

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
Presbyterian Church

“PERSONAL AND POWERFUL WORK”

For individual study or group discussion

DATE: April 12, 2026

SPEAKER: Aaron/John Mark

SERIES: The Gospel of John

PASSAGE: John 5:1-18

Family Dinner Table

In his Gospel, the apostle John records a select number of signs performed by Jesus during his ministry (20:30-31). The first sign takes place after a request from his mother at the wedding of Cana (2:1-11). The second sign comes after a request from a dying boy's father (4:46-54). But in this instance, Jesus himself initiates the healing. There's no mention of the man's faith. Jesus simply shows compassion and miraculously heals. In John 5:1-18, the **personal and powerful work** of Jesus is on display. This healing, which takes place on the Sabbath, serves as a pivotal turning point in Jesus' ministry, where his identity as the Son of God sets the stage for future confrontations with the religious leaders.

The Divine Healer of the Helpless (vv. 1-15)

The scene at the pool of Bethesda is one of stagnant despair. Among the multitude of invalids, Jesus singles out a man who has been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. This man is sick and helpless having “no one to put [him] into the pool.” Jesus initiates the encounter with a question: “Do you want to be healed?” Then, commanding the man to “Get up, take up your bed, and walk,” the Divine Healer demonstrates that he is the source of life itself. His Word carries the power of creation (John 1:3). However, physical renewal is only the beginning. Later, Jesus finds the man in the temple where he seeks to restore him to a right relationship with God. John Piper concludes, “Jesus had no intention of walking away from this man and leaving him with nothing more than a healed body. The issue is holiness mainly, not health.”¹ The miracle immediately sparks a confrontation. Rather than rejoicing in the man's restoration, the religious leaders focus on the “work” performed on the Sabbath. They value the preservation of their tradition over the restoration of the broken. As one commentary points out, Jesus reaffirms the Sabbath's intent: “Here is the Son of Man accomplishing, for the paralytic, all that the Sabbath pointed to in terms of rest and rescue.”²

- Read Isaiah 35:4-6. Isaiah prophesied that when God comes, “Then shall the lame man leap like a deer.” How does Jesus' miracle move beyond an act of compassion to a formal declaration that the Kingdom of God has arrived?
- In what specific ways has the “paralysis” of sin affected your life or the lives of those around you, and what is currently hindering you from trusting that Jesus has the same authority to tell you to “Get up, take up your bed, and walk” out of your spiritual brokenness today?
- Read Acts 3. In John 5, Jesus warns the healed man to “sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you” (v. 14). In Acts, how does Peter define what is truly “worse” than physical lameness? What does he present as the only way to experience the “times of refreshing” that lead to total restoration?

The Divine Son of the Father (vv. 16-18)

Jesus' provocative response incenses the Jewish leaders. In his justification, “My Father is working until now, and I am working,” he makes two radical claims: not only is he equal with God, he is the Son of God. Just as God sustains the universe every day (including on the Sabbath), Jesus continues his redemptive work without pause. Regardless of the pushback from the religious leaders, Jesus moves forward with his work—restoring, healing, and revealing his glory.

- Read Exodus 23:12 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. The Sabbath was established both to provide refreshment for all of creation and to serve as a perpetual memorial of God's rescue from the bondage of Egypt. When Jesus encounters the man in paralyzed “bondage” for 38 years, how does his act of “working” to heal him actually fulfill the true intent of the Sabbath?
- Read Isaiah 61:1-6 and Romans 5:6. How does Jesus bring restoration to a broken world, moving past the “colonnades” of our helplessness?
- Meditate on Psalm 147 this week.

Physical Sight and Spiritual Blindness

In C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, the “Hard-Bitten Ghost” travels from a dismal “Grey Town” to the foothills of Heaven, a realm of “Solid Reality.” Despite standing in a landscape of blinding beauty where even the grass is as hard as diamonds, he dismisses the miracles around him as a “publicity stunt.” He is offered total restoration, the chance to become solid and hike into the mountains of God, but his cynicism binds him. He prefers his ghostly, suspicious independence over submitting to the reality of the person offering him life.³

This serves as a chilling parallel to John 5. Like the ghost, the healed paralytic experiences a physical miracle but remains spiritually “thin,” ultimately reporting his Healer to the authorities. Similarly, the Jewish leaders witness the “Solid Reality” of a man made whole, yet choose the “grey” shadows of legalism over the Divine Son. Both Lewis' character and the figures in John 5 illustrate that one can be touched by a miracle and still miss the Benefactor. They prove that physical healing does not guarantee spiritual recognition; without faith, one remains a ghost in the presence of the Living God.

- In John 5, we see a man who is physically healed but remains spiritually blind to the identity of Jesus. Considering that “no one seeks for God” (Romans 3:11) and no one comes to Jesus unless the Father “draws him” (John 6:44), how does John's narrative help highlight that we are just as helpless as the paralytic or the Jewish leaders without God's divine initiative? (cf. John 6:65, Isa. 65:24, and Exo. 31:13)

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¹ John Piper. *Healed for the Sake of Holiness*. August 23, 2009, DesiringGod.org. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/healed-for-the-sake-of-holiness>

² Read Mark Learn: John, A Small Group Bible Study. 2013, Scotland, UK. Christian Focus Publications. 71

³ C.S. Lewis. *The Great Divorce*. 2001, NY NY. HarperOne Publishing. Chapter 7