
LIFE IN HIS NAME

A RESURRECTION MIRACLE

John 5:1-29

John Chapter 5, beginning in verse 1:

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man answered him, “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.” Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. 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.” But he answered them, “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 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does

likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

“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. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

We are studying our way through the book of John, the gospel of John, and we have been in it for quite a number of weeks. On Easter Sunday we might typically go away from our normal study to do an Easter message. But in the providence of God, our passage today in the study of John brings us to a passage that addresses the Easter subject, the subject of the resurrection. This is a resurrection miracle. It may not appear to be a resurrection miracle from our first observation. But if you've been with us in the study of John, you understand that John tells us about an event -- he tells us about a miracle that Jesus performs or a conversation that Jesus enters into, something critical that happens -- and then John follows that with an explanation of what has happened.

In this case, he tells us about a healing that Jesus performs, and then he provides the explanation through the words of Jesus himself. Jesus enters into a conflict with the religious leaders of his day. In fact, if you noticed the reference to the Jews as I was reading the passage, it is probably a reference to a specific group of Jewish leaders that began to oppose Jesus.

What is it that happens in this miracle? Jesus comes down to a very specific place. We are given a description of what that place looked like. It was a pool. Evidently, there were some natural springs that were attached to these pools. People believed if they could get down into the water

when the water was stirred that they would be healed. And superstitiously, probably, there was a belief that if you go into the water first or early, your opportunity to be healed was greater.

So, Jesus sees a man and calls him out. This man, we are told, has been lame for 38 years. He has been unable to walk. In a day when your life expectancy would not be much more than that, we are safe to say that his entire life, his entire adulthood has been spent with the inability to walk. Jesus asks this man a this very curious question: “Do you want to be healed?” The man’s response is: “Well, how can I be healed? I can’t get down into the water, and when I go to get down in the water, someone goes before me.” Then Jesus speaks his divine word, his powerful word to this man and tells him that he is healed, and to take up his bed and walk. The man is instantly healed, he takes up his bed, and he begins to walk.

At this point, something unusual happens. The Jewish leaders find him, and there are two amazing things about what happens next. The first is this: They ask the man who it is that healed him. Actually, they confront him and say, “Why are you carrying your mat, your bed on the Sabbath?” According to these individuals, this was a violation of the Sabbath law, that you are breaking God’s law by carrying your bed. You are not allowed to work on the Sabbath, but certain things you could do. You could put that mat around you like a garment and you could wear it, but you can’t carry it as your bed.

When the man is confronted, he tells them, “Well, the man who healed me told me to take up my bed and walk.” It’s amazing that when they say, “Well, who told you that?” his response is: “I don’t know.” He doesn’t know who healed him!

The second amazing thing about what takes place is their response. Their response is not: “You have been unable to walk for 38 years, and through a word you are healed?!” Their response is: “What is his name? Who told you that you could walk with your bed? That’s not allowed on the Sabbath!”

So Jesus finds the man in the temple and introduces himself, and he says something very unusual. He tells the man, “Look, you are well. Go and sin no more so that something worse doesn’t happen to you.” Then the man does something that from our perspective is disappointing. He goes back to the leaders and tells them, “There is your guy. There is the man who healed me.”

Then Jesus enters into a conversation with them that is initially about the Sabbath. Basically, this is Jesus' explanation for why he did works on the Sabbath. He tells them, "Listen, you understand that God the Father doesn't rest on the Sabbath the way you rest on the Sabbath. If God rested on the Sabbath the way you rest on the Sabbath, if God didn't sustain the world, if God didn't keep things going, everything would collapse."

Then he makes a statement that really troubles them. He says, "My Father and I have work to do. We are working." They were persecuting him before, now they are ready to kill him. There are two reasons:

- 1) He is breaking the Sabbath, and
- 2) He is claiming equality with God the Father.

Jesus gives an explanation in verses 19 and following. In it, he explains that everything is moving toward resurrection and that resurrection is God's answer for everything. It is God's solution for everything. He shows us that this miracle, where a man's legs are completely incapacitated and they are made whole, is preliminary to, a preface to what we will see at the resurrection.

We were talking in our house this week about The Waltons. Is anyone old enough to remember the show The Waltons? You are old if you remember The Waltons. John-Boy on Walton's Mountain? Do you remember how every episode ended? Every episode ended with seeing the little house there on the mountain. There are one or two lights on and they start to tell everyone goodnight. Goodnight, Mary Ellen. Goodnight, John-Boy. After they tell everyone goodnight, they would say a little comment that summarizes the episode. They tell one another goodnight, and the lights go out. It's the signature scene. It gives you this feeling of warmth and that all is well in the world on Walton's Mountain.

God has a signature scene. It's the resurrection. Everything is moving towards this moment where the lights come on. And for the Christian, every episode of life ends with this reality. Jesus is teaching us here that he has conquered death, and death is your enemy. It is your greatest enemy. When the reality of that gets in you, you interpret all of life, all that happens, in light of that reality. Capture this. This is a little bit lower than what lies on the surface. God's work of creation and sustaining the universe has to go on or everything collapses. The work that Jesus is doing is reclaiming God's universe, and the way he is doing it is resurrection.

I am going to give you three statements. I am going to try to summarize Jesus' argument in three statements. The first one is this:

- I. There is something terribly wrong with the world and Jesus alone is the answer.

Let me give you the other two statements before we jump into the first.

- II. Jesus imparts life by his word.
- III. The answer is resurrection, now and later.

Let's jump into the first. Jesus tells us there is something terribly wrong with the world and he alone is the answer. I would like for us for a moment to back to verse 14. We notice that when Jesus finds the man in the temple he tells him, "Look, you are healed. You are well. Sin no more unless something worse is going to happen to you. This statement by Jesus in verse 14 seems contrary to a position that Jesus typically takes.

You see, there was a misunderstanding in Jesus' day. There was this thinking that good things happen to good people. Bad things only happen to bad people. If you are healthy and if you are rich, that is always a sign of God's pleasure on your life. If things are not going well, it's a sign of God's displeasure.

Later in the gospel of John, Chapter 9, Jesus heals a man who was born blind. The disciples have trouble figuring this out, because if bad things happen to you because of bad things you do, and a child is born blind, then how can this be? They asked Jesus this question: "Was this man born blind because of his sin or his parents' sin? Because it doesn't seem right; it doesn't seem possible that he could have sinned before he was born. And if it was his parents' sin, it doesn't seem right that he would be afflicted for something his parents did." Jesus corrects this misunderstanding. He tells them, "Well, this man didn't sin, nor his parents, but that God might be glorified," and Jesus healed him that day, and God was glorified.

In another instance, a very wealthy man comes to Jesus seeking eternal life, and Jesus enters into a conversation with him. The love of material things has captured this man's heart and it is choking out his spiritual life. Jesus tells the man, "If you want eternal life then you must go and sell everything you have, then come and follow me." The man was unable to do this. He was very wealthy and he left discouraged.

Jesus is sad for him and he gives this little lesson to his disciples. He tells them it is very difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Their response is this: “How can that be? If the rich can’t get saved, how can anyone get saved?” Their question points to the fact that they understand wealth to be solely a sign of God’s favor and blessing. Jesus explains to them, “Listen, with God nothing is impossible.” He tells us that every gift of salvation, every person that comes to Jesus is a miracle, rich or poor, and he saves the both.

If Jesus is typically correcting this misunderstanding -- good things happen to good people, bad things happen to bad people -- in this verse, John 5:14, it seems like he is reinforcing that, doesn’t it? It seems like Jesus is saying, “You were ill because of personal sin, and if you return to it, something worse will happen to you.” I think that is probably what Jesus is saying to the man.

He is teaching us that our whole understanding of suffering and sin and consequence is reductionistic and superficial. Just as there are some people who would say, “Well, bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people,” and that’s a completely inadequate explanation, there are other people who would say, “Well, no one is really bad and no one does anything really bad, and there aren’t really consequences for what you do.” Jesus says, “No. No, that’s not true.”

There is something very wrong with the world and the biblical answer is that our relationship with God is broken. We have sinned against God and the consequences for that rebellion against God are devastating. They are death. We live in a world where we are wonderfully made in the image of God. There is something to be treasured in each and every one of you and each and every one of us, reflecting the image of our Maker. At the same time, we know things are not as they should be. We see our bodies decaying and unraveling, for some of us at a faster rate than others. We see the effects, the physical decay and corruption, but we also see it in the things that we treasure the most - in our relationships and in things that are precious to us. We see a battle taking place. We struggle in human relationship because our relationship with God is broken.

Jesus tells us that sometimes you can’t draw a line from A to B to say, “Well, something bad is happening, and it’s something I did.” You can’t make that assumption and should never make it about others, but at the same time, there are consequences, and sometimes there is a direct line from A to B. Are you with me? In all cases, the problem is sin. It’s our relationship with God.

I went to the doctor because I was having some headaches, and he told me I had mild high blood pressure. That seems like a contradiction to me, but he said, “No, no, no, seriously - it’s not so bad that you would have to go on medication for it, but you are particularly blessed.” I said, “Blessed?” He said, “Yeah, your body gives you a headache as your blood pressure starts to rise. Most people have no symptoms whatsoever. Most people can have blood pressure sky high and they don’t even know it, but your body is telling you, and that’s a blessing.”

You see, it’s a blessing to be properly diagnosed. If our real issue in this world and in life is our relationship with God, and if it is sin, it’s a blessing to be told that. It may seem harsh to us, but if you are struggling in your marriage and you are looking for a new job or more money or a baby or some solution that doesn’t deal with the root.... Isn’t it true? It’s so hard for us to see that. It was so difficult for me to convince Beth that she was the problem in our marriage. Some people!

Do you understand that I was a pastor? I was teaching people how to be married, and about to end up in a divorce. The people closest to me were trying to say, “Brian, have you ever thought that maybe you are a contributing factor to this? Have you ever thought that maybe your pride and your selfishness... Do you have any idea how obstinate you can be?” That doesn’t give you permission to come and tell me that.

I remember so vividly the day a friend and I were in Boca at a pizza restaurant. I told him, “Listen, I have done everything I can do to save my marriage.” If you have been here, you hear me say this over and over, because God met me in these moments. This friend loved me enough to say, “Brian, I have heard you say some prideful things, but that was the most prideful of all the prideful things you have ever said. Do you really think you have done everything?”

The problem, friend, goes deep. Death has entered. There is something terribly wrong in the universe. Don’t you crave to live beyond? Don’t you go to a funeral and say, “This isn’t right! I don’t want this person to be taken from me”? Don’t you feel the effects of aging and say, “This doesn’t fit right”? Yes. Jesus Christ is the answer. He is the answer. When we properly diagnose, we come to the conclusion that Jesus alone is the answer.

Just a moment on this before we move to the second statement. The lame man sought an answer in a superstitious remedy. He thought if he could get down into those waters fast enough, though he had virtually no hope of doing that, that he would be healed. Jesus dismisses all of that and speaks his word to this man and heals him.

But there is another false remedy that's offered in this passage. Do you know what it is? It's the false remedy of religion. Do you see the religious leaders in the day? They don't even care that the man is healed. That's what religion does. That's what false religion does. It blocks us from life. At its root is this idea: You have to do more in order to get what you need from God.

Christianity is different from any other religion in this. It is not about what you do for God, it is about what God has done for you, and it is a gift. God's salvation is his mercy. It's his gift. You are there by the pool. You have been there your whole life. Some stranger walks up to you. You don't even know who he is. You don't even know that you are entering into a divine moment, and he heals you. Next thing you know, you are walking. It is sheer mercy from God.

II. Jesus imparts life by his word. Verses 24 and 25:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. 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.

In our first point I kind of moved past this quickly, but let me just say it so that it paves the way for this second point. Jesus is claiming in verse 19 through 23 to be uniquely entrusted with authority from the Father to exercise judgment and to give life. He addresses their accusation in this way. They are saying, "You are breaking the Sabbath and you are claiming equality with God." He says, "Yes, but not in the way that you are thinking. I am not saying I am another God, as if there are two Gods. We know that the scripture teaches monotheism - one God. I am saying that the Father and I are completely one. We are equal, and yet I am subordinate to the Father. The Father tells me what to do and I am fulfilling his will. And he has given me authority, the authority of life and death, the authority to judge and the authority to give life." Then we move into this second point where the emphasis is on Jesus imparting life through his word. He speaks his word and he imparts life.

This is what I would like to do. I would like to very quickly run through a few of the times in the gospel of John that Jesus makes a similar statement. I want you to see this. Jesus imparts life.

- John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

- John 3:36: Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
- John 4:14: ...but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.
- John 6:35: Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."
- John 6:47-48: Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.
- John 6:51: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.
- John 7:37-38: On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"
- John 10:10: The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
- John 11:25-26: Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Do you understand that Jesus imparts life? This is one gospel, Chapters 3 through 11, just example after example after example where Jesus is saying he gives life. He imparts it by his word. Notice in these two verses, John 5:24-25, he says:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. 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.

Let's just talk for a moment about how this happens. The first thing to notice is that Jesus uses a variety of images to tell you he imparts life. And what we take away from that is that it's experiential. It's living water. It's the bread of life. Jesus' word is spoken to you, and the eyes of your heart are opened, and you begin to see Jesus. You begin to see his glory. You begin to experience God and you come alive. It's like tasting fresh baked bread when you are very, very hungry. It's like drinking living water when you are parched, when your soul is completely dry. It is like being lame for 38 years and in a moment being able to walk. It is resurrection. We experience this.

Let's just piece together two or three verses to lay out this process of how it works. John's purpose is given to us in John Chapter 20, verses 30 and 31. This is the purpose of John's gospel. He writes:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John is telling you "My very purpose in writing this entire book is that you would live and experience life in Jesus. As that happens, as you read, as you hear, you see Jesus, you behold him, you believe in him, and the result is that life is imparted into your soul.

Let me add one or two more verses to that. We read this in the beginning when we started in John, Chapter 1, verse 14. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus, the eternal Son of God, Creator of the universe becomes man, and John says we see his glory. That's his purpose in writing to you. He wants you to see his glory. Verse 16 of Chapter 1: "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."

Here is how it works, okay? Stay with me for just a moment. I know it's a little bit deeper, but I didn't want you to have "church lite" on Sunday morning, alright? This is what happens. You are reading the gospel of John. You are hearing a sermon about it, and you see Jesus walk up in a crowd of people to a man who is not only trapped by his physical infirmity, but he is trapped by his superstition.

If that seems silly to you, we are all trapped in ridiculous thinking. There are people who will literally go out this morning and be afraid to step on a crack in a sidewalk, as if that crack controls

the universe. We are bound in crazy thoughts. Here is this man, trapped in poverty, trapped in his disability. Jesus walks up to him in a crowd and says, "Do you want to be whole? Take up your bed and walk." Instantly, a world of sin and death falls off this man and he gets up.

If you hear that, and you see that, and you see Jesus, it's like the sun bursting before you, a Son of glory. If you were about to die, you would travel to Singapore if a doctor was there that could really help you. We are talking about an instant healing that promises a magnificent eternal resurrection. Jesus raises the dead! And when you see it, the glory shines into your soul and you are given life! Jesus imparts life! You are changed! Don't you get tired of feeling like, "I can't change?!" Yes, we do, don't we? Jesus imparts life. Verse 16: As you behold his glory, it's like grace, God's favor. God's gift is just traveling to you.

I remember sitting in a seminary class on the book of Romans. I had just had an experience where I had been engulfed in a season of depression. It wasn't clinical depression, but it was an incredibly low moment. I had lost self-control in a moment of competition and gotten really angry and hurt some people. I made a fool of myself through my own pride and anger and extreme competitiveness. It has been a sin that I have battled most of my life. Some of you can relate to it. I remember taking a jog a few days before this particular class. I just stopped in the middle of the jog and cried out to God, "God, I just don't feel like I can go on like this. I am so discouraged by my inability to change."

Here I am, sitting under this cloud in this seminary class, studying to be a pastor. I know it doesn't speak well for my resume. But something happened in this very academic, very "clinical" atmosphere. The professor was talking about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Over and over again, he was saying this truth: "You cannot perform your way to God. You cannot keep the law well enough. If you think you can, every time you try, the rules will only serve to point out to you that you have sinned and you deserve the death you are experiencing. You can do nothing to earn God's salvation. You must receive it as mercy that you do not deserve." And I sat there with tears running down my face, because the word of God came, and I saw for a moment the glory of Jesus, and I drank deeply of the mercy of God.

If you are a guest here and this is your first time, you are hearing a little bit about my story and you are saying, "Wow, this pastor is really a mess -- I wonder what the rest of the people are like." And it's true. You see, you will not come to Jesus if you perceive yourself to not need him. And those

who think they are the least deserving are the most likely to drink deeply of the waters of salvation. God's word comes to us. It's a word of grace. It's a word of mercy, and we receive life. He imparts life.

Finally,

III. The answer is resurrection, now and later.

What do I mean by that? Well, in verses 26 through 29 we read these words: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man." In these verses Jesus is restating, summarizing his position: He alone has the answer. He has the authority.

Look at what he says: "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." What's interesting here is that in these verses, verses 28 and 29, he is talking about a literal, physical resurrection. A resurrection will take place. Jesus, in his power, at the end of time, will raise everybody - the good and the bad. He will raise those who don't know him to a resurrection of judgment, those who have received his mercy and grace to a resurrection of life.

If you put that together with what we read earlier in verse 25 -- look at verse 25 again -- "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." Jesus is saying that there is a resurrection right now, and there is one to come. There is a spiritual resurrection and there is a physical resurrection.

If I tell you that in Jesus Christ you can live forever, that's good news but it's not good enough news. We love stories about not only time travel, but about people who live forever. Every year or two some story comes out about a man or a woman or a group of people who don't die. You end up leaving the movie or closing the book feeling sorry for these people, because living longer doesn't address our deepest need. If you live long enough, all you do is bury all the people that you love. You find these people caught in this dilemma where they can't marry, they can't love, and it's an insufficient answer.

Jesus says, "You don't just live forever, but you experience life in a new way. You experience my life. You experience my healing, my forgiveness." You experience transformation, so that it's not

just eternal life, it is abundant life. It's living water. It's a river of living water within you. It's a well. It's a spring, welling up to eternal life.

If living forever is not sufficient alone, then spiritual resurrection is not sufficient in and of itself either. Some of you think, "I don't really want to go to heaven. I don't want to go to heaven because I don't want to sit around on a cloud and play a harp. I don't even like harps." You have this picture of heaven that's completely unbiblical. The biblical picture is that you will have a body. You will have a body that doesn't wear out. I don't know if you will go to the gym, but certainly, you are going to play golf. That's just my personal, not professional opinion.

Think about the magnificent creatures that you are going to behold, enjoying the physical beauty of God's perfection, untainted by sin and decay and corruption. You see, if we don't have that component, really who wants to go, because so much of our existence is the physical?

It's now and later. It's everything. It's the best of both worlds. Jesus restores everything in the resurrection. Jesus sought out this man to say, "Listen, I've got more for you. I want to lead you into life away from sin and toward me so that you might experience my mercy forever."