and sulfur content.

[1 : 17] And that's why if you find that some of the most popular hot springs throughout the world, they tout their medicinal value. And some of them have grown alongside them are rehabilitation clinics for those with disabilities.

And that's very similar to the situation you find right here in this passage in John 5, 1 to 18. And if you pay attention to the verse numberings in the Bible, you may have noticed that it skips verse 4.

And that might leave you wondering, why does it skip verse 4? And if you have the ESV Bible, NIV Bible has a similar footnote. If you look at the footnote, it says, Some manuscripts insert wholly or in part, waiting for the moving of the water.

For an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred the water. Whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.

Right. Now, this verse was not omitted from our present-day translations because it offends our modern scientific sensibilities. Rather, it was omitted because with more archaeological discoveries and advanced techniques for recovering manuscripts, scholars have determined that this verse was a gloss or a comment that was later added by a scribe and was mistakenly included as part of the original text.

[2 : 33] That's why it's omitted from our Bibles today. And as they do that, because there were a lot of English Bibles already in print with a lot of commentaries using the verse numberings, instead of changing the verse numbering and throwing off the rest of the verse numbering in John, they decided just to skip verse 4 so that we can keep that intact.

So that's what's going on here. And whether an angel really stirred up the pool or not is not our present concern because it wasn't part of the original Bible there. But the pool of Bethesda certainly appears to have had some kind of medicinal properties.

The water was stirred up, as it says in verse 7. And you can still visit the archaeological remains of the pool in Jerusalem. And some ancient writers who write about the pool of Bethesda note that it had a redness to it, which is a common way ancient writers refer to mineral water that potentially had healing properties.

And so 2,000 years later, not much has changed, has it? People still seek out hot springs, go to spas, and they seek medicine because people don't like to be sick, especially those with chronic illnesses.

They want to be healed. They want to find remedies, both modern and ancient. And in this passage, Jesus heals one such man of his disabling condition.

[3 : 49] And as he does so, he demonstrates that he is the Lord of creation who heals both our sicknesses and sins. And so in verses 1 to 9, John tells us about how Jesus heals sicknesses here.

And in verses 10 to 15, John tells us about how Jesus heals sin, our ultimate disease. And then finally, in verse 16 and 17, he tells us why Jesus is able to do this, namely that he is the Lord of creation.

And look at verses 3 to 7 with me to begin. It tells us about a very desperate invalid who was seeking healing. And because of the healing value of Pool of Bethesda, maybe miraculous, maybe just from the offspring, there lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed.

And one of them was a man who has been an invalid for 38 years, it says. The exact nature of this man's condition is not specified, but it was clearly a disabling condition, because he writes later in verse 7 that he didn't have enough mobility to get himself into the pool in time to receive healing.

And so likely the man was lame or partially paralyzed. So he was bedridden for some reason. And John tells us this, that this man had been an invalid for 38 years.

[5 : 09] And the length of this man's suffering and his disability is there to show us what a remarkable healing this is. It's not that he had, you know, twisted his ankle or pulled a hamstring.

This is a 38-year-old invalid, I mean, 38 years of disability. And so if you look at this man's condition, he's clearly, and you look around the pool at all the multitude of invalids there, there's no doubt as to why this man is here, right?

He's seeking healing. Yet Jesus asks him in verse 6, Do you want to be healed? And the sick man is understandably exasperated.

You could hear his frustration. He says, 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.

So he doesn't yet understand exactly who he's talking to. Because if he knew who Jesus was and that he could heal him right there and then, he would not be responding in such a way.

[6 : 11] But in his limited understanding, the only way he could possibly get healing, the faint hope of healing in this situation is by getting into that pool as soon as the water was stirred.

And so with that, he grumbles to Jesus for asking this obvious question. Yet Jesus is patient. He's compassionate. He says to him in verse 8, Get up.

Take up your bed and walk. And John notes that at once the man was healed and he took up his bed and walked.

This is not like the campaign of kind of modern day pseudo healers that go around, the healing people, where they carefully curate at their campaigns who comes up on the stage.

They make sure that it's people who have diseases or ailments that you can't readily see that come up on the stage. So that when they declare, oh, you are healed, there's no way to actually verify.

[7 : 08] So someone with cancer or diabetes. But if you find someone that is lame or blind and they're on their wheelchair, they make sure they sit in the back. They don't come anywhere near the stage. It's not like one of these pseudo healer campaigns, but rather this man who was an invalid for 38 years and couldn't even get off from his mat, he tells him, get up, take up your bed and walk.

And not gradually, right, does he recover after a period of time. And not ambiguously, you know, the man was formerly bedridden, but now he could kind of limp around. No, he gets up, picks up his bed and walks in front of everybody, in front of Jesus.

That's an immediate, incredible healing that Jesus administers. And this fits the pattern of what Jesus has been doing, because he's told us in chapter 2 that he fulfills the Old Testament purification laws in no purification ritual, in a way that no purification ritual could fulfill.

And in chapter 4, he told us that he could satisfy the human thirst for eternal life in no way that Jacob's water, the well from Jacob's water can. And in this chapter, in chapter 5, he shows that he can heal and transform the needy in a way that no miraculous pool can.

Jesus is the greater healer in this passage. And the Old Testament had prophesied of a time when God would visit his people. In Isaiah 35, 5, it says, The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.

[8 : 44] Then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. That time has come. And Jesus' ministry of healing is a fulfillment of that prophecy.

He's a promised Messiah, the Son of God, Emmanuel, which means God with us, has been singing about. And his ministry of healing signals to the world that the kingdom of God is now upon us because the King has come.

And Jesus, as he heals, he's rolling back the effects of the fall. Because of sin having entered into the world, because of the fall, there is brokenness. There's not just sinfulness, but also brokenness of body and sickness and illness, ailments.

They're all here because of the fall. And in his healing ministry, Jesus signals that he's rolling back the effects of the fall. He's come to redeem the world. And of course, that kingdom is not yet consummated.

It's not fulfilled in its entirety, which is why there's still sick people today. But because the kingdom has been inaugurated, it has begun, there are people who do get healed.

[9 : 49] And God still heals today. And so this is the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. It's kind of like the light piercing, you know, through a dark sealed room, through the cracks, eventually to eventually break through in entirety and fill the whole room.

That's kind of what we're seeing, the beginning of that. And we're in that in-between kingdom of the kingdom that has begun and kingdom that has not yet been consummated. And the fact that Jesus is doing this, that he heals this invalid, shows us two things.

First, it shows us that God cares about the material world. Jesus came primarily to atone for our sins and save our souls, yet his kingdom also brings healing to the sick.

The spiritual life and the wholeness are more important, it's true, than physical life and the wholeness. But God nevertheless cares about our physical life. And we as a church, as a family of believers, should be concerned also for the physical welfare of our neighbors and our friends.

And that's why we care when a fire like this happens and 50, 60, 70 of our neighbors are displaced. That's why we seek to meet that need and care for the physical needs of these people. Because when we see our neighbors and friends in a dire physical need and yet do nothing but simply say that God loves you and you need to believe in him so that you can be saved, then we expose our soul-saving mission as a sham.

[11 : 15] And we belie the fact that there was no love to begin with. And secondly, it shows us, the fact that Jesus heals this invalid, shows us that God is presently at work in our material universe.

Sometimes even Christians who believe in the supernatural and miracle can be so enculturated in the naturalistic framework of this world that we function, that we live like functional deists who believe that God never intervenes or acts in an ongoing, continuous way.

But we are a church that believes in the ongoing activity of the Spirit and sometimes surprising activity of the Spirit of God. And we should cultivate an openness to this kind of work for God to work, whether it be through prophecy or miraculous healing of the sick.

And if you do not yet believe in God, then you might be wondering how, just how, seemingly reasonable people can believe these things. How can, what do you mean?

That it's things that violate blatantly the laws of nature. But it's one thing to say that science and reason is not equipped, is only equipped to test for natural causes.

[12 : 27] And it's a whole another thing to say that science, because science can only test for natural causes, only natural causes exist. You guys follow that? It's one of my favorite philosophers, Alvin Plantinga says, he puts it this way in his book, Warranted Christian Belief.

To say that, to insist in that, would be not unlike the drunk who insisted on looking for his lost car keys under the streetlight on the grounds that the light was better there.

In fact, it would go the drunk one better. It would be to insist that because the keys would be hard to find in the dark, they must be under the light. The claim that worldly phenomena only have naturalistic causes and explanations is in the end an unprovable, indemonstrable presupposition, and no more grounded in reason than our belief in the supernatural.

And so Jesus heals our sicknesses. He cares about this. And in doing so, he announces that the kingdom of God is here, and that he is the God-appointed Messiah and King.

But the story doesn't end there. We find an interesting backdrop to this former invalid story in verse 14. When Jesus once again runs into this man, he tells him, verse 14, See, you are well.

[13 : 46] Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. That's a remarkable statement. Because he's saying that this invalid was disabled because of his sin.

And now we have to note this qualification, and please get this, that this doesn't mean that every sickness is caused by a specific sin.

Right? And it does not mean that every time you get sick, that you should ask yourself what sin caused it. Because not necessarily does this sin cause your sickness.

And later in the Gospel of John, he does offer, Jesus offers a corrective to this in chapter 9, verses 1 to 3. Because when his disciples ask Jesus about this man who was born blind, they ask him, Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?

And then Jesus answers them, It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. Right? So sometimes people are sick or disabled for no particular sin, but to serve God's greater purposes and display his glory.

[14 : 57] However, this truth should not lead us to overlook the fact that some sicknesses and disabilities are, in fact, direct results of specific sins.

That's what this passage teaches us, and that's numerous examples of that throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. And this is not talking generally about the fact that sin is the root of all sicknesses in the world.

That is a true statement. But it's more than that, because Jesus' statement is very emphatic and directive. Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. It's this invalid's specific sin that had led to his disability.

And that may be the reason why, actually, Jesus, among a multitude of invalids, singles out this man. He could have gone to any number of them, but he goes to this man and talks to him, perhaps because his sin, uniquely, particularly, was tied to his sin.

And Jesus sought the man's repentance and spiritual restoration, as well as physical healing. And this is probably why the phrase, nothing worse, refers to spiritual perdition, damnation and being separated from God.

[16 : 11] Because, I mean, one, it's hard to imagine a physical condition more debilitating and full of suffering than being bedridden for 38 years. But not only that, the immediate context in chapter 5, in the passages that follow Jesus, talks about the resurrection of the dead and how he brings life.

And so, nothing worse may happen to you, it seems to be, referring to the threat that faces him if he fails to repent and he is judged by God in the end. And now, as we recognize that sin and sickness can be connected in a very intimate way, we recognize that sin is at the root of some of the physical problems that we or others around us might experience, we have to make sure that we're not desensitized to that and to remember that.

Because, and this is not as surprising as you might think. Even some non-Christians make note of this, you know, observe this kind of thing. I came across an article last year sometime called, God at the Bedside, published by New England Journal of Medicine, right here, by Dr. Ed Jerome Groupman, who was an oncologist, and he argues that spiritual beliefs and practices factor in to people's health heavily.

And he, much more heavily than we're comfortable admitting. And even though he writes that, understandably, doctors are leery of moving outside the strictly clinical and venturing into the spiritual realm, he concedes that a rigid separation between the two, religion and science and health, has been detrimental.

And he writes that in his experience, the patient's guilt and anxieties and fears affect their illness and that their faith in God affects the prospects of their healing.

[17 : 52] And he's certainly not the first doctor to make this observation. And so, the link then between sin and sickness should make us certainly more vigilant about our sins, right?

So don't assume that you're sick because of your sin and certainly don't assume that other people are sick because of their sins, but that's a great opportunity to examine ourselves, take inventory of how we have been living before God.

And that's also a great reason to confess our sins freely. And also because sin is the greater disease at the root of all suffering and sin, we should demonstrate a proportionate concern for sin, the gravity of sin.

Because more often than not, as we live suffering and sickness, they feel more real to us than sin does. We're more concerned as we share prayer requests about the circumstances, about our physical well-being, than the spiritual well-being.

And this is, it happens to all of us. I mean, even for me, as I've been, this is week three of, I guess, having my cold and my concern can so easily be, I just want to get well and get over with this.

[19 : 05] But the greater problem is that in my sickness, I become more irritable and I'm more easily annoyed and that I can be, that I can sin against my brothers and sisters, my family members and in that context, and that besmirches the name of God for the sake of my selfishness and that's the greater evil.

That's the greater concern. And in the same way, for us, if someone, a member from our church gets cancer, yes, let's pray for that person's healing, let's minister to that brother or sister, meet their physical needs, but let's also make sure that we pray for them so that they can persevere in faith, entrusting themselves to God's sovereign care in the midst of suffering.

Right? Maybe you're wracked with anxiety or worry about something. And in that context also, let's not merely seek prayer that God would help you to solve whatever the situation or circumstances that you're worried about, but also let's pray that in the midst of that, in the middle of that fire, that you're able to have faith in Him, to believe in Him, to cry out to Him, to cultivate a dependence on Him.

We have, from the beginning, been a church that does a really good job meeting one another's needs. And we have sought also to be a church that regularly confesses our sins.

We're open and vulnerable to one another. And so let's do that. Confess our sins to one another regularly and openly. And even more importantly, and even more frequently, let us pronounce the good news of Jesus Christ, the full assurance of pardon that we have because of Him, the forgiveness of sins because Jesus absorbed the wrath of the Father and paid the penalty for our sins.

[20 : 52] Let's remind each other of that. Let's preach that to one another. Let's be a church that's obsessed with the gospel. Although in this particular passage, Jesus doesn't exactly pronounce that this invalid is forgiven, probably because He hasn't repented yet.

He tells him, sin no more. We see a glimpse of Jesus' authority to do so in His direct command to the man in verse 8 because He says to the invalid, get up, take up your bed, and walk.

And the command, get up, can literally be translated, rise. And that's resurrection language throughout the gospel of John and in the immediate context in chapter 5.

And so when it's later 25, verses 25 and 29, Jesus says, truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

And that's what He's doing with this invalid. He speaks and when the voice of the Son of God is heard, He gets up and He walks, carries His mat. And the same thing happens spiritually.

[22 : 04] When you hear the voice of the Son of God, the spiritually dead come to life. We're forgiven of our sins and reconciled to God. And why? So He heals, Jesus heals us both of our sicknesses and sins.

Yet, then how is He able to do that? Why does He have the authority to do that? And we'll learn more of this in the coming weeks and we're going to talk about that at verse 17 and more in the following weeks.

But we see a glimpse of it already here in His confrontation with the Jewish leaders. verse 9 kind of prefigures it. It says, Now that day was the Sabbath.

That's a foreboding statement because in the Gospels, if you're familiar with it, the Sabbath becomes a point of contention between the Jewish leaders and Jesus. And it's from this point on that the conflict really escalates and Jesus is really on His way to the cross, being persecuted and killed by Jewish leaders and others for our sins.

And note the response of the Jewish leaders. Look at verses 10 to 13. Read it with me. It says, 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.

[23 : 20] But He answered them, Well, the man who healed me, that man said to me, Take up your bed and walk. They asked Him, Who is the man who said to you, Take up your bed and walk? 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.

Note the extraordinary callousness of the Jewish leaders here. A man who had been an invalid for 38 years just gets up, picks up his mat, and walks.

And then their response is not amazement and wonder and worship, but it's petty and legalistic. They're like, Oh, but you shouldn't carry your mat on the Sabbath. And they're so disturbed and perturbed by this, that perceived violation of the Sabbath that they ask Him, Who is the man who told you to take up your bed and walk?

Because in their mind, I mean, the person that's violating the Sabbath is not a big problem compared to the person who's telling people to break the Sabbath. So they're concerned about Jesus and want to find out who He is.

But if you look at the biblical teaching on the Sabbath, it's not even clear that this man violated the Sabbath. Like, there is a verse in Jeremiah 17 that prohibits people from bearing a burden on the Sabbath day, but that had in view the specific, the people who bore burden related to their work, their profession, right?

[24 : 43] And this man is certainly not working. I mean, he's been an invalid for 38 years and he's picking up his mat. That hardly constitutes work according to the biblical teaching on the Sabbath. And here, what the elders, what the Jewish leaders are concerned with here are rather what they call the tradition of the elders, traditions that had accumulated, created on top, in addition to the Bible, and where they defined 39 different classes of work and according to that classification, carrying one thing from one domain to another considered, was constituted work.

So in their mind, yes, Jesus, this man broke the Sabbath. Yet, they go even further than that, don't they? They don't just confront this man for breaking the Sabbath, they confront Jesus.

Because later in verse 16, it says, this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. So they think that his healing, miraculous healing, also constitutes work.

You shouldn't be working, you shouldn't be healing people on the Sabbath. And so this persecution is being ramped up and then Jesus answers them, it says in verse 17. It doesn't just say that Jesus says to them, it says Jesus answers them.

That's legal language, the language of court defense. So Jesus answers them. And the answer is really interesting and unique to the Gospel of John. Because in the other Gospels, in the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus' answer in essence is that he's bringing about a new age so that he fulfills and reinterprets the law of the Sabbath as well as all the other laws in the Old Testament.

[26 : 18] That's his answer and that's true. But in the Gospel of John, the focus, the attention turns more directly to Jesus' identity. He says in verse 17, my father is working until now and I am working.

If you know the context of Jewish discussions about the Sabbath, this was a question that preoccupied them for a while because they asked themselves, well, if Genesis 2 says that God rested on the seventh day, on the Sabbath day, but the world is still running on the seventh day, does that mean that God violates his own Sabbath?

Because he has to be working or the world would fall apart. So how is he resting on the Sabbath day and how is the world running at the same time? So this was a question that they preoccupied themselves with and the answer that they came to, a consensus among the Jewish rabbi, was that yes, God is indeed working on the seventh day but it does not constitute a violation because he's God that he transcends the universe, right?

So that was the sensible answer that they had come to and Jesus knows this and he says, my father is working until now, as you know, and I am working.

That's an audacious claim. In other words, Jesus is saying that the father is the Lord of creations who sustains the creation and I am his son.

[27 : 45] I am also God who is bringing about this new creation and that's why I work. I work on the Sabbath day just like my father does. That would be a blasphemous thing to say if he weren't actually the second person in the Trinity.

And so it's like you're using a computer program and the person who quoted the program is right next to you and then you say, well, that's not the way you use the program. I mean, he could do whatever he wants.

He could manipulate the code to do whatever he wants. That's what's going on. He said, Jesus says, I am one with the Father. I rule over creation. I'm the Lord of the Sabbath, not vice versa.

And that's why Jesus is able to heal our sicknesses. That's why Jesus is able to heal our sins. Right? And it's particularly appropriate to remember this Advent season that Jesus is the Lord of creation.

He's both man and God. Right? Because if he were God but not man, he would not be able to represent us or empathize with our weaknesses or reconcile us to God because he would not be able to identify with our sins if he were only God and not man.

[28 : 57] But if he were only man and not God, he would not be able to represent God or reveal God to us because if you offend a friend of yours and then I come to you and say I forgive you doesn't do you any good.

Sins committed against God, only God can forgive. The person who represents God must be God himself and that Jesus is able to do that for us. In the same way, and also if you have a friend, you would not think that someone else will know more about this friend than that friend himself.

So likewise, Jesus is the one who is uniquely capable of revealing God in his fullness to us because he is God. He is the second person in the truth. He is the son of God.

And for that reason, because Jesus is the Lord of creation, he can deal with both our sicknesses and sins. as Isaiah 53, 4-6, which was our assurance of pardon today, it says, Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

[30 : 22] And with his wounds, we are healed. Jesus is the Lord of creation who heals our sicknesses and sins.

So let's turn to him and run to him unreservedly for all our sicknesses, all our sins. Expect him to move. Expect him to work. Let's pray together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. God, we want to be a church full of faith, praying and living and working expectantly, expecting to see the surprising work of the spirits, to see you work, to act in normal ways but also in extraordinary ways.

Amen. Yet when you do not intervene the way we expect or desire, Lord, we also want to be a church that remembers your faithfulness in sending your son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins so that we can be assured of your faithfulness and your grace and goodwill toward us.

So help us, God. To be a church that faithfully proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ in both works and word in this neighborhood.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.

[32 : 20] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.