Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Damning Power of False Religion
Scripture: John 5:1–16
Code: 43-25

I do want you to open your Bible now to the fifth chapter of the gospel of John…the fifth chapter of the gospel of John. This is a very important portion of Scripture and not for the reason that most people think. It's a story about a man whom Jesus healed. That in itself is a rather common occurrence in the New Testament. And for the man, of course, a remarkable experience.

But that really is only incidental to the point of this passage and we want to get a grip on the point of the passage, don't we? That's very, very important. We have been told this story many times. For a couple of reasons this story is memorable. One of them is because of the name of the pool, the Pool of Bethesda. From the time you were in Sunday School, you heard about the man by the pool of Bethesda, And another indicator of this story and its familiarity is the fact that there were 38 years that this man had been ill. We all know the story of the man who was ill for 38 years by the pool of Bethesda whom Jesus healed.

But there's so much more to the story than just that. Those, of course, make it memorable for us. But this is not a story about a healing, this is a story about false religion. This is a story about the power of false religion, the devastating grip of false religion, the damning force that false religion exerts on people's minds and souls, even in the face of the truth.

The remarkable emphasis of this story is found in its conclusion. Go down to chapter 5 verse 16 and you read these words, "The Jews were persecuting Jesus. The Jews were persecuting Jesus."

When John speaks of the Jews, he's not simply talking about any Jewish people in Israel. He uses that as a technical term for the leaders, the religious leaders. They are in the gospel of John the ones in view when John refers to the Jews. The religious leaders then were persecuting Jesus. The Greek verb *dioko* means to chase, or to pursue, or to run down. And with hostility, in this case, and thus it's translated, to persecute, it's a present tense verb, or a verb of continuous action in the imperfect. It means they have been continually after Jesus. This then is a miracle that triggers persecution…persecution that runs all the way to the cross, all the way to the execution of Jesus at Calvary.

Now let me give you a little bit of background up to now. We have gone through the opening four chapters of the gospel of John which have clearly indicated to us that Jesus is God. He is introduced to us in the first chapter as the Creator, the One who made everything that exists and without Him

was not anything made that was made. We are told that He, the eternal Word, God, became man, took on human flesh, and we beheld His glory.

We have seen Him directed…His disciples, the disciples of John the Baptist directed to Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We have been introduced to Him, therefore, as the Messiah. We have heard from His own lips that He is the only Savior, that whoever believes in Him will be saved from perishing forever in hell. Those who reject Him will be judged. We have seen His works, His mighty works, as well as heard His powerful words. We're aware of the miraculous indications of His knowledge. He knew what was in the mind of man. He knew the history of the Samaritan woman that He had never met. So we have seen His deity on display. We've heard powerful words, we've even seen His miracle power just in the end of chapter 4 in the healing of the nobleman's son, a miracle in behalf of a boy who was near death.

Those are just samples of what Jesus was demonstrating in the ministry that He was carrying on. As we come to chapter 5, I just remind you that we've already gotten into the Galilean ministry, a ministry of about sixteen months, after almost a year in Judea where He was ministering then He went to Galilee and He will be there for about sixteen months or so and then wrap up the final months of His ministry back in Judea up to Passion week and His death and resurrection.

Now all through the early days, months of His ministry, His words and His works are giving testimony to His deity, that He is the Messiah, to put in the language of John, that He is the Christ, the son of God and that we are to believe in His name and by believing in His name, we have eternal life. But here we find the Jews were persecuting Him. That catches us somewhat by surprise in the gospel of John. The works of the Lord Jesus generated unprecedented sensation in Israel. His miracles which He was doing on a daily basis in front of massive crowds of people were drawing even bigger crowds were amazed. Matthew 9:33, the crowds were amazed and were saying nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel, Mark 2:12. They were all amazed and were glorifying God saying, "We've never seen anything like this." The miracles were the authenticating signs of His deity and His Messiahship.

In the eleventh chapter of Matthew, a familiar section, John the Baptist who is imprisoned hears about the works of Christ and sends His disciples to say to Him, "Are you the Messiah? Are You the expected one?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you see and hear." Here's the evidence. "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." So His signs were His works, miracle works, and His Words, preaching the true message of salvation. It is the works of Jesus and the words of Jesus that authenticate His Messiahship and His deity. And both created sensation in Israel through His powerful teaching, powerful preaching, the crowds were drawn and they said things like, "Never has a man spoke like this man has spoken, " John 7:46. They were shocked at Him because He spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes and the Pharisees, Matthew 7 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

The people were excited by the sensational power of Jesus' words and works. And they marveled at everything He did and everywhere He went He was mobbed by crowds, Matthew 4:25, "Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judea, and beyond the Jordan." That covers everywhere in and around the land of Israel.

Matthew 13:1, "Large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and the whole crowd was standing on the beach." In other words, in order to get some space from the crush of the crowd, He got in a boat and went off shore into the water so that He could create some distance and speak to the people.

Luke 12:1 says, "So many thousands of people gathered together, they were stepping on one another." Huge crowds everywhere He went created by the sensation of His teaching and His miracles.

If you'll just go into chapter 6 for a moment and you look at verse 2, "A large crowd followed Him because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick." That is the sensation that drew the crowds. In verse 5 Jesus lifted up His eyes and seeing that a large crowd was coming to Him, asks Philip about feeding that crowd. Down in verse 10, Jesus says, "Have the people sit down. There was much grass in the place. The men sat down and number about five thousand." Five thousand men means five thousand women meant ten or fifteen thousand children. This is a massive crowd of people that typically are following Jesus, overwhelming, unparalleled popularity for the miracle working teacher.

However, it is motivated by curiosity. It is superficial. Why? Because these people are captive to a false religious system. That is immensely effective and powerful. It has been in place for generations. And it has a stranglehold on people. It is important for us to understand the power of false religion. We've all come across it in our endeavor to communicate the gospel to people who are Roman Catholics or Mormons, or Jehovah's Witnesses or in some other cult, or who are Muslims, or Hindus, or Buddhists, or whatever it is that they might be. We understand the massive captivating power of false religion that captures the mind. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10 that it imprisons people in massive fortresses, idealogical fortresses from which it is so hard to deliver them. And we see that in the incident that we're going to look at in chapter 5. But going in to chapter 6 for a little bit, if you drop down into verse 26, Jesus says to this massive crowd that followed Him and He fed them, "You seek Me not because you saw the signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled." It's very superficial interest in Him, very superficial. Go down to verse 64 of that chapter. "There are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who didn't believe and who it was who would betray Him." Verse 66, "As a result of this, many of His *mathetes*, His followers, His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. They were faced with a choice, either follow Jesus and abandon the system of Judaism, or leave Jesus and be loyal to the system.

Ultimately those who were once even His students, His disciples rejected Him and followed the system in which they were so powerfully engulfed.

Behind this system were, of course, primarily the scribes and the Pharisees. Engulfed in it were the rabbis and accommodating it were the Sadducees and even the Herodians. That system was devilish and it was damning…it was deadly.

What did the leaders say about Jesus? Because whatever they said about Jesus, they said often and to the people to keep the people loyal. According to John 8:48 they said He is a Samaritan and He has a demon. They told the people that Jesus was demon-possessed. In Matthew 12:24 they said He does what He does by the power of Beelzebub, does what He does by the power of hell, the power of Satan. They spent their time working on the people in their system to keep them loyal to the system, to not allow them to defect to Jesus so that by the end of His ministry, in Judea they gather in the Upper Room, there's 120 believers after three years of this miracle ministry. And then, according to 1 Corinthians 15, there was a gathering of five hundred, most likely in Galilee.

Six hundred people committed to Christ, gathered in His name after a miracle ministry of three years across that land, you would have thought that there would have been a rising tide of faith in Christ, that there had been a rising tide of trust and belief in Him, they would be confessing Him as Lord and Messiah. That is not the case. There is a rising tide through the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Mark, the gospel of Luke and the gospel of John, a rising tide of opposition that could be traced back to the relentless influence of the religious leaders of Israel who kept up the mantra that Jesus was from hell, that He was working in the power of Satan and that He was demon possessed, if not insane

Now, we're not surprised by this because you remember in John 111 whom we just got started in the gospel, we read this, "He came unto His own and His own…what?...received Him not. He was in the world, the world was made by Him, the world knew Him not." So we've had warning that He is going to be rejected in chapter 1 verse 11, and then in chapter 3 and verse 32, where we read this, "No one receives His testimony." They piled up to see His miracles. They were in awe of what He said. But there was general indifference to Him as the Messiah and the Son of God. Why? Because of the relentless influence of the religious leaders of Israel.

And I want you to see this in John so look at chapter 7 verse 25, I'll just give you a few glimpses of how this progresses through the gospel of John. Chapter 7 verse 25, "Some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill?'" So here we are relatively early in the gospel of John, and the people already know the leaders want Him dead. They already know that they've designated Him as something like a Samaritan, a traitor, and an outcast, and a demon-possessed man. They want Him dead, the people know that.

In chapter 7 and verse 30, it says, “So they were seeking to seize Him and no man laid His hand on Him because His hour had not yet come.” They wanted to capture Him to execute Him. In verse 44 of the same chapter, “Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.” In chapter 8 verse 20, God is restraining them from doing what they want to do up to this point. Again in verse 20 of chapter 8, “No one seized Him because His hour had not yet come.”

So here we are three times in a row, they wanted to seize Him, to execute Him, to kill Him, the people knew that, but they didn’t do it because they were literally restrained by God because it wasn’t the right time. Chapter 8 verse 52, the Jews again, remember who John is referring to when he calls them the Jews, said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died and the prophets also and you say if anyone keeps My Word, he will never taste of death.” To say that, you must be demon possessed. This was their constant comment about Jesus.

End of chapter 8 verse 59, “Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but He hid Himself and went out of the temple.” A demon-possessed man who needs to be executed, He needs to be killed even by a mob. In verse 22 of chapter 9, chapter 9 is the man born blind. Jesus heals the man born blind, and the leaders, the Jews, come and confront the parents of the man and the man and his parents in verse 22 said this because they were afraid of the Jews. This is an insight into how the people felt about their leaders. They were afraid of them. They feared them. They were the ones that they believed had charge of their eternal souls and their destiny and their place in the Kingdom. And they wanted to comply with them. They were completely engulfed under their power and authority. For the Jews had already agreed…again, the Jews, the leaders, that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, the Messiah, he was to be put out of the synagogue. Anybody who affirmed that He was a follower, or she was a follower of Jesus Christ would be *persona non-grata* in the social life of Israel because everything revolved around the synagogue. They would be unsynagogued, they would be excommunicated. They would be considered an outcast. They couldn’t participate in social activities of any kind, even within a family. So the people knew what the price was if they followed this demon-possessed man…the price was high.

In chapter 9 and verse 24, a second time, “They called the man who had been blind and they knew He could see and they said, “Give glory to God, we know that this man is a sinner.” He’s a sinner, he’s demon-possessed, he’s like a Samaritan, he’s an outcast and a traitor. That’s what they said to the people. And anyone who followed Him would be literally put out of the society of Israel. The price was high.

Chapter 10 and verse 19, very important. A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words, “Many of them were saying, ‘He has a demon and is insane, why do you listen to him?”

All right, now we've got another element. He is insane. He is a maniac. He is a madman. Down in verse 31, the Jews again picked up stones to stone Him. Verse 39, "They were seeking again to seize Him and He alluded their grasp.

Maybe just one more from the eleventh chapter and verse 53, "From that day on they planned together to kill Him." And that leads right in to the Passion Week where they were able to get the Romans to execute.

The tide is the tide of hatred. And it is promulgated by the leaders of Israel who are the gatekeepers of an apostate, damning religious system. They're in the business of producing, Jesus said in His own words, sons of hell just like themselves. They were so effective that when you come to Matthew 27:23 and 25, the people all scream, "Crucify Him, crucify Him, crucify Him, we will not have this man to reign over us." That is the power of false religion. It is the power to capture the souls of sinners.

Now let's go back to chapter 5. In John's gospel, this entire flow of persecution against Jesus starts from this story. Verse 16, "And they were persecuting Jesus," the Jews were. The tide of hatred is triggered by what happens in chapter 5 verses 1 to 16. Yes it is a miracle, yes it is an amazing miracle, healing a man who was 38 years ill, that's a wondrous evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ. But the miracle is not the reason for the story. It is to show us the reaction to Jesus. This miracle triggers the hostility of Israel. Here is the trigger, you could say, that launches the people from interest with reservations to rejection without reservations; from interest with reservations to rejection without reservation.

And so, in chapter 5, 6 and 7, opposition is the theme…opposition to Jesus now becomes the theme. Up through chapter 4, it was the deity of Christ on display by His omniscience, by His miracle power, by His authority exercised in the Temple and even by the declarations of John in chapter 1 of His deity as the Creator. All of the first four chapters focus on the person of Christ and His deity, and focus on His words, the things that He said. Now you come into chapter 5 and you see the opposition begin to rise.

Let's look at the story. "After these things, there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame and withered waiting for the moving of the waters, for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water. Whoever then first after the stirring of the water stepped in was made well from whatever disease of which he was afflicted. A man was there who had been ill for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, 'Do you wish to get well?' The sick man answered Him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.' Jesus said to him, 'Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.' Immediately the man became well and picked up his pallet

and began to walk." Here comes the problem. "Now it was the Sabbath on that day. So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, 'It is the Sabbath and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.' But he answered them, 'He who made me well was the one who said to me, Pick up your pallet and walk.' They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you pick up your pallet and walk?' But the man who was healed didn't know who it was for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place. Afterwards Jesus found him in the Temple and said to him, 'Behold, you have become well, do not sin anymore so that nothing worse happens to you.' The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who made him well. For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus cause He was doing these things on the Sabbath."

Now it isn't that this sort of initiated their hatred of Jesus. That had been initiated a long time earlier when He attacked the Temple back in chapter 2 verses 13 to 22. We have a record of what He did at the very beginning of His ministry many, many months earlier. But they didn't forget that. They didn't forget His assault on their Temple.

But in specific in the gospel of John, here's the trigger event that launches the persecution that keeps escalating through the passages that I read you a moment ago. There are three elements to the story and they're around the personalities. Three personalities—Jesus, the Jews, and the man, and three amazing realities. The amazing compassion of Jesus, the amazing contempt of the Jews, and the amazing complacency of the man. And maybe that's the most surprising of all.

All of this comes together to launch, to trigger, to ignite the persecution. Now let's start with the amazing compassion of Jesus, that's how the story begins. By the way, do we need to remind you that God is a God of compassion? I don't think so. Psalm 86:15 describes God as full of compassion. It's repeated in Psalm 111, Psalm 112, Psalm 145 and referred to all over the Old Testament…God is a God of compassion. You read in the gospels in Matthew, in Mark, that Jesus was moved with compassion many times. He is God, He has the same compassion as God has…that means sympathy, feels to some degree the pain of fallen sinners and He is merciful. All His works and all His words are compassionate. He has compassion for the physical suffering, that's why He heals people. He has compassion for the demonic suffering, that's why He delivers people. He has compassion for the sin suffering, that's why He saves people. God is by nature compassionate and so is Jesus. Here is an illustration then of the compassion of Jesus to a man who had received no mercy. Jesus shows him mercy, he had received no mercy. His statement in verse 7 indicates that no one would help him get into the water, while I'm coming, somebody else steps in front of me. Whatever his infirmity was, it slowed him down. And other people with other debilitating illnesses or handicaps were able to get to the water before him and no one was saying, "Since you've been here so long, why don't you go first?" There was no mercy for this man, but there would be mercy from Jesus after nearly 40 years, the compassion is really clear.

Let's pick it up in verse 1, "After these things," that is the things that had gone on in Galilee, including the healing of the nobleman's son at the end of chapter 4, and the other miracles that He did in Galilee. John doesn't record them but the other writers do. John records only one healing in Galilee, that's the one at the end of chapter 4, the nobleman's son.

"But after His ministry in Galilee, there was a feast of the Jews." It is an unidentified time and it is an indefinite feast. We don't know if it's Passover in April, we don't know if it's the Feast of Tabernacles in October, we don't know if it's the Feast of Pentecost. We don't know what feast it is. But we do know in Deuteronomy 16:16 that there were three feasts every year that all men had to attend. And it would be most likely one of those feasts, we don't know which one, it doesn't really matter. But it was a feast of the Jews, Jesus would have attended.

By the way, just as a footnote. Even though the system was apostate and the priests who were doing the functions of those feasts and festivals were all an abomination to God, it was still a command to celebrate those feasts that came from the Word of God and so Jesus was faithful to fulfill all righteousness, to do what God had commanded him to do even though the people who were doing it when He got there were absolutely unworthy. He was faithful to be obedient to God on all God's requirements.

So, He goes to Jerusalem with all the other men and all the others who went to the feast. We don't know again when but it is more likely that He interrupted His Galilean ministry and went down to this feast and came back. The reason I say that is in chapter 5, you have Him in Jerusalem; in chapter 6 you have Him back in Galilee; chapter 7, back in Jerusalem, Judea again. So rather than put this at the end of His Galilean ministry and then have to figure out how He got back to Galilee in chapter 6, it's better to just see it as a trip to Jerusalem for a feast sometime during His Galilean ministry. It's important to know that.

Now there is in Jerusalem—by the way, the word "is" is important because John is writing between 80 and 90 A.D. at the end of the first century and Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., okay? So at least ten years, maybe twenty years before John writes this, the city has been destroyed, the Temple has been destroyed, the wall has been destroyed to some degree and some say why does He say there is in Jerusalem? Well that can be the historic presence. Sometimes when I tell a story, a biblical story, I would say even though I'm talking about two thousand years ago, there is in the city this gate, or there is in this city a man—you use it in historical present sense.

There's another possibility and that is equally possible. There's a fourth century testimony from a pilgrim who visited Jerusalem several hundred years later that He was able to see the sheep gate, or the ruins of the sheep gate still standing and the remnants of whatever it was that framed up that pool still there. In any case, there was at the time that Jesus went there, the sheep gate and the pool. If you want more information on the sheep gate, go to Nehemiah chapter 3 verse 1 and start there and

Nehemiah mentions the sheep gate several times. What was it for? It was the gate in which the sheep were brought for sacrifice at the Temple. So it's near the Temple and near this place, there's a pool. There were pools scattered all over the city of Jerusalem for the reason that you would assume—for water, for purification, for bathing, for cooling off in the heat. They were public pools and they were many places.

Some interesting historians tried to identify this as a certain pool that was 75 feet deep. That is impossible because you'd have a pile of crippled people at the bottom of the pool. So whatever the depth of the pool was, they could get in and get out. So it's not that pool that some have suggested, And by the way, it's called the Pool of Bethesda and Bethesda means house of mercy—house of mercy. That may go along with the idea that there was a superstition about an angel coming to stir the waters and that it had healing properties.

If you look at your Bible, you will notice in chapter (verse) 3 a line before the word waiting, or after the word withered, that runs all the way down to the end of verse 4. What that's telling you is something has been added. Ancient manuscripts do not have this. This has been added by a scribe. We didn't know that until we found more ancient manuscripts and when we found the older manuscripts, we realized this wasn't there. It was added. So completely disregard the idea that an angel came down and stirred up the waters and that whoever stepped in was made well from whatever disease he had if he was the first one in the pool. That appears much later than in the original. Some scribe added that maybe because there was that superstition. That might be in the mind of the man in verse 7 when he says, "I have no man to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up, when I'm coming, another one steps down." So probably that superstition did exist.

Well you say, "How would that superstition develop?" Well it may have been, this was a spring-fed water source and it may well have been that it did have some therapeutic value to ill people, as water does. And perhaps over the years they kind of associated that with miracle power. It's hard to say. Sufficient for you to know that the original text of Scripture reads like this, "In these lay a multitude of those who were sick and blind, and lame, and withered and a man was there who had been ill for 38 years."

Now this pool had five porches which means it was a fairly large pool. Five patios, verandas that would have a covering to keep the sun off them, but it would be open with colonnades and they would be there around the pool. Apparently the traditional belief, the superstition was that there was some angel that came and stirred the pool. Maybe that story had been in tradition and some scribe though he'd put it in at a later time to try to explain this belief, but it is not in the original text. If they did believe it, they believed it foolishly. It was magic, it was nothing but superstition.

There's a man there who has been ill for 38 years and he's been unsuccessful in getting into the water and being delivered from whatever his illness is. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew he

had already been a long time in that condition, Jesus again, here is His omniscience which is the declaration of His deity, He said to him, “Do you wish to get well?” Now, you know, people have mocked that. “What…what…what do you mean?” He said to him, “Do you wish to get well? What a ridiculous question.” He’s been there with all these other blind people and deaf people and lame people hoping to get in when the waters are stirred and that may have been nothing more than some bubbling up that was a physical phenomena in the nature of the spring-fed pool. But he had been there a long time. Of course he must wished to get well. But, you know, it is the right question. It’s better that saying “Are you having a nice day?” or “He there, how are you?”

To gain the man’s immediate attention, He directed His conversation at his immediate need. If he had completely given up on this issue, he wouldn’t have probably been there with all those other people in order to be disappointed another time after 38 years of this. So our Lord speaks directly to the issue as He did with the woman at the well when He talked about thirst and moved right into her spiritual thirst.

And the question is a fair question: do you wish to get well? Have you lost all hope? It’s a fair question. Thirty-eight years, do you have anything left that could be even considered hope or are you completely in despair? Is it nothing but a passive kind of despair? Is there anything left of hope within you? Whatever motive our Lord had to ask him, the obvious thing is He wants to direct the man’s attention on his need and the fact that it’s never been solved. And that shows that He cares. Nobody else around there was compassionate. Nobody else was making sure he got in first or at all. It was a man who had lived almost 40 years without any mercy from anybody, even people who were miserable themselves. But now for the first time, here’s somebody who cares about him. This is the compassion of Jesus. A stranger pities him. A stranger extends kind conversation to him. Keep in mind that this man by virtue of his illness over this amount of time is considered a piranha and an outcast by the Jewish leaders because they would believe this is punishment from God because this is a wicked man. Nobody of any importance spiritually would have spoken to this man.

But our Lord speaks to him. “And the sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. But while I’m coming, another steps down before me.’” He had bought in to the superstition. He doesn’t make any mention about angels stirring the water. Whatever the superstition was, he had bought into it and he had been unable to have it make a difference in his life.

Why…you say, “Well why would anybody believe something like that?” This is the ancient world, folks. Papyrus Ebers, Egyptian medical book says, “To prevent hair from turning gray, anoint it with the blood of a black calf boiled in oil or with the fat of a rattlesnake.” Here’s another one. Some of you men need this. “When hair falls out, apply a mixture of six fats, those of the horse, the hippo, the crocodile—a little harder to come by--, the cat, the snake and the ibex. To strengthen it, anoint it with the tooth of a donkey crushed in honey.” Now if you think that will make hair grow, you’re really

mistaken. But this is the ancient world. They believed in magic water, lizard's blood, swine's teeth, putrid meat, stinking fat, moisture from pig's ears, goose grease, animal fat, etc., etc., as being remedies. People believing that somehow bubbling water could give them some kind of cure isn't a stretch because bubbling water can be therapeutic. But he's not been able to take advantage of it.

And here comes the compassionate Jesus. This man, by the way, has no idea who Jesus is…no idea. He's not a believer, he doesn't even know who He is. Immediately Jesus says to him in verse 8 three commands, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." Three commands. Get up, pick up, and walk. The power is unleashed at that moment. Immediately, verse 9, "The man became well, picked up his pallet and began to walk." I mean, it's just really a stunning moment which means he was in a prone position with this illness. And he began to feel strength come into his long, useless legs and arms. And as he began to stand up, he had the power and the strength to stand up. You have to understand that the healings of Jesus were complete and instantaneous. They needed no rehabilitation, there was no progression. He was like a young man, full strength. He stood up. Nothing about faith. He didn't have to believe for this to happen. He didn't even know who Jesus was.

So this miracle was not about his faith. No, not at all. But it starts out with a demonstration of the compassion of Jesus, and the man's response, and he began to walk. Now here's the rub. "Now it was the Sabbath on that day." That's the point of this whole miracle. Jesus could have done this thing on the next day. This man did not have a terminal illness. This man had a chronic problem. This man could have been healed three days later or two days earlier. Jesus picked the Sabbath because that's the whole point of what's happening here. He picked the Sabbath for the express purpose of exciting a confrontation with the leaders of Israel.

He told the man, "Carry your bed." Didn't He know that would rattle the Jewish leadership? Of course He knew that. Of course He knew that. They had perverted the law. God had given the Sabbath Law all the way back in Exodus 20 and repeated it a number of times in Exodus and in Deuteronomy. God had given the Sabbath as a time of rest, relaxation, enjoyment, doing good. The only thing you were not to do was the normal work, the normal business, the normal jobs. In Jeremiah 17:21, "Take heed for yourselves and do not carry any load on the Sabbath or bring anything in through the gates of Jerusalem." That's commerce. Don't keep the normal commerce. But they had added dozens and dozens of prescriptions and binding commands to behaviors on the Sabbath Day. In fact, in Matthew 23, the burden was so oppressive that people couldn't carry it and they didn't give them any help…impossible burdens. And they had therefore perverted the Sabbath into the worse day of the week, the day of the greatest amount of bondage.

In Luke 6, He entered the synagogue on Sabbath, was teaching. There was a man there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath so they might find reason to accuse Him. So He accommodated them. He knew what they were thinking, as He always did. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come

forward." He got up and came forward. Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath to save a life or destroy it? And looking around at them all, He said to him, 'Stretch out your hand.' He did so and his hand was restored and they themselves were filled with rage and discussed what they would do to Jesus." They wanted Him dead because of what He was doing on their precious Sabbath. The Sabbath was the focal point of their apostate, self-righteous, legalistic, religious system."

Jesus even declared to them that He could do whatever He wanted on the Sabbath. Listen to Mark 2:27, "The Sabbath was made for man," Jesus said, "and not man for the Sabbath. And the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

So Jesus purposely brought about a Sabbath confrontation. This was never about the faith of the man. This was about the confrontation with the leaders. And that leads us to consider how serious they saw this breech and how Jesus paid no attention to their traditions. He refused to observe the legalistic man-made Sabbath regulations of rabbinic tradition. It was a major point of contention between Him and the religious establishment; Matthew writes about it. Mark, Luke, John, as we're seeing here. The Lord deliberately heals this man on the Sabbath, deliberately tells him to pick up his bed, deliberately tells him to walk. He knows He is defying the Jews that are always around watching Him. He has no interest in rabbinic tradition, only the Law of God. He knows that they have substituted the traditions of men for the Law of God. He knows the Sabbath is a means to glorify God and honor God. It is a gift to mankind. They have turned it into a burden and a way in which they can demonstrate their false righteousness. And so He attacks them at the heart of their system and He does it by an act of compassion, amazing compassion to a man who is ill for such a long time.

The amazing compassion of Jesus is then followed by the amazing contempt of the Jews. Look at verse 10. "The Jews were saying to the man who is cured, 'It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.' But He answered them, 'He who made me well was the one who said to me, Pick up your pallet and walk.' They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you pick up your pallet and walk?'" They couldn't care less whether that man could walk. They couldn't care less whether that man had any healing. They were ugly, indifferent. They had nothing but contempt for that man, believing that he was in that condition because God had punished him. And they were not because they were being approved by God. They have nothing but contempt for that man, but more importantly, they have nothing but contempt for Jesus and what He has done. They want to know who did this? Who told you you could carry your bed? Forget the miracle, ignore the miracle, who told you you could carry your bed? Who is the man who told you that?

He's intimidated. This man is intimidated. And that's what leads to the third and most compelling part of the story, the complacency of the man. The compassion of Jesus, the contempt of the Jews, and then the complacency of the man. This is really amazing. Pick it up in verse 14, "Afterward Jesus found him in the Temple." Now remember there would have been tens of thousands of people in the

Temple but Jesus knew what was in people and He knew where they were, knew where they had been and where they were going. Found him in the Temple. He went after him and said to him, “Behold, you have become well. Do not sin anymore so that nothing worse happens to you.” Personal touch. He found the man in the massive crowd, in the Temple He finds that man who is now walking and no doubt talking to everybody he can find about what has happened to him. That man has no idea who did this, where the power came from. Jesus finds him and I think they had a conversation longer than is recorded here. I think this kind of fits in to John 21:25 that if everything Jesus did and said was written down, the books of the world couldn’t contain it.

But the end of the conversation went like this. “You have become well. You’ve been healed. Do not sin anymore so that nothing worse happens to you.” What’s the implication of that? That his 38 year illness was connected to sin. Is that always the case? No, in chapter 9 a man born blind, what did the Jews say? “Who sinned, this man or his parents?” And what did Jesus say? Neither. Sometimes you’re sick and it’s not a direct punishment for sin. But sometimes sickness is a direct punishment for sin. Paul said to the Corinthians, “Some of you are weak and sick and some of you have even fallen asleep because of the way you’ve desecrated the Lord’s table.” David said that God’s hand was so heavy on him for his sin that his life juices were drying up. Moses said in Deuteronomy 28, to the people of Israel, “If you do not obey God, God will cause these diseases to come on you.” In the case of this man, his sickness was related to sin—to his sin. We don’t know any more than that. And Jesus’ final sobering warning to the man is, “You’ve been made well, now you need to go a different direction, away from the sin that has marked your life.” That tells me the man is unsaved. And Jesus is saying, “Thirty-eight years of illness as a result of sin, but that is nothing compared to the wrath of God in hell that you could experience forever. You’ve been made well. Go and sin no more.”

Jesus had to have told the man what He meant by that which is an indication that He had given him the necessity of believing in Him as the way to be forgiven and delivered from the power of sin. You think you have troubles looking back over 38 years? It is nothing compared to what’s ahead of you if you don’t turn from sin.

Here’s the most shocking part of the story. “The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.” He picked sides, didn’t he? Whose side did he pick? The Jews. Amazing, four decades of terrible suffering, healing, warning, the truth of forgiveness made clear to him, I’m sure, he walked away from Jesus and declared his loyalty to the Jews who hated Jesus. He knew they hated Jesus. He knew they were after Jesus. Everybody knew they were after Jesus. And he turned Jesus in. That’s the power of false religion. In the face of the compassion of Christ, in the face of an amazing miracle, in the face of healing, this man declared his loyalty to the Jews who hated Jesus and wanted Him dead. This has to be the most startling act of ingratitude and unbelief in all the healings that Jesus did. He has no intention of worshiping the Lord Jesus. He has no intention of following Jesus. He knows the Jews are hostile. They had a conversation back in 10 to 12, again a cryptic part of that conversation. They must have revealed and declared to Him how they felt about

the man who did this. And in order to put himself back in good graces for having violated the Sabbath, there's sort of a penitence here and he's aiding his desire to be in good graces with the religious leadership by turning in Jesus to ingratiate himself with the religious establishment. This is the power of false religion.

As a result, for this reason, verse 16, the Jews were persecuting Jesus because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. Yes it is a miracle story, but it is a tragically sad miracle story. Not a story about a man who was healed and then became a believer. But a man who was healed and became a rejecter. And if that surprises you, keep this in mind. Almost all the people Jesus healed rejected Him because He healed massive numbers of people and there were only a few at the end. That is the power …damning power…of false religion. He took his side with those who had their prescriptions for behavior on the Sabbath. That triggers the persecution that then flows, as I read to you, all the way to the cross.

Our Lord here is confronting Jewish legalism at its very heart, the Sabbath. He challenges the traditions with His authority as Lord of the Sabbath, as God. He heals a man. He warns him about living in sin and the need to turn from sin and the man goes right back loyal to his damning religion and turns Jesus in. He has been successfully turned into a son of hell, as Matthew 23 says. That's what they did.

You know, when Jesus was talking to His disciples and He saw the widow put her money in, remember, put her coins in. He said, "Beware of these men, this is what they do. They bring a widow to the point where she goes and gives her last two cents to go home and die. That's how captive she is to a religious system that has taught her she can buy her salvation." Jesus says beware of them. And then He says, "Not one stone will be left on another, I'm going to bring this whole thing down." Before John every wrote this, 70 A.D., the Romans came as the instruments of divine judgment and smashed Jerusalem and the Temple and the religious system.

What about you? What about you? Do you love Christ? Do you embrace Him as your Lord and Savior? Or are you captive to a religion that your loyalty that is led by false teachers telling you lies and making you a prisoner of their deception? I warn you as Jesus warned. There's only one hope of salvation and that's in Him. Reject Him and you are lost forever. And the punishment is forever outside of His presence. The man made his choice, wrong choice, tragic choice, a kind of a microcosm of Judas who encountered Jesus, saw His power, heard His words, heard His warning and chose hell. Tragic story. Sets the tone for the rest of the gospel and the rejection to come.

Father, again, this morning, we acknowledge that the Word comes with authority. My word has no authority, my thoughts, my ideas. But Your Word is authoritative, it is true and it is weighty, it is serious and it has to be treated in that fashion. Every soul, every heart, every life here this morning, or hearing this message has been confronted by the truth. The compassionate Christ comes. He

offers deliverance and salvation and the truth and He warns about clinging to false religion, the power of false religion to hold its people captive. O, God, we pray that You would be gracious and open the eyes of those who perhaps before have not seen this, that they may see it now and bring the truth to bear so that the fortification of deception and lies is smashed and they are delivered and led captive to Christ. That's our prayer.

Before I finish the prayer, I have a great, great nagging anxiety that never leaves about the people who are caught up in false religion because of its power and its deception. And I pray that God will grant escape through this message to many.

Father, now we ask that You would grant us wisdom to understand this truth and wisdom to apply it in every life. First in our own, if there's any question about our own spiritual condition and then to bring it to bear on the lives of those we know and meet and love. There's joy in our hearts because we have been delivered out of darkness into light, out of the kingdom of Satan into the Kingdom of Christ. We are blessed as we were reading earlier to have tasted Your kindness. We pray that for others. Rescue them, Lord, deliver them for Your truth and Your Spirit. And use us as instruments to do that. Now that the message has been delivered, this is not the end, this is the beginning. Where does it go from here? From us to someone else. Give us that opportunity, we pray for Your glory in Christ's name, Amen.

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