

JOHN 5-8 – SABBATH KEEPING; THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES



We begin with John 5, where Jesus went to Jerusalem to attend a Feast that is not specified but probably was either the Passover or Pentecost since John 7 covers the Feast of Tabernacles. We read, "After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" (John 5:1) As Leon Morris explains, "John adds, as he does in other sections, 'of the Jews,' so his Gentile readers would understand which feasts are being mentioned" (New International Commentary, p. 299).

It says in Jn. 5:2-4, "Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda [house of mercy], 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."

This was a way for God to show mercy on the sick. Scholars weren't sure which pool this was taking about, but just ten years ago, this pool was found by excavators in 2005, one of the most exciting discoveries in Jerusalem. *Biblical Archaeology Review* mentions, "Among the most famous of Jesus' miracles is recounted in the Gospel of John, where Jesus heals the paralytic at the Bethesda Pool (John 5:2-9). It is not the only one of Jesus' miracles of healing to take place at a pool in Jerusalem, however. In addition to the Bethesda Pool, the Gospel of John also says that Jesus healed the blind man at the Siloam Pool. The Siloam Pool was discovered in 2005 and was quickly identified with the pool mentioned in John. The Bethesda Pool, on the other hand, was excavated in the late 19th century, but it has taken more than 100 years for archaeologists to accurately identify and interpret the site. The Siloam Pool has been identified as a *mikveh* [pool for purification]....When Jesus heals the paralytic in the Gospel of John, the Bethesda Pool is described as having five porticoes—a puzzling feature suggesting an unusual five-sided pool, which most scholars dismissed as an unhistorical literary creation. Yet when this site was excavated, it revealed a rectangular pool with two basins separated by a wall—thus a five-sided pool—and

each side had a portico....So why a pool with two basins? The archaeological evidence shows that the southern basin had broad steps with landings, indicating that it was indeed a *mikveh*. The northern basin provided a reservoir, or *otzer*, to continually replenish and repurify the *mikveh* with fresh water flowing south through the dam between them. Jerusalem's pilgrims would flock to the Bethesda Pool and Siloam Pool to purify themselves in these public *mikva'ot* and, at times, to seek healing" (September 30, 2011, pp. 40-48).

Here, Jesus meets an infirmed man for 38 years and asked, "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, 'Rise, 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* [according to their man-made rules].' He...said, 'He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'...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 it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, *because He had done these things on the Sabbath*" (John 5:6-16).

Jesus again goes against the man-made Rabbinic laws, this time about Sabbath-keeping. Notice He was keeping the Sabbath, but not according to the Pharisaic teachings. He now gives three reasons why it is legitimate for Him to heal on the Sabbath. By the way, keeping with this principle, no minister of God would refuse someone who asks for an anointing for healing on the Sabbath.

In the Talmud, the Rabbis had set up 39 main categories about Sabbath-keeping (with 1521 separate laws) and their 39th section stated it was not lawful on the Sabbath to carry an object heavier than the weight of two figs more than four cubits (two yards) from a public place to one's house and whosoever did it was worthy of being stoned to death. The Jewish leaders saw the healed

man clearly carried an object heavier than two figs much farther from a public place to his house.

So here are the three reasons Jesus asserted He had the right to heal on the Sabbath.

1. Jesus said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17). In other words, God is still constantly doing works of mercy and love, and this includes healing the sick on the Sabbath so they will not suffer for one more day. Divine healing does not require toil, yet the Pharisees could approve all the heavy work the priests did on the Sabbath, and knew it was justified because it was part of God's ministry. How much more is healing on the Sabbath part of God's work and ministry!

2. The second reason is that Jesus Christ knows intimately what God the Father's will is, which was to allow healing on the Sabbath. He said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does" (Jn. 5:19-20). Jesus knew perfectly well how to keep the Sabbath because God the Father and He had been supervising Sabbath-keeping since they gave the commandment to Adam and Eve in the Garden. He was actually the one who gave Moses this commandment, so He could rightly claim to be the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28).

3. Jesus Christ also had the right to heal on the Sabbath because He is the Savior and Judge of all mankind, who will raise up the dead, and so has full authority to heal on the Sabbath. He said, "For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him...Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live...Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I

can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge: and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent me" (Jn. 5:21-30).

We see here that Christ abbreviates the resurrections into the resurrection of life—this would include the first resurrection at His coming and also those who are saved during the Millennium and in the second resurrection. The resurrection of condemnation has to do with the condemnation to the lake of fire, what is actually a third resurrection for the incorrigibly wicked.

Now Jesus explains why his testimony is true and is backed by numerous important testimonies.

He says, "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true" (Jn. 5:31). So now He provides five witnesses to show He is true.

1. **The witness of John.** He says, "There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth" (Jn. 5:32-33).

2. **The witness of His miraculous works.** He said, "But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me" (Jn. 5:36). No one could do the miracles that Jesus constantly did, even raising the dead to life.

3. **The testimony of the Father.** He added, "And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form" (John 5:37). One of the times God the Father sent a message was at Christ's baptism where it was probably an angel who was used as a messenger to say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17). Since they didn't hear the voice of the Father.

4. **The testimony of the Scriptures.** Christ said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (Jn. 5:39).

5. **The testimony of Moses.** He said, "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father: there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe in Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not

believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:45-47). He was referring to Moses prophesying that another greater than he would one day arise (Dt. 18:15, 18).

We have already covered most of John 6 in the previous study, so we go on to John 7. After the healing of the paralytic at the Bethesda pool and the persecution it incurred, Jesus had gone back to Galilee. We read, "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee, for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacle was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, 'Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he Himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world. For even His brothers did not believe in Him'" (John 7:1-5). Here it is talking about Jesus' half brothers, and clearly shows none in His family were converted at that time—including His mother (see Mt. 12:46-50).

He told His brothers it was not time to reveal Himself fully to the world because of persecution and for them to go up to the Feast. He did not want them to spread the news that He was coming to Jerusalem and tip off the Jewish leadership. We read, "But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret" (Jn. 7:10).

There was still a stir over having given the healed man the command to carry his cot with him on the Sabbath. Jesus said, "Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? The people answered and said, 'You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?' Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers) and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:19-24).

Christ was admonishing them to judge the Scriptures with discernment. If circumcision was so important that the Rabbis had ruled if it fell on

the eighth day and that was a Sabbath, all the work done to circumcise the boy was acceptable, and yet they ruled healing should not be done on the Sabbath. It was again a case of straining the technical gnat and swallowing the spiritual camel.

The Jewish leaders began to harass Him during the Feast, and on the Last Great Day, He gave this vital message, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:37-39).

During the Feast, it was a tradition to pour water out, as *Clarke's Commentary* notes: "This was the eighth day, and was called the great day...It was probably when they went to draw water from the pool Siloam, and while they were pouring it out at the foot of the altar, that our Lord spoke these words; for, as that ceremony pointed out the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, our Lord, who was the fountain whence it was to proceed, called the people to himself, that, by believing on him, they might be made partakers of that inestimable benefit."

After the Feast was over, the Jewish leadership was seething with envy and hatred toward Jesus because they could see many beginning to follow Him instead of them. So they needed to find something against Him and tried to trick Him by bringing a woman caught in the act of adultery and asked what He would do. If He condemned her, they would accuse Him of being hardhearted, but if He forgave her, then they could accuse Him of violating God's law and calling Him a liberal law-breaker. Yet, they didn't count on Jesus turning the tables on them. We read, "This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him...So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.'...Then those who heard it, *being convicted by their conscience*, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst" (John 8:6-9). He then applied mercy in this case and warned her not to repeat this sin.