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More Sabbath Controversies (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In "More Sabbath Controversies (Part 1)", Steve Gregg examines the events that occurred on the Sabbath in the book of Matthew. He argues that while Sabbath keeping is one of the Ten Commandments, it is not linked to a moral issue like the other commandments. Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and when questioned by the Pharisees about it, Jesus highlighted their hard-heartedness and misrepresentation of God's character. Gregg emphasizes the importance of prayer and worship as sacred activities that can be done any day of the week unto the Lord.

Transcript

Let's turn briefly to Matthew Chapter 12. In our last session, we were scheduled to take, and we did deal very briefly with, material up through Matthew Chapter 12, verse 14. However, I feel that we did not have time to really say very much about verses 9-14 of Matthew 12.

And I'd like to say a few more things about that before we go to our new material today. So, Matthew 12, verses 9-14. This is the second Sabbath event recorded in this chapter.

Likewise with the other Gospels, there are parallels to the events of the first eight verses of Matthew 12 occurred on a particular Sabbath. And the events of verses 9-14 occurred on another Sabbath, though that's not at all clear the way Matthew tells it. We are told that in Luke's version, in Luke 6-6, it says, on another Sabbath, Jesus went into a synagogue, and that's what we're about to read now.

These two different Sabbaths, whether they were successive Sabbaths and happened, you know, only a week apart from each other, or whether these are events from two Sabbaths widely removed from each other chronologically, it doesn't really make much difference. It's very clear that by recording nothing between these two Sabbaths, so Jesus certainly must have been busy every day, and Matthew and the other Gospels could have recorded events that happened between the Sabbaths. By putting them together like this, it was the intention of the authors to focus our attention at this time on some of the things that Jesus had to say about the Sabbath.

Jesus had something very unique to say about the Sabbath, just as he did about the rest of the law. However, the things he said about Sabbath are a little different in some respects than what he said about the rest of the law. You know, in the Sermon on the Mount, he talked about the law, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, and he made it clear that this had to do with not only action, but motive, and attitude, and it's an issue of love.

Likewise, on the Sabbath, Jesus had distinct things to say about the Sabbath. In the first eight verses of Matthew 12, where Jesus' disciples were criticized for picking grain and rubbing it in their hands and eating it on the Sabbath day, which was construed to the Pharisees as being a breach of the Sabbath commandment not to work, Jesus defended his disciples. Now, I want to make something clear about that too, although that's not really the story I want to get into, but something I hoped last time to get into, and again didn't have enough time to do.

We just tried to take too much material last time. In the story about Jesus defending his disciples' actions when they picked the grain and ate it on the Sabbath, many people feel, especially those who still believe that Sabbath-keeping should be practiced, that Jesus was not defending their breach of Sabbath, but he was defending their breach of the Pharisees' interpretation of Sabbath. We know that the rabbis, of course, had added a great deal to what the law itself actually said about Sabbath-keeping.

The law just said don't do any work on the Sabbath, don't bear any burdens on the Sabbath. The rabbis had done a great deal of speculating on what constituted work, what constituted a burden, what could you do, what could you not do. And according to some, especially those who feel that we should still today keep the Sabbath day, they would say Jesus was not here abrogating the Sabbath or would not certainly have permitted his disciples to really break the Sabbath according to the law of the Sabbath.

He just allowed them to break the traditions that the Pharisees had about the Sabbath and that the rabbis had taught. I disagree. Jesus did not in any sense, in his defense of his disciples, appeal to an argument based on traditions.

He didn't say, well, full well, you break your law to enforce your traditions, like he did in another situation on a different occasion. He didn't imply at all that the Pharisees or the rabbis' traditions about Sabbath were what was at stake here. What he defended them on the basis of was that there was a precedent in the Old Testament and even in current times in his day, of people rightfully breaking the Sabbath, not only breaking the Sabbath, but breaking ceremonial law in general.

He gave the example of David eating the showbread, which was in fact a breaking of the law. It wasn't just a breaking of the rabbinic traditions about showbread, it was a breaking of the actual law of Moses about showbread. The showbread was to be eaten only by the priests.

And yet David ate the showbread, he was not a priest, he broke that law, and Jesus seems to be saying, we find no fault with David for this. Why? Because there was a matter of human need there. David was running for his life, he was faint, the people who were with him needed food.

Therefore, the, you know, I will have mercy rather than sacrifice becomes the issue. What is the merciful thing for the priest to do or for David to do for himself and the men? To save their lives and to, you know, and to meet their needs? It was not wrong for this compassion to be shown, even though it violated a law. But the law it violated was a ceremonial law.

That's very important for us to understand. Jesus would not have made the same argument, for example, of David, defending David for sleeping with Bathsheba, for example. Because he had, she had a need because her husband was away at war and she was a lonely woman.

And therefore David, you know, putting human need above the law, went ahead and slept with her. You know, I mean, Jesus would never make an argument like that. And the reason for it is simply this.

Sleeping with Bathsheba was a violation of moral law. Eating showbread was not. Eating showbread was a violation of ceremonial law.

Therefore, while David could never be defended for his breach of the moral law in the Old Testament, he could be defended for his breach of the ceremonial law if there was compelling reason or good cause based on human need and compassion. Now, that is the parallel to the present situation that Jesus raises. He is basically saying that ceremonial laws can be set aside on occasion if necessary for the sake of meeting people's genuine needs.

Now, someone could have argued the disciples didn't have to eat that day. They could have fasted. I mean, they wouldn't die if they waited until the day after the Sabbath to eat.

True. But eating every day is considered a legitimate human need unless you have special reasons to fast. And the fact that it's Sabbath is not special reason to fast.

There is nothing wrong with them eating even though it involved them doing a bit of labor. Now, Jesus could have argued that the little bit of labor they did was not enough to constitute a breach of the Sabbath. But the problem with that is that God never constituted how much work is a breach of the Sabbath.

Jesus, you know, would not find the Pharisees in his camp in that kind of an argument because, I mean, they wouldn't accept his position on it any more than the other rabbis on the subject. What he pointed out was whether his disciples were, in fact, breaking the

Sabbath or not. They should not be condemned because it's parallel to what David did.

And in saying this, Jesus is essentially saying that Sabbath-keeping is a ceremonial law, just like showbread law was. He does not link Sabbath-keeping, although it's one of the Ten Commandments, he does not link it with the other moral issue commandments. And that is why Jesus never commanded anyone to keep the Sabbath, though he did, you know, basically restate virtually all the other commandments in one form or another.

He did not enforce or restate the Sabbath commandment because it was not a moral issue, just like eating the showbread if you're not one of the priests is not a moral issue. It's a matter of ceremony. Now, that's a very important thing.

This parallel Jesus draws is extremely important in the Sabbath question because many people feel that Sabbath-keeping is a moral issue because it's one of the Ten Commandments. And they just assume right off that the Ten Commandments are moral law and the other things that aren't in the Ten Commandments, the other laws are ceremonial. But, of course, that's oversimplifying the case.

There's many laws in the Old Testament that are not in the Ten Commandments but are moral in nature. Laws against incest, laws against homosexuality, laws against a lot of different things that aren't specifically commanded against witchcraft, for instance. Those are moral issues.

And yet they are not in the Ten Commandments. There are a lot of moral laws that are not exactly in the Ten Commandments. And in the Ten Commandments there is at least one ceremonial law, as Jesus seems to indicate here, and that is Sabbath-keeping.

Furthermore, he gives the example of the priests violating the Sabbath and they did that from Moses' time until Jesus' own time. But they could do it because they were about God's business. That's it.

In the temple they had to do God's business there, whether it was Sabbath or not. Therefore, it was right for them to break the Sabbath if they were doing what God wanted them to do, if they were going about God's business. And his statement was, there's one here greater than the temple, meaning himself.

So that to be about Jesus' business is even more important than being about the temple business. And if being about the temple business is excused enough to violate the restriction on working on Sabbath, then being about Jesus' business on the Sabbath is even more excusable. And that is how Jesus is arguing here.

That Sabbath-keeping is not something that is an absolute moral issue. If a person is doing what God wants them to do, they don't have to be looking at the calendar to see whether it happens to be the Sabbath or not, and whether they should cease and desist. Because doing the will of God is right all the time.

Now, that brings us to the second Sabbath point, where he makes a very similar kind of teaching on it. In verses 9 through 14 of Matthew 12, Now when he had departed from there, he went into their synagogue, and behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. This man's hand had no use of its muscles.

It was probably bent, since he had told him to extend it out. The muscles must have been constricted, and it was bent, and he had no use of his hand. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, that they might accuse him? Then he said to them, What man is there among you who has one sheep? And if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value, then, is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Then he said to the man, Stretch out your hand. And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him.

Now, before commenting on this story, I want to let you know it's quite differently rendered in both Mark and Luke. It's obviously the same event, but the order of events is different. Which suggests, I personally think that Matthew has compressed the account.

I've told you about that on other occasions, where certain authors, and I think Matthew tends to this more than the others, compresses an account, which would take longer to really put it in the exact, you know, to give all the detail of what happened. He summarizes, more or less. Now, for example, in Mark and Luke, here's how it goes.

It's in Mark chapter 3, the beginning of Mark chapter 3, and it's in Luke chapter 6, I believe. Mark and Luke say that when Jesus went into the synagogue, there was this man with a withered hand there, and it says specifically, the Pharisees watched Jesus to see if he would heal the man. In other words, before anyone spoke a word, and Matthew doesn't mention this, before anyone spoke a word, Jesus or the Pharisees, to him, there was already a sort of a stilted, electrified atmosphere there, knowing that there was a needy person present, whom Jesus would probably heal.

Now, they were watching him to see if he would heal. They knew he was likely to, and according to their law, a man should not heal on the Sabbath, if it was not a life-threatening situation. And a withered hand is not a life-threatening situation, therefore Jesus could have waited until the next day to heal him, presumably.

Except that that's not what Jesus wanted to do, or his father wanted him to do. Now, this much we get from Mark and Luke. The Pharisees watched Jesus to see if he would heal the man, because they wanted to accuse Jesus.

Now, in this story in Matthew, it looks as if they initiated the confrontation. It says in Matthew 12, 10, and they asked him, saying, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, that

they might accuse him? Well, they might have asked him that, or that might be simply what he perceived was their question in their mind. In the other Gospels, Mark and Luke tell us that he knew their thoughts, and told the man to stand up in their midst.

In other words, Jesus precipitated the confrontation. He initiated the action. Now, they might have asked him the question, but it says in Mark and Luke that he knew their thoughts.

And because he knew they were wondering about this issue, he decided to make an issue of it, and he told the man, first of all, to stand up in the midst of them, making it very clear that he was going to make an object lesson of this guy. Then Jesus asked the first question, according to Mark and Luke. Jesus said, is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it? Now, that's very much like the question that Matthew has them asking him.

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? And it's possible that they did ask him, and then Jesus repeated the question in this form. In which case, Matthew and Mark and Luke are all giving parts of the story that actually happened. As I said, it's also possible that Jesus simply knew that this question was in their mind, and they were asking this question, as it were.

So he enunciated it. And the way he did, in Mark and Luke, is, he said, is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day or to do evil, to save life or destroy it? Now, what a way to confront these guys. Jesus was a great debater.

And scholars who study the teaching of Jesus have often observed that Jesus made very effective use of rhetorical means of argument. At this point, he's resorting to something called dilemma. He's putting his adversaries on the horns of a dilemma.

A dilemma is when you ask them a question which either answer condemns their position. Now, of course, this only works if you've got truth on your side. Because if you've got the truth, then any adversary is going to have error, who's opposing your truth.

And if they have error, it's often the case that you can give them, you can show them their error by giving them two options, apparently only two existing, and both of them are obviously wrong. Here's an example. Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil? Well, this was a great thing to do to his enemies.

I mean, they were on the horns of a dilemma. They couldn't answer either way without condemning their own position. Because if they said, well, it's lawful to do evil on the Sabbath, how could they say such a thing as that? Because it's never lawful to do evil on the Sabbath or any other day.

And yet, if they took the other option, and said, oh, it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath,

they anticipated what he would do then, because he could arguably say, well, healing is good. Therefore, you've just given me permission to heal this man. Thank you.

Be healed. You know, I mean, in other words, if they gave him one answer, they'd look like moral idiots, saying it's right to do evil on the Sabbath. If they gave him the other answer, they're giving him permission to do the very thing they want to criticize him for doing.

And so he puts them in that position. It's a little bit like some people who write books about child training say you should not ask your children whether they want peas. You should ask them whether they want peas or broccoli.

Now, they might not like peas or broccoli, but if you put it like that, they have to choose one of the things that you want them to have, and the choices that are left to them doesn't even give them a choice that's contrary to your will for them. And, you know, it's a little like that. Do you guys want peas or broccoli? Do you want to say it's right to do evil on the Sabbath? Do you want to say it's right to do good on the Sabbath? Now, Jesus does not allow for the possibility that there may be moral neutrals.

You know, he assumes that all action is going to be either good or bad. You're either going to be doing the will of God, or you're going to be doing what's contrary to the will of God. Those are the only two possibilities.

Now, the way he puts it is, on the Sabbath day, should you do the will of God or not the will of God? He doesn't phrase it like that, but that's what good and evil really amounts to, doing what God wants you to do or what God doesn't want you to do. Now, in saying this, he was making, to anyone who's perceptive, a very important statement about Sabbath keeping in general. Namely this, that it's either always wrong to do something, or it's always right to do something, whether it's the Sabbath or not.

You see, the reason they couldn't say it's lawful to do evil on the Sabbath is because everyone knows it's wrong to do evil any day of the week, and it'd be as wrong to do it on the Sabbath as any other day. But he's saying that the only other alternative is that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. And why would it be lawful to do good on the Sabbath? Because it's always lawful to do good.

In other words, Sabbath is no different than any other day, in terms of doing right or wrong, doing good or evil. Now, you might say, well, then why did the law forbid any labor to be done? Well, Jesus points out that even on the Pharisees' own understanding of the law, there are times when some labor is okay to be done on the Sabbath. He gives the example of a sheep falling into a ditch.

This is another rhetorical way of arguing. Basically, it's, I think it's called ad hominem argument, where it basically means on the basis of your own admissions, I can prove my

point, they themselves would admit that if man had only one sheep, and that sheep fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, where it would very possibly die if left there unrescued, it would obviously need water, might possibly have a broken bone you need to attend to, it might just die of exposure if it didn't come in out of the pit in the night. Just to avoid losing your only sheep, presumably if you have only one sheep, you're fairly poor, and you can't afford to lose a sheep.

Jesus said, if a man had only one sheep, and it fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, wouldn't you lift it out? He implied that the Pharisees themselves would break the Sabbath to save a sheep. And if that is not true, then they would have answered, no, we wouldn't allow that, but they didn't say that. Apparently, he was correctly representing their own practice.

That if there was something like a minor emergency, or there was a need that one of their animals had, they would see that as valid reason to do some labor, some small lifting of a burden on the Sabbath. And Jesus' argument is, of course, from the lesser to the greater, if it's okay to help a sheep on the Sabbath, then how could it be wrong to help a man on the Sabbath, who is far more important than a sheep? Now this is how Jesus argued, and it's very clear that they could never possibly answer one way or the other, and in Mark and Luke, when Jesus asked this question, it says in Mark 3, 4 anyway, it says they held their peace. They didn't answer, because they couldn't.

Any answer they gave to his question would have been self-condemning, so they just held their peace. And Mark tells us in Mark 3, 5, and Jesus looked around on them in anger, being grieved for the hardness of their heart. This is the only place in the Gospels that speaks specifically of Jesus having anger, the emotion of anger.

His anger, however, was not a selfish, wounded kind of anger that people have when they have personally been injured or offended or overlooked or wronged. It was the anger that was prompted by his grief over the hardness of their hearts. He was angry that anyone who was in a position of religious leadership looked to by the populace as representing God and his ways and his laws and his character, as it were, that they could be so hard-hearted and so out of touch and so misrepresenting to the people what God really cared about.

This angered him, because it ended up putting people under bondage. And so Jesus looked on them on anger, it says in Mark 3, 5, and then it continues. He told the man to stretch out his hand and so forth.

By the way, one thing that Jesus specifically says in this Matthew passage, Matthew 12, 12, he says, Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. He asked the question, is it lawful to do good or is it lawful to do evil? Since they didn't offer an answer, he gave the answer. It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

And since good is always in terms of what is the will of God, as long as you are doing the will of God, you should do it on the Sabbath as well as any other day. By the way, you shouldn't do anything less than the will of God on any day of the week. And this is an important thing, because people do, by their religious nature, do tend to categorize actions into religious and non-religious, or sacred actions and secular actions.

Going to church is a sacred activity. Prayer and worship is a sacred activity. Watching a religious broadcast or reading your Bible is a sacred activity.

Going to a prayer meeting in the middle of the week is a sacred activity. The rest of your activities, going to work, eating, clothing, shopping, taking care of your kids, the entertainment you choose, those are all secular activities. And secular is a word that simply means having no religious ramifications.

Secular is just a-religious, having nothing to do with religion. And this is how most people think, including most religious people, and especially, in my opinion, those who make an issue of keeping Sabbath. They say, whoever gave you permission to make God's holy day unholy? It's a sacred day, don't you know? And I read their literature, as recently as last week, I was reading Cynthia Adventist's book, arguing for the keeping of Sabbath.

And this is the very point to make. You know, God has never authorized anyone making Saturday less holy than he made it. I agree.

We should never make Saturday less holy than God made it. What we should do is elevate all the other six days to be as holy as Saturday is. In which case, there ceases to be any distinction between Saturday and any other day, and this is what they fail to realize.

They think that the day they go to the gathering of the worship service is a sacred day more than the day that they go to work. But you see, the New Testament teaches that whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, you do all to the glory of God. Everything in your life becomes a sacred activity, and you have no... See, when you become a Christian, you become a slave of Jesus Christ.

And like any slave, every hour, 24 hours of every day, belongs to your master. And the slave owns nothing, has no rights, he is simply there to do the bidding of his master every hour of every day. Now, his master may want him to sleep eight hours or six hours or whatever, so he sleeps that amount.

The master may want him to have a little bit of leisure, and so he gives him some time for that leisure. But also, if the master doesn't, whatever the slave is doing at any hour of any day is supposed to be exactly what his master desires for him to do. And when we are Christians, that's exactly where we stand.

We're to be doing at any moment of any day exactly what God wants us to do. If I go to

work and eat 40 hours of work, if I work 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week, that's what I was trying to say before I got my merge mixed up. I should do it not because that's the thing to do in American society, I do it because that's what I feel God's called me to do.

If I don't think God's called me to do it, I better not do it. Now, by the way, if I wasn't full-time busy in something else that I felt God has called me to do, I would feel that God wants me to go out and find a profitable labor, you know, 40 hours a week, because that's in the Bible. For the most part, not 40 hours a week, but basically whoever doesn't work should not eat.

And I could assume this much if I had no specific calling otherwise, that God would have me go out and work in profitable labor at least to the point where I can feed myself and those who I have obligation to feed. It wouldn't have to be 40 hours a week if I could make enough money in less time than that. But whatever hours I'm not working for money, I have to also be doing what God wants me with those hours to do.

You know, my care for my family, the feeding, the housing, the clothing, all of that is a sacred duty because I do it because that's what I believe God wants me to do and what God's told me to do. And there's nothing I do any day of any week, at least there should not be, anything I do any day of any week or any hour of any day that I don't do unto the Lord. And if that's true Sunday through Friday, why shouldn't it be true Saturday? Or let me put it this way, if it's true on Saturday, why shouldn't it also be true Sunday through Friday? If there is a certain way of living that's appropriate on a holy day like Saturday, whatever arguments there are in favor of living holy on that day would be equally good arguments for living that way every day.

And so when Paul said in Romans 14, one man esteems one day above another, another man esteems every day alike, he didn't condemn either view, but I personally believe Paul's position would be he preferred to view every day alike. Now it doesn't mean you do the same thing every day, it may be that you go to church on Saturday or Sunday or some other day of the week, doesn't matter, every day is the Lord's day and for that reason you can go to church any day you want, you can go every day. I mean what the Seventh-day Adventists fail to point out is that in the book of Acts we read that the disciples met every day for prayer and fellowship and breaking of bread and to sit under teaching.

They went to church every day. They didn't treat Sabbath as a special day for that, that was an everyday thing. Now you do that here while you're in school, when you leave the school you probably won't have the luxury of going to church every day as it were, but whatever day you do it, doesn't matter whether it's Saturday, Sunday or some other day of the week because going to church isn't a more sacred activity than going to work if you're living your life unto the Lord, whether we live or die we're the Lord's.

And so what Jesus said basically abrogates the Sabbath observance as a special thing

because although there was a command to rest on the Sabbath, Jesus made it very clear, you can now work on the Sabbath if what you're doing is good, if what you're doing is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. That is as much a removal of the command to rest on the Sabbath as when he said it's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him but what comes out, as that statement was an abrogation of all dietary laws that would restrict eating anything. And Mark understood that by the way in Mark chapter 7, when Mark records Jesus saying it's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, it's what comes out of his mouth that defiles him, Mark puts his commentator saying thus Jesus declared all foods clean.

And for Jesus to say it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath, the commentator could have said thus Jesus said you don't have to rest on the Sabbath anymore as long as what you're doing is good. Now, that's a very important point. One point on the side from this story I'd like to point out, it's just an observation that's not a main part of this, it's just sort of a sideline.

In verse 11, when Jesus gives the example of the sheep that falls into the ditch, he emphasizes what man is there among you who has one sheep and it falls into a ditch. Now, what he's suggesting is helping this man is in some ways analogous to helping the only sheep you've got if you had only one. Suggesting that if this man was the only man in the world who needed help, Jesus would be as concerned about helping him as a man would be concerned about helping his only sheep that was in trouble.

You ever heard preachers say if you were the only sinner in the whole world, Jesus would have come and died for you? I've heard that all my life. And I always wonder, is there a biblical warrant for that statement? I mean, maybe it's true, maybe it's not, but I thought, is there any biblical warrant to say that if you were the only person who ever lived, died, fell, and was damned, that Jesus would have come and died just for you? I believe there is. This illustration he gives suggests that if there was only one sheep in need, everyone would realize it was appropriate to help it.

And so, how much more important is a man than a sheep? Suggesting that if there was only one man in need, if he was the only man God had who was in need, that God would have been concerned to come and help that man. And I believe that we could extrapolate from that the very thing that preachers have often said about that. Namely, that if you were the only sinner, the only person in need that God ever had made, and ever saw in need, He would have come and done all that He could for you, just as He did for the whole world.

Now let's turn to John chapter 5, and it's interesting because we're changing, we're shifting gears altogether in one respect, because any time you shift from the synoptic Gospels to the Gospel of John, you're moving from one environment into another entirely. And everyone knows that. Anyone who's read the three synoptic Gospels, and

then begins reading the Gospel of John, knows you feel like you're in a totally different environment than John.

He's so theological, he's so far more mystical, and so forth, than just straightforward telling what Jesus did, and so forth. Most of John is taken up with long discourses, and they're of a theological nature, and so forth. But even though there's this major difference between the synoptics from which we now turn to the Gospel of John, which we're now turning to, that difference does not change the fact that we're still talking about Sabbath here.

The next chronological thing in the Gospels for us to consider is another case of the same thing. Jesus doing something on the Sabbath, getting criticized for it, and making a defense of His activity of working on the Sabbath, healing on the Sabbath in this case. Now the thing that makes the story before us in John chapter 5 different than the other is that Jesus is not in Galilee in this story.

The chapter opens, after this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. So now Jesus takes His show on the road. He's confronted these people over Sabbath observance up in Galilee, where it's considerably less risky to take such positions, because the Jewish power is centered not in Galilee, but in Jerusalem.

And after having made His points there in the synagogues in Capernaum, He now goes down to Jerusalem at a feast to confront the leaders on the very same issue in Jerusalem, in the most dangerous place on the planet to violate the Sabbath. And this chapter divides up into kind of three parts. We should cover all of them in this session if we can.

But the first 15 verses of John chapter 5 are the story itself of the healing of this man and the sequel of the report given to the authorities. The actual telling of the story is in the first 15 verses. Then, in verses 16 through 30, we have Jesus essentially arguing or debating, defending Himself, really, and speaking in conflict with the religious leaders who are planning to kill Him.

And He still does so in verses 31 through 47. However, 31 through 47, the third segment, is distinctive in that Jesus begins to appeal to several witnesses as proof of His authority. In the Jewish law, it said several times, in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word should be established.

Jesus, in this story, just like He did in the stories we just read, claims to have authority over the Sabbath. We didn't study that in Matthew just today, but yesterday we saw that in the parallel in Mark, Mark has Jesus saying, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Now here, in John chapter 5, He violates the Sabbath.

That is, the Sabbath as the Jews understood it to be understood and to be observed. And He defends Himself. And the final part of His defense in John chapter 5 is where He gives

basically proof that He has the authority to do this kind of thing.

And several witnesses are called. John the Baptist, God, His works, and even the scriptures themselves of the Old Testament are appealed to. So, in this chapter, I don't know whether we'll get through it all in this session.

I certainly will try. The first 15 verses tell the story. Then verses 16 through 30 are more of a, Jesus' defense of His actions.

And verses 31 through 47, He gives the multiple witnesses that He appeals to as proof of His own authority. After this, verse 1, 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 porches.

In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water. Then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.

Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, Do you want to be made well? 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 am coming, another steps down before me.

Jesus said to him, Arise, take up your bed and walk. And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed and walked, and that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, It is the Sabbath.

It is not lawful for you to carry your bed. He answered them, He who made me well said to me, Take up your bed and walk. Then they asked him, Who is the man who said to you, Take up your bed and walk? But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn a multitude being in that place.

Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you. The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

This guy seems a bit dull. I mean, you can't make out too much, but he just doesn't seem to be a real sharp guy. I mean, that he goes and tells the Jews who Jesus was when he knew that they would likely be hostile seems to be a strange thing for him to do, either not realizing this is going to get Jesus into hot water, or else maybe because Jesus said, Sin no more, lest a worse thing happen to you.

Maybe he decided to get Jesus into hot water. Maybe he didn't like what Jesus had to

say. The suggestion Jesus makes may mean that the man's original condition of sickness for those 38 years had been caused by some sin in his life previously.

Now, it may not imply that, but most scholars think it does, and I think it does make sense. When Jesus said, Sin no more, lest some worse thing come unto you, it's hard to imagine that Jesus meant if you do any kind of sin whatsoever, you're going to be in worse condition than you've been in the last 38 years. That would be putting a terrible fear on him, although certainly the man should avoid all sin, but there aren't very many sinless people around, and it's unlikely that this man avoided every sin for the rest of his life, and that would be putting him under tremendous pressure.

I personally think that when Jesus said, Sin no more, he meant do not repeat the sin that you did previously, lest some worse thing come upon you for repeating it than happened to you the first time you did it. Now, that doesn't mean that Jesus didn't want the man to avoid all sin, but I think scholars would agree with this for the most part. It's the impression one gets, I think, from reading it, that Jesus is suggesting you fell into this crippled condition before because of sin.

Now, don't do that again. Don't do it again or it'll be worse next time. You should have learned your lesson.

Now, that may be reading more into it than Jesus implied, but that's not altogether clear. Let's start at the beginning. It says there was a feast of the Jews.

No one knows what kind of feast it was. Jesus went to Jerusalem, which suggests that maybe it was one of those three feasts of the year which required all male Jews to go to Jerusalem, although we're not told that he had to go there, and it might have been some other lesser feast. It could have been Hanukkah or some Purim or some other feast where Jews were not required to go to Jerusalem.

Jesus may have gone there not by requirement, but because that's just what God wanted him to do at that time. However, many have felt that it was very possibly a Passover. Now, John has mentioned three other Passovers.

Not so far. He's mentioned one other before this. He mentions another in chapter 6 and another in chapter 18.

And therefore, if this is a Passover, that gives us some... it lengthens the ministry of Jesus to about three and a half years. If this is not a Passover, then we can't really say with certainty that Jesus' ministry was more than about two and a half years. You've heard throughout probably your Christian life that Jesus' ministry was about three and a half years, and that I think is very probably true, but that is based on the assumption that John 5, verse 1 is a Passover.

It may not have been. And if it is not, then we can't prove his ministry extended beyond

more than two and a half years. Anyway, it's hardly a major concern.

Jesus... I need to make another point. In verse 4, we have a statement that is omitted from many of the manuscripts, and therefore it is probably not found in the newer translations. If you have a newer translation like NASV or NIV or something, it probably doesn't have verse 4 there.

It's absent from some manuscripts, and it is believed that some scribe stuck it in there to explain the phenomenon of these people trying to get into the water. Obviously, if it is not part of the original, it is based on verse 7, where the sick man said, Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me. Now, verse 7 is authentic.

It's in all the manuscripts. And some feel that the statement would be so nonsensical without verse 4 that that proves that verse 4 is authentic. On the other hand, some have felt that it was verse 7 and the confusion it caused that caused some scribe to make up verse 4 to explain it.

I do not know which is the case. I think perhaps the ones who want to eliminate the verse find it a little incredible to believe that an angel actually would come down periodically and stir up the water. Angelic visits do happen in the Bible, and no evangelical would deny that.

Although to think that an angel came down basically at arbitrary times and stirred up water so that one person could be healed and no one else could be, it raises questions. Why? Why would God do it that way? Especially in view of the fact that that process would prevent the most needy, the most crippled, from getting help. The ones who would get first in the water into that situation were the ones who were ambulatory or mobile or could at least do it.

Whereas the people who were the most paralyzed, the most needy, and the most friendless would be the ones who simply would always lose out in that deal. And that doesn't seem to agree with the way God does things. Therefore, there is some maybe reason to omit verse 4. As I said, it's omitted from some of the manuscripts.

And the man's statement in verse 7 may well reflect some kind of a custom or some kind of a belief of the Jews that they had about this without necessarily the Bible trying to affirm that there really was some kind of an angelic visitation. I do not know. I mean, we just don't know.

It's impossible to know whether this verse is authentic or not. So you can take it or leave it. But one thing I would like to point out to you, two important things about this healing.

One is that there was a great multitude of sick people there, according to verse 3, and yet Jesus only interacted with one. Those who say that Jesus healed every sick person he

encountered and that it's never the will of God to pass over a sick person without healing them and only a person's lack of faith will prevent them from being healed, because if you have enough faith you will be healed, so they simply haven't taken the biblical data into consideration adequately, it seems to me. For one thing, this man didn't appear to have any faith in particular.

He didn't know who Jesus was. He didn't ask for healing. There was no waiting for him to express any faith whatsoever.

Jesus said, do you want to be well? The guy said, I don't have anyone to put me in the water. Jesus said, get up. The guy did.

There's no reference to the man's faith. There's no... I mean, the guy appears not to have any particular manifestation of faith in his life, and it wasn't until considerably later that he even realized who Jesus was. He didn't even know the guy's name, who healed him.

So it's not as if seeing Jesus, oh wow, here's the healing guy that I've heard so much about. I can believe he'll heal me. He didn't even know, he didn't recognize Jesus.

Never heard a thing about him. So it would appear that there was no faith involved on the man's part, at least not until Jesus said, arise, take up your bread and walk. It's possible that the man may have had to exercise faith then before feeling himself strengthened, although it's also possible that he didn't have faith until he felt himself strengthened.

In any case, he did obey Jesus, which was arguably an act of faith. But the point is, Jesus singled him out without any evidence that he was singled out on the basis of his faith, in this case. Furthermore, it's hard to believe that if this guy did have faith, that he had more than all the other multitude around who didn't get healed.

This man doesn't have an exemplary manifestation of faith, like the centurion who had a sick servant, or the Syrophenician woman who had a demon-possessed daughter, or the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment, or others who are commended for their faith and told that their faith got them the blessing they wanted. This man is not commended for his faith. He doesn't exhibit anything that looks like faith, and yet he gets healed and the others are passed over.

It's really hard to believe he had more faith than all the other multitudes there, and I think to say that he got healed because of faith and they didn't get healed because of no faith is to read in there what does not seem likely to be present in the account. I think it's much better to assume that Jesus was just acting under direction from his father. He healed who his father told him to, and didn't heal the ones that his father didn't tell him to.

I don't think Jesus assumed that sickness is the worst thing that can happen to people, or even that being disabled is the worst thing that can happen to people. Spiritual issues were far more important to him than such things. To us, especially when we're not thinking like spiritual people, getting healed is the most important thing.

Physical discomfort, physical pain and sickness, when you're in that condition you can hardly think of anything else unless you're thinking about God, in which case you can think of things far more. In fact, you can think about God a lot more if you're laid up and disabled and stuff than if you're out in an active, healthy, comfortable lifestyle. You tend to be distracted more by a comfortable lifestyle than by a disadvantaged lifestyle in some respects.

You look to God more, or at least by nature you would tend to, if you're afflicted. Now I'm not trying to make an argument for being afflicted. However, I am saying this, there is no evidence whatsoever in the scripture that God felt like being physically afflicted is an intolerable condition for humans to be in.

After all, he called his disciples to be afflicted. Some might say, well, not with sickness. I would argue against that if I had the time, but the point is, affliction is affliction.

Whatever kind of affliction, whether it's caused by humans persecuting you or a germ in your body.