

# Jesus is God (John 5)

## Introduction

Jesus continues to reveal himself—now making it clear that he is not only fully human—he is also fully divine. Here in chapter 5 Jesus gives evidence in the form of a third miraculous “sign”. The first two signs were semi-private—turning water to wine and healing a nobleman’s son. But this sign is given openly. Moreover it is performed on the Sabbath Day, inciting persecution from the Jewish religious authorities. Here we have an unfolding drama in three acts: cure, controversy, and claims. They add up to one thing: Jesus is God.

## Act 1: The Cure (5:1–15)

*<sup>1</sup> Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Here a great number of disabled people used to lie-- the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. <sup>5</sup> One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> 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?" <sup>7</sup> "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." <sup>8</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." <sup>9</sup> At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, <sup>10</sup> and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." <sup>11</sup> But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" <sup>12</sup> So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" <sup>13</sup> The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. <sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> The*

***man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.***

Jesus returns from Galilee to Jerusalem. The occasion is an unnamed ‘feast of the Jews’—which feast is not important – what John emphasizes is the miracle Jesus performed and the message that miracle conveys about Jesus’ identity.

The pool of Bethesda (meaning ‘places of outpouring’—there were actually two pools there) is near the northeast corner of the Old City, close to the Sheep Gate. The NIV does not include the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 which say that infirmed people lying at the pool, “waited for the moving of the waters. 4. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had.” This addition to the original text tells us the common understanding of circumstances surrounding this event. It explains why this man would come back year after year hoping to be healed.

The listing of the types of diseases present here is important because healing of such infirmities was a prophesied ministry of the Messiah (Isa. 35:3–6). Had the religious leaders known their own Scriptures, they would have recognized their Redeemer; but they were spiritually blind and could not understand God’s grace—here powerfully illustrated. The fact that Jesus came to the man, spoke to him, healed him, and then met him later in the temple is proof of his wonderful grace.

Jesus asked the invalid if he wanted to be healed. At first, this question seems odd (even insensitive). But it was possible that , after so many years, the man preferred not to face the challenge of a normal healthy life. However, at a deeper symbolic level (compare 5:6 with 5:40) the man represents the tragic spiritual condition of the nation and the ineffectiveness of the law to bring salvation (healing). The law says “do this and you will live”, but is unable to impart the will to choose life, much less that life itself. And so the ineffectiveness of the law to save is contrasted with Jesus’ powerful healing grace. In sheer grace Jesus heals the man through nothing more (and nothing less) than his spoken word by which he commanded the man to do the very thing he was unable to do (get up and walk). This enabling command was the power of fulfillment and the cure was immediate (‘at once the man was cured’, verse 9). Certainly some of

the many people at the pool must have witnessed it. But Jesus did not pause to heal anyone else; instead, he “slipped away” (verse 13).

Perhaps the miracle would have caused no big stir except that Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. This is clearly intentional on Jesus’ part—apparently intended to directly challenge the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem (the people referred to in verse 10 as ‘the Jews’) and their interpretation of the law (their reference to the ‘law’ in verse 10 is a reference to what is called elsewhere ‘the tradition of the elders’—the verbal tradition that went beyond the biblical revelation). This interpretation distinguished thirty-nine categories of work forbidden on the Sabbath; the thirty-ninth was carrying a load from one dwelling to another. Jesus is here demonstrating his authority over them and their interpretation and application of the law. Indeed, Jesus is greater than the law itself—he is, for example, Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). His commands are the highest authority, which is demonstrated here.

Note that this healing did not include forgiveness of sin (see verse 14) – though the infirmity was in some way related to sinful behavior. Sometimes illness is related to personal sin; sometimes it is not. Note as well that this healing was not related to the faith of the invalid (he did not even know until later that the person who healed him was Jesus). Sometimes healing is related to the faith of the recipient; sometimes it is not. What is always common to healing is the presence, grace and power of Jesus.

Did the man “inform” on Jesus because of fear? John does not share his motive with us. But what we do know is that because of this, the Jewish leaders turned from the invalid and went after Jesus.

## **Act 2: The Controversy (5:16–18)**

***16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. 17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.***

As guardians of the faith, the Jewish religious leaders had the responsibility of investigating new preachers and teachers who appeared in the land, lest

some false prophet come along and lead the people astray. Jesus had healed a demoniac on the Sabbath (Luke 4:31–37), so they were already suspicious. In the days following the miracle recorded here in John 5, Jesus would defend his disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–8), and would heal a man’s withered hand on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9–14). He deliberately challenged the legalism of these religious leaders.

Now when they confronted Jesus with his supposedly unlawful conduct, he raises an important and compelling question – does God keep his own laws? Jesus implies that God does keep Sabbath, but his Sabbath is not cessation from work; rather it is the continuing ‘work’ of seeking and saving the lost—the Sabbath thus being a type of the ‘rest’ (salvation) we enter through faith in Christ (Hebrews 4:3–10). To the Jewish leaders this claim undermining their Sabbath law was shocking enough, but even worse, Jesus refers to God as “my Father” instead of the usual “our Father,” used by the Jews. They well understood what Jesus was saying – he was claiming equality with God, which to the Jews was the worst form of blasphemy. But it is true: Jesus is God. Indeed this claim is a primary theme of John’s Gospel. But the Jewish leaders from this point forward try to pin the charge of blasphemy on Jesus and the punishment for blasphemy is death. Jesus is now headed for the cross.

### **Act 3: The Claims (19–47)**

In response to their accusations of blasphemy, Jesus elaborates on his claim that God is his Father. He makes three significant claims further proving that he is the Son of God—meaning that he is fully God.

#### **1. Jesus claimed equality with God (19–23)**

***19 Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. 21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. 22 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him."***

If today a man made this kind of a claim, we would conclude that he was joking or mentally disturbed. Jesus was certainly not insane, and there is every evidence that he was deadly serious. Either he is what he claims to be, or he is a liar; and if he is a liar, how do you explain all the good he did in the lives of needy people? Nobody wants to trust a liar; yet Jesus' disciples were willing to die for him. Jesus claimed equality with God in three ways:

### **a. In his works**

If healing a man on the Sabbath was a sin, then the Father was to blame. Jesus did nothing "by himself" but only that which the Father was doing. *The Father and the Son worked together, doing the same deeds in the same way.* "I and the Father are one" (10:30).

When our Lord came to earth as a man, he submitted himself to the Father in everything. "I have come to do your will" (Heb. 10:9). He veiled his glory and laid aside the independent exercise of his divine attributes. *He was totally dependent on the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Because the Father loves the Son, the Father shows him his works. The blind religious leaders could not see what Jesus was doing, because they did not know the Father or the Son. In fact, even greater works were in the Father's plan, works that would cause them to marvel, including raising the dead. Such a claim was blasphemy to Jews who ascribed that power to God alone.

### **b. In executing judgment**

To the orthodox Jew, God was "the Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18:25); and no one dared to apply that august title to himself. But Jesus did! By claiming to be the Judge, he claimed to be God. "Because he [God] hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31).

### **c. In equal honor with the Father**

Because Jesus claimed to be the appointed Judge of all humankind, he was claiming equality in honor with the Father (verse 23). What a tremendous claim: if you do not honor the Son, you are not honoring the Father. Apart from Jesus Christ, we cannot know the Father, or worship the Father, or serve the Father.

## **2. Jesus claimed authority to raise the dead (24–29)**

***24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. 25 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. 28 Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."***

For a second time, Jesus introduced his words with the solemn “I tell you the truth” (“verily, verily” KJV). More than twenty times in John’s Gospel Jesus uses this solemn form of address. It is as though he was saying, “Pay attention to this! What I am about to say is important!” In this fascinating paragraph, Jesus alludes to **four resurrections**. The fact that Jesus has the authority to raise the dead is proof that he is equal with the Father, and therefore he is God.

### **a. Resurrection of lost sinners into eternal (24, 25)**

Spiritually speaking, lost sinners are as lifeless and helpless as a corpse. They are helpless to save themselves and certainly cannot give themselves life. How are dead sinners raised from the dead? By hearing Jesus’ Word and believing the one who sent him (the Father). Jesus healed the paralyzed man at the pool by his Word (5:8). Each time he raised somebody from the dead, he spoke the Word (Luke 7:11–17; 8:49–56; John 11:41–44). Indeed, his Word is “living and powerful” (Heb. 4:12). It raises sinners from spiritual death. “Eternal life” means that they can never die spiritually again, nor can they ever come into judgment (Rom. 8:1). To hear Jesus’ Word and believe means salvation; to reject his Word means condemnation (John 12:48).

### **b. Jesus’ resurrection (25)**

Our life is derived, but Jesus’ life is original, “in himself.” “In him was life” (John 1:4). The grave could not hold him because he is “the Prince of Life” (Acts 2:24; 3:15). Jesus laid down his life and then took it up again (John

10:17, 18). Because he has life in himself, he can share that life with all who trust him to do so.

### **b. Resurrection of the body to glory (28-29a)**

This wonderful truth is explained in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and 1 Corinthians 15. Keep in mind that resurrection is not reconstruction. It does not imply that God “puts the pieces back together again.” The resurrection body is a *new* body, a *glorified* body, suited to the new heavenly environment. Death is not the end for the believer, nor will he live in heaven as a disembodied spirit. God saves the whole person, and this includes the body (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:20, 21). This resurrection of the body to glory (what we refer to as ‘glorification’ will take place when Jesus Christ returns and calls his people to himself.

### **d. Resurrection of the body to condemnation (29b)**

This resurrection involves the lost, and it will take place just before Jesus Christ ushers in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 20:11–15). Believers will be given resurrection bodies so that they might reign with Christ in glory. Unbelievers will be given resurrection bodies that they might be judged and suffer punishment.

### **3. Jesus claimed the testimony of three others (30–47)**

***30 “By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. 31 If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. 32 There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. 33 “You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. 34 Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. 35 John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. 36 I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. 37 And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, 38 nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. 39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify***

***about me, <sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me to have life. <sup>41</sup> I do not accept praise from men, <sup>42</sup> but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. <sup>43</sup> I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. <sup>44</sup> How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God? <sup>45</sup> But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. <sup>46</sup> If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. <sup>47</sup> But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"***

The word *testify* (*witness* in KJV) is a key word used forty-seven times in John's gospel. Jesus did testify to himself, but he knew they would not accept it; so in accordance with Jewish tradition he called upon the testimony of three other witnesses to make his case.

### **a. The testimony of John the Baptist (30-35)**

The religious leaders had interrogated John carefully (John 1:15ff). In fact, at the end of his ministry, our Lord pointed the rulers back to John's testimony (Matt. 21:23–27). John testified that Jesus was Lord (John 1:23), Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36), and Son of God (John 1:34).

### **b. The testimony of Jesus' miracles (36)**

John selected seven "signs" to include in his Gospel as proof that Jesus is the Son of God (20:30, 31). Jesus made it clear that his works were the works of the Father (5:17–20; 14:10). Even Nicodemus had to admit that our Lord's miracles identified him as "sent from God" (3:2).

We note here, however, that miracles were performed by ordinary men such as Moses, Elijah, and Paul. Do these miracles prove that they are also sent of God? Yes, they do (see Heb. 2:3, 4), but none of these men ever claimed to be the very Son of God. No servant of God able to perform God's mighty works would ever claim to be God himself. The fact that Jesus made this claim, backed up by his mighty works and perfect life, is evidence that his claim is true.

### **b. The testimony of the Word of God (37-47)**

The Jewish people highly revered the written Word of God, particularly the Law given through Moses. The Old Testament Scriptures bear witness to Jesus, yet the people who received and preserved that Word were blind to their own Messiah. Why? Three reasons:

1. They did not permit that Word to generate faith in their hearts (5:38). The Jewish scribes sought to know the Word of God, but they did not know the God of the Word (5:39). They counted the very letters of the text, but they missed the spiritual truths the text conveyed.
2. They did not see Christ in their own Scriptures nor would they put their trust in him as their Savior.
3. They did not have God's love in their hearts (5:42). This means the experience of God's love for them as well as their expression of love for God. They claimed to love God, but their attitude toward Jesus Christ proved that their love was counterfeit.

Our Lord closed this penetrating sermon by warning the Jewish leaders that Moses, whom they honored, *would be their judge, not their savior*. The very Scriptures that they used to defend their religion would one day bear witness against them. The Jews *knew* what Moses wrote, but they did not really *believe* it. It is one thing to have the Word in our hands or our heads, but quite another thing to have it in our hearts. Jesus is the Word made flesh (1:14), and the written Word bears witness to the Incarnate Word. The witness of John the Baptist, the witness of divine miracles, and the witness of the Word of God all unite to declare that Jesus Christ is indeed one with the Father as the one and only Son of God. Jesus is indeed God.

## **Conclusion**

Our Lord was not intimidated by the accusations of the religious leaders. If you check a harmony of the Gospels, you will see that after the events recorded here, Jesus deliberately violated their Sabbath laws again. He permitted his disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath, and he healed a man with a withered hand (Matt. 12:1–14). These events probably took place in Galilee, but the news would certainly reach the leaders in Jerusalem and Judea.

The healing of the man on the Sabbath would come up again (John 7:21–23). The leaders would persist in protecting tradition instead of understanding truth (Mark 7:1–13). But before we judge them, perhaps we

ought to examine our own lives and our own churches. Are we permitting religious tradition to blind us to the truth of God's Word? Are we so involved in "Bible study" that we fail to see Jesus Christ in the Word? Does our knowledge of the Bible give us a "big head" or does it give us a "burning heart"? Let us all seek God in and through the one who is God indeed—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To him be the glory. Amen.

**Sermon Series** is provided by Ted Johnston via the Senior Pastor Team of Tom and Alberta Ecker to assist ... Bible studies in series covering a book of the Bible. **This issue continues a series in the gospel of John** with material from *The Bible Expository Commentary* by Warren Wiersbe, *The New Bible Commentary*, *The Parable of Joy* by Michael Card, and *The Gospel of John* by F.F. Bruce.

## **GROWING in our RELATIONSHIP with the TRIUNE GOD**

Relate ... Ask (or compare)... Pray

### **John 5:5, 6 "I Have No One"**

What can't you do for yourself?

### **John 5:16. 17 "Equal to God"**

How close do you want God to you?

### **John 5:19, 20 "The Son Gives Life"**

What were the "greater works"?

### **John 5:22, 23 "That All May Honor the Son)**

How do you honor God?

### **John 5:28, 29 "The Dead Will Hear the Voice"**

What happens at the resurrection?

**John 5:39, 40, 45 "If You Believed Moses"**

What convinced you to believe in Jesus?

**Please see the Sermon Series Study Guide: John #6**