

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

The Not So Clear Cut Priority

John 5:1-16

¹ Sometimes you can get your relationship with the church in the way of your relationship to the Lord. You get so carried away with the church system, the teachings, the procedures or the building that these things dwarf your personal relationship with God.

The event that takes place in John, Chapter 5, verses 1 through 16, may be able to help us straighten this issue out. ² Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie — the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ¹ ³

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?” “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when

¹ v1-5.

the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.² ⁴

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.” But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.³ ⁵

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him

² v6-9.

³ v9-13.

well. So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. ⁴

Living the Christian life involves setting up God's priorities and then living them. In verses 1 through 5 .

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I. This Man's Priority was to Seek Healing -

v1-5

. . . this man's priority was to seek healing. ⁷ So, he would go where he thought healing could happen. This is much the same as a sick person going desperately to a Pentecostal/Holiness Healing Service. You go where you think you can be healed. ⁸

What was so special about the Pool of Bethesda? Verse ⁷ ⁵ refers to the superstition regarding the pool. Normally this semi enclosed pool's water was calm, like glass. But ⁹, periodically the water would ripple without a noticeable reason; like magic! The popular

⁴ v14-16.

⁵ v7 - "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

superstition was that an invisible angel would stir the water with his finger. The first sick person entering the water following this event would be miraculously healed.

So people from all over the area would congregate at the pool's edge eagerly waiting for the water to be mysteriously stirred. When it happened people would jump into the water! Psychosomatic healing would instantly occur enough times to keep the legend alive. What actually happened was that the pool was fed by an underground spring. Air would occasionally get caught in the welling action and cause the ripples.

Now, there was this man who had been placed near the water's edge. ¹⁰ His condition was hopeless. ¹¹ He was an invalid ⁶, someone weak, feeble, literally "without strength". ¹² It seemed so hopeless to him. All he could remember all his adult life was being an invalid. ¹³ And he was frustrated. For thirty eight years, every time the waters rippled someone else always

⁶ ἀσθένεια.

jumped in first! There wasn't anyone there willing to help!

Then, along came Jesus! Verses 6 through 9 tell us . .

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II. The Lord's Priority was to Heal People - v6-

9

. . . that the Lord's priority was to heal people. ¹⁵ With the Lord, people always came first! ¹⁶

He would teach in the synagogues, preach the gospel and heal people ⁷. ¹⁷

At least once, in the process of healing, He actually touched a leper! Lepers were not supposed to be touched! ⁸ ¹⁸

The Lord cast out demons! ⁹ ¹⁹

⁷ Matthew 4:23 - Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

⁸ Matthew 8:3 - Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

⁹ Matthew 8:16 - When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.

He healed the blind and the dumb. ¹⁰ 20

People could even just touch the hem of His garment and be healed ¹¹ . 21

Once He even healed a crippled hump backed women ¹² . 22

Even while He was being arrested, He healed the ear of Malchus, servant of the High Priest! ¹³ 23

The Lord's goal for you is for you to grow into His image! Genesis, Chapter 1, verses 26 and 27, **Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.** ²⁴

¹⁰ Matthew 12:22 - Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see.

¹¹ Matthew 14:35-36 - People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

¹² Luke 13:13 - Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

¹³ Luke 22:51 - But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

The word "image" appears nineteen times in the Old Testament. Four times it refers to man and woman made in the image of God. One time it refers to Seth being born in the image of Adam. All the rest of the times it refers to idols of pagan "gods".²⁵ Your goal is found in Colossians, Chapter 3, verses 9 and 10, **Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.** Your goal is to grow back into the image of God again!²⁶ You do that by making the Lord's priorities your priorities!

Leaders in the church of Jesus' day had different priorities. We find them in verses 9 through 16.²⁷

III. The Jewish Religious Leaders'

Priority was to Obey Rules - v9-16

The Jewish religious leaders' priority was to obey rules! ²⁸ One of their favorites was keeping the Sabbath Day Law. This is what it says, **Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.** ¹⁴ ²⁹

So, the question is, "What constitutes work?" The religious leaders had thirty nine classifications of what work was; ³⁰ one of which was carrying a burden.

¹⁴ Exodus 20:8-11.

Jeremiah, Chapter 17, verses 19 through 27 ¹⁵ and Nehemiah, Chapter 13, verses 15 through 19 ¹⁶, both

¹⁵ Jeremiah 17:19-27 - This is what the LORD said to me: "Go and stand at the gate of the people, through which the kings of Judah go in and out; stand also at all the other gates of Jerusalem. Say to them, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and all people of Judah and everyone living in Jerusalem who come through these gates. This is what the LORD says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers. Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline. But if you are careful to obey me, declares the LORD, and bring no load through the gates of this city on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy by not doing any work on it, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this city with their officials. They and their officials will come riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by the men of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever. People will come from the towns of Judah and the villages around Jerusalem, from the territory of Benjamin and the western foothills, from the hill country and the Negev, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings, incense and thank offerings to the house of the LORD. But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses.' " Nehemiah 13:15-19 - In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to

say carrying a burden is considered work. Both of these scriptures imply that the loads were heavy and associated with conducting business. ³¹ But these religious leaders defined carrying a burden as carrying anything; a pencil, a needle embedded in a

the people of Judah. I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn’t your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath.” When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day.

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robe or even wearing a broach! ³² Disobeying a clear command of the written Law of Moses was punishable by execution! ³³

Supposedly, both this man and the Lord broke the Sabbath Day Law! ³⁴ This man carried a burden; his pallet. Lord Jesus practiced medicine by healing a person. ³⁵

But these critics also did things on the Sabbath Day! ³⁶ They practiced circumcision if the Sabbath fell on the eighth day. ¹⁷ ³⁷ They also watered their animals on the Sabbath Day. ¹⁸

¹⁷ John 7:22-23 - Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? ¹⁷

¹⁸ Luke 13:11-21 - and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity. "Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this

Obviously, these religious leaders were carrying the law too far! Would they execute a man for carrying his toothbrush? Here is a man cured of an incurable affliction. He had been lying at that pool for as long as anyone could remember. You would have thought that they would have been happy and rejoiced! ³⁸

You can get so wrapped up in playing the church game that you forget about people! ³⁹ It is important what you believe. You do need to get your theological doctrines straight. ⁴⁰ But, let's be reminded why Lord Jesus went to the cross! ⁴¹ You may know people who are active church members, serve on committees and work hard for the church but they don't live consistent Christian lives!

woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Attending church and being involved in Christian service are not ends in themselves. Their purpose is to stimulate your growth in Christ! ⁴²

A personal walk with the Lord must always be a priority over church stuff! If it isn't, then you are no better off than those Pharisees!

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