

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 72.3%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Luke 5:33 – 39, Mark 2:18 – 22 & Matthew 9:14 – 17

Monday: John 5:1 – 4

Tuesday: John 5:5 – 18

Wednesday: John 5:19 – 24

Thursday: John 5:25 – 29

Friday: John 5:30 – 39

Saturday: John 5:40 – 47

Current # of email addresses in the group: 726

I hope everyone had a good and productive week. Very thankful for God's Sabbath rest for our normal work. Thank you for understanding last week's pause, and now we get back to it. We don't cover much ground this week, but this is an incredibly dense set of scriptures and so we will take some time as we go through it since the goal of this program is not just to read through the Bible but attempt to thoroughly understand what we are being taught. May God bless each one of you for your faithfulness to Him and His Word!

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

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### **3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 114**

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 771 – SUNDAY: May 17<sup>th</sup>

Luke 5:33–39, Mark 2:18–22 & Matthew 9:14–17

Daily Deep Dive:

Luke 5:33 – Fasting in the first century had become a regular religious practice. The Pharisees typically fasted twice a week (see Luke 18:12). So, it had become the customary and expected behavior of those who

would claim to be devout. The phrase “make prayers” (Greek: *δεήσεις ποιούνται*) typically leans toward prayers that are either at a set time or are a set form of prayer (versus spontaneous unrehearsed prayer). This word in Greek is typically used for carrying out a known practice and performing something that is habitual or expected. This word for prayer is not the broadest form for prayer (like *προσευχή*), but one that often shows up in repeated or patterned appeals. At the time of Jesus Christ, prayer was commonly tied to the set times of the temple sacrifices --- mornings at 9:00 am and evenings at 3:00 pm (the ninth hour - Acts 3:1). The Pharisees were especially known for consistency and visibility in these practices. With both fasting and prayer listed together, this seems to imply that both of these are on a set regular repetition and pattern, and likely visible to others who can “see” their devoutness.

We might ask, why would John’s disciples do this too. It’s possible that they are influenced by the religious practices of the day. But it’s also possible that they are doing it for two other reasons. John’s ministry was focused on repentance and preparing for the coming Messiah. Their fasting likely expressed “mourning over sin” and a “dedication and readiness for God’s intervention”.

Luke 5:34 – The NKJV uses the word “bridegroom” twice in this sentence. The first use is the Greek word *nymphōnos* (νυμφῶνος), and in the first century this primarily referred to a bridal suite/chamber, wedding hall (the house or room prepared for the wedding), or the place associated with the bridegroom and marriage festivities. To those hearing these words, they would have immediately pictured a Jewish wedding celebration, which was one of the most joyful and anticipated social events in village life. A wedding at that time, as I believe we have previously covered at various parts of this reading plan, were not short celebrations in Jewish culture, but often a multi-day celebration, full of feasting, music, and collective public joy. No

one would plan a fast during this time, as the two (a wedding feast vs fasting) would stand in opposition --- and fasting would feel inappropriate.

Here Jesus uses the phrase “sons of the bridechamber”. This was an idiom meaning the “the bridegroom’s companions”, “wedding attendants” or “close friends of the groom participating in the festivities”. These friends would often accompany the bridegroom in the procession. It would have been clear to all of them that Jesus was describing Himself as the bridegroom and His disciples as the friends of the bridechamber. The clear meaning to all was that this was a time of joy and celebration, not a time of fasting.

Luke 5:35 – Wedding celebrations eventually ended and the village people, including the close friends of the new couple, would go back to real life. This would include the difficulties that life brings. And in this, they would again fast before God to draw close to God and to humble themselves before Him. But even greater than the end of the wedding feast imagery that Jesus was invoking, was the clear meaning, which His disciples would not even yet understand --- that His ministry and time as a human being was going to be short as well. He would die and no longer be with them in the flesh --- and His disciples would mourn and fast at that time.

Jesus then tells them two parables (stories meant to teach a lesson), which at first glance might not seem to relate at all to what was being talked about. But we’ll see that they do. Let’s first understand the parables as they would have understood them, and then we will relate them back to the context.

Luke 5:36 – In this first parable, why would no one at the time use a piece out of a new garment to patch an old garment? This word for “garment” can mean any type of clothing (dress, cloak, robe, tunic,

etc...). Let's take a dress as an example. If you place a new patch into a dress with a color and design, it's never going to match the old one, so it's going to look bad. But additionally, clothing of different ages shrinks at different rates. All of us have likely bought something, and washed it the first time, and it shrunk in size after. But after that, as we continue to wash it, we don't get the same rate of shrinking, but we still might get some shrinkage bit by bit. Imagine making a clothing patch from something that will shrink at a faster rate than the old. Well, it's going to tear and pull away from the old clothing as it shrinks.

Luke 5:37-38 – Now consider this second parable. At this time, wine was stored in animal skins. Fresh skins were still flexible, stretchable, and elastic. This was important, because new wine was still fermenting and expanding. This happens because during fermentation, carbon dioxide gas is produced that creates pressure within the animal skins. The new skins can expand to handle this process. But overtime the wineskins become brittle, hardened, and inflexible. This is okay, because by this time, the wine has stopped fermentation and expanding. However, if you would try to reuse a wineskin for new wine, the expanding gasses would break the wineskin. Both the wine would spill out and be lost, and your old wine skin would also be broken.

Before we get to Luke 5:39, let's first understand what Jesus is teaching through these first two parables. The scribes and Pharisees (verse 30 and continuing in verse 33) have been complaining and asking questions about what Jesus is doing. They want Him to fit into their traditions and views on how a religious person should be --- especially as they are considering whether He is truly the Messiah. Jesus is clearly teaching that He has not come to "patch" up the existing religious structure. Even more, that structure and system couldn't handle what He was doing and bringing (the New Covenant, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and a life led by the Holy Spirit).

In the first parable, the old garment, represented the existing religious structures, traditions, interpretations, etc. The new cloth represented Christ's true teachings and God the Father's actual expectation. It wasn't as simple as "adding" Jesus into the old system as it was currently practiced and understood.

Similarly, in the second parable, the new wine represented the dynamic work Christ was doing. The old wine skins represented the rigid and inflexible structures (practices and understandings) of the scribes and Pharisees. This had become formalized, tradition-bound, external-focused --- and was harmful to true spiritual transformation. This rigid system couldn't handle what Jesus had brought. It's important to understand, that Jesus was not abolishing any of God's royal law. He was showing and exposing that they had corrupted interpretations, man-made traditions and a system that was not in alignment with true principles.

They wanted His disciples to be fasting because it fit within their traditions and religious expectations. They couldn't see what was truly right before their eyes in Jesus Christ.

Luke 5:39 – In ancient times, old wine was normally considered superior to freshly made wine. Old wine was typically smoother, more mellow, more refined --- and therefore considered more desirable. Based on that understanding, who would want the new when they could have the old. However, in this case, Jesus is not actually confirming that the old is better than the new. He's just confirming that there is a belief that the old is better. He's using a very realistic observation of everyday life and describing people's natural tendency to resist change. The scribes and Pharisees, (and even the people in general) had become accustomed to the old ways. The religious leaders were comfortable in their familiar traditions, established systems, and inherited customs. In this natural human tendency, even if

something better arrived, many would instinctively resist it. But here, this “new” wine, WAS in fact better. But they were comfortable and happy with the old. Again, freshly made wine would be understood to be inferior, however, it’s interesting to me that Jesus had already made “freshly made wine” in John 2 and it WAS SUPERIOR to what was first served.

What additional insights might we gain from Mark’s and Matthew’s accounts?

Mark 2:18 – Here we learn that they the Pharisees and disciples of John “were fasting”. John Gill’s commentary supposes they were fasting “that very day” perhaps the same day that Matthew had been throwing a feast for Jesus Christ. This might be why they are at odds with the behavior of Jesus Christ. This may have been one of the days of the week that their religious tradition had made a day of fasting.

Mark 2:21 – Instead of describing a “new” cloth like Luke does (using the word Kainou (καινοῦ) which means “new in kind, fresh, & unused” -- thus emphasizing the “newness” of what Christ brought), Mark uses a different word to describe this cloth even more. Mark uses the word Agnaphou (ἀγνάφου) which literally means “unfulled”. A “fuller” was someone who cleaned, thickened, shrank and finished the cloth. So, an unfulled cloth was raw, untreated, and not yet shrunk. Mark explains why this new cloth will cause a significant tear to the old cloth.

Luke seems more focused on the “new” vs “old” aspect --- and that the new is actually better than the old (Luke 5:39). Mark does not add a Luke 5:39 line about new wine being superior to the old. Mark seems more focused on the incompatibility of the two ways (the current religious traditions vs Jesus Christ’s Way).

I should also point out that in Greek there are two different words for “new”. One deals with being “new” in regards to “time” (i.e., “being recent”). Luke didn’t use this word. His focus wasn’t on that Jesus was bringing something new in regards to being new in time, but he used the Greek for “new” in regards to something’s “nature” or “quality”. Luke was emphasizing that what Jesus brought as new was not the same in quality or nature to that of the current religious system. This is important to understand as we continue to read the New Testament. When we see the word “new” in regards to covenant, creation or commandment, we should examine whether this is in regards to “time/recent” or in regards to “nature/quality”. Jesus was not just bringing the “newest” stage of the old religious system, but instead was bringing something “superior” and transformative.

Matthew 9:14 – This account actually spells out that the disciples of John the Baptizer were directly asking Jesus this question.

Matthew 9:16 – Matthew uses the same “unfulled” (unshrunk) Greek word that Mark did.

Day 772 – MONDAY: May 18<sup>th</sup>

John 5:1–4

Daily Deep Dive:

We now start into a whole chapter of John that is not contained in the other gospel accounts.

Verse 1 – John lets us know that after this time up in Galilee Jesus goes back to Jerusalem because it’s Feast time.

Verse 2 – It’s important to remember that by the time John writes this (about 60 years after these events took place and about 20 years after the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.) people by this time might not

have been familiar with Jerusalem. The “sheep gate” is most likely the same gate mentioned briefly by Nehemiah in chapter 3:1 and 12:39. It was located on the northern side of Jerusalem, near the Temple entrance. John Gill’s commentary states: “so called, because the sheep were led through it to the temple, and near it was the sheep market, where they were sold, and the sheep pool, where the sacrifices were washed; and this being near the temple, and for the service of it” [END QUOTE]

The sheep gate seems less of the focus here from a metaphor/meaning standpoint, and more as a landmark for locating this pool. This would prove to be important from a biblical “proof” standpoint. For many years, skeptics claimed that John’s description here was inaccurate --- or written by someone else and simply made up. Why? It’s due to this description that this pool of Bethesda had five porches. For many centuries no one knew of any pool near Jerusalem that matched this description. The details sounded strange architecturally. Most pools in the ancient world were square or rectangle. The Greek word translated here as “porches” is “stoas” (στοὰς). In the first century, this was not a “porch” attached to a house like we have in the USA sometimes today. This was a covered colonnade (long sequence of columns that were connected by their covered section that rested on these columns. It was essentially a roofed walkway. People could sit or lie here, protected from the sun or weather. Most pools during this time might be surrounded by 4 of these “stoas” --- but John’s description of 5 seemed awkward and improbable to many.

However, around the late 1800s/early 1900s excavations made an amazing discovery. A pool was discovered near/under the grounds of the Church of St. Anne in Jerusalem (north of the temple mount). What they found was one of the most significant archeological confirmations of the Gospel of John. They discovered a large double-pool complex dating back to this time period that had “five porches”. There were two large adjacent pools separated by a central partition/wall. There

were five colonnades, one north, south, east and west, but also one in the center. Finally, what John described made archeological sense. This was proof that John knew Jerusalem's geography, architecture and pre-70 A.D. conditions (pre-Temple destruction). These findings should strengthen our faith. And it may be part of why God wanted these exact details preserved through time.

John tells us that this pool in the Hebrew language is called Bethesda. This means House of Mercy.

John 5:3-4 – We now need to talk through two difficult scriptures. I'm going to state up front that there are multiple views on these scriptures.

Before I dive into that, we need to understand the debate between Greek manuscripts a bit that I don't believe I've ever discussed in this reading program.

When scholars translate the New Testament from Greek into English, they must compare thousands of ancient handwritten copies called "manuscripts". Human copying down through time presented opportunities for copying errors. Over time, small differences appeared between manuscripts because scribes occasionally made mistakes, clarified wording, skipped lines, repeated phrases, or added notes in the margins that were later copied into the text itself. Most of these differences are very small—such as spelling changes or word order—and they do not affect major Christian doctrines. However, scholars still debate which manuscripts most accurately preserve the original wording written by the apostles.

One side of the debate places greater trust in the oldest surviving manuscripts. These include famous fourth-century manuscripts such as Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, as well as earlier papyrus fragments like Papyrus 66 and Papyrus 75. Supporters of this approach

argue that copies made closer to the time of the apostles had fewer generations of copying between them and the originals. Their reasoning is often summarized with the phrase, “older is better.” They believe that later manuscripts may contain additions or smoothing changes that gradually entered the text over centuries of copying. Modern Bible translations mainly follow this “critical text” approach, which weighs the age and quality of manuscripts very heavily.

The other side emphasizes what is commonly called the “Majority Text” or Byzantine text tradition. This view points out that the overwhelming majority of surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts agree with one another in most places. Many of these manuscripts are from the medieval period, especially after the ninth century, but supporters argue that such widespread agreement shows careful preservation by the Greek-speaking Church over many centuries. Their reasoning is often summarized with the phrase, “the majority is better.” They question why only a few older manuscripts should outweigh thousands of later manuscripts that agree together. Supporters of the Majority Text also argue that some of the oldest manuscripts disagree with each other more often than people realize, and may reflect a smaller regional tradition rather than the text most widely used by the Church historically.

A major part of the discussion centers on how manuscripts survived through history. Those who prefer the oldest manuscripts argue that the dry climate of places like Egypt helped preserve very old copies that otherwise would have worn out through normal church use. In contrast, supporters of the Majority Text argue that manuscripts heavily used by churches naturally wore out and had to be recopied, meaning the text tradition most used by believers may not always survive in the very oldest physical copies. In other words, one side focuses more on closeness in time to the apostles, while the other

focuses more on widespread preservation and consistent use across generations.

The history of the King James Version and the New King James Version is tied closely to this debate. In the early 1500s, a scholar named Desiderius Erasmus compiled one of the first printed Greek New Testaments using the manuscripts available to him at the time. His work eventually became known as the Textus Receptus, meaning "Received Text." The translators of the King James Version mainly used this Greek text when producing the KJV in 1611. Because the Textus Receptus was largely based on later Byzantine manuscripts, the KJV reflects that textual tradition.

When the New King James Version was produced in the late twentieth century, its translators chose to preserve the traditional textual base of the KJV --- while updating the English language into a more modern style. For that reason, the NKJV still primarily follows the Textus Receptus. However, the NKJV also includes many footnotes that inform readers where the Majority Text or the older critical-text manuscripts differ. This allows readers to see where manuscript debates exist without completely changing the familiar wording of the KJV tradition.

Critics on both sides raise strong concerns about the other position. Those who favor the Majority Text often argue that many of the oldest manuscripts, especially those connected to Egypt and Alexandria, came from regions where false teachings and heavy philosophical influence were present in the early centuries of Christianity. They point out that Alexandria was associated with allegorical interpretation and various theological controversies, and they question whether manuscripts preserved there may reflect a corrupted textual tradition. They also note that some of the oldest manuscripts frequently disagree with one another, contain corrections by later scribes, and sometimes omit verses or phrases familiar to Christians for centuries. On the other hand, supporters of the older "critical text" manuscripts argue that the

Byzantine or Majority Text became dominant only after later church standardization, especially during and after the era of Emperor Constantine the Great. They suggest that because there is not a complete, unbroken chain of surviving Byzantine manuscripts going all the way back to the first centuries, there was opportunity for smoothing changes, harmonizations between Gospel accounts, clarifying additions, or traditional readings to gradually enter the text over time. They also argue that when many later manuscripts descend from the same textual family, having a “majority” does not necessarily prove originality, since thousands of copies can ultimately trace back to a smaller number of earlier manuscripts. Both sides therefore accuse the other of relying on a textual tradition that may have been altered at some stage in history, which is why the debate continues among sincere scholars and believers today.

I want to also add, that while the argument against the “majority texts” centered on the view that while there were a lot of them, they came from a late medieval corrupted time and therefore can’t be trusted as much as the older “Alexandrian” texts. However, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century, papyrus discoveries of Papyrus 45, 46, 66 & 75, which were much earlier than most Byzantine copies, sometimes only 100 to 150 years removed from the apostles, showed that papyri do not always fit easily into one text-family category or the other. Some of these readings matched the later Byzantine readings. This mattered because some readings labeled “late-Byzantine” were now demonstrably present centuries earlier. This provided evidence that the Byzantine tradition may preserve some ancient readings rather than being entirely secondary.

Another thing to also consider is that the now rediscovered older Alexandrian texts were not available to the majority of Christians from about 800 A.D. to about 1800 A.D. The vast majority of manuscripts available to Christians were the Byzantine-type manuscripts. Would

God have allowed around 1000 years for the older texts to be isolated and not heavily used if they were more accurate?

Today, faithful pastors and scholars can be found on both sides of this discussion. Some believe the earliest manuscripts provide the clearest window into the original writings of the apostles, while others believe the manuscripts preserved and copied by the majority of believers over centuries deserve greater trust. Despite the debate, it is important to remember that the vast majority of the New Testament is the same across all manuscript traditions, and no major Christian teaching depends entirely on one disputed passage.

United Church of God has a long history of placing greater trust in the majority texts.

With that said, this debate becomes important to John 5:3 & 4. The last part of John 5:3 and all of verse 4 states: “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 text is not in the oldest Greek manuscripts. Some believe that this may have been left out because the scribe found the “angel explanation” difficult or because the wording appeared superstitious.

This section of scripture begins appearing in later Byzantine manuscripts, often with variations of wording. Some manuscripts even mark it with symbols that essentially indicate “this section is absent from older copies” and “some manuscripts do not contain this”. This is interesting because it shows that scribes were comparing manuscripts and knew that textual differences existed. This undercuts the simplistic assumption that scribes blindly copied mechanically without awareness. These notes do not automatically prove that a passage was inauthentic, only that there were known disputes.

Some modern scholars believe scribes inserted the statement as a marginal explanation to clarify why the sick people gathered around the pool of Bethesda waiting for the water to move (clearly shown in verse 7 which is in the older manuscripts). These scholars believe that over time this explanatory footnote entered the body of actual text (instead of being retained as just a note).

Even if this is true, we then still have two ideas. One is that the scribe HIMSELF BELIEVED that an angel really did come down and do this and so he included that thought into a note that eventually became part of the text. Or two, that the scribe is recording what the PEOPLE in the first century sitting around the pool of Bethesda BELIEVED, and the scribe captured the original belief for others to understand the cultural background, and that note became eventually absorbed into the manuscript copies.

So, what do you think? Did an angel literally come down on behalf of God the Father and do this? Would God work in a way that has humans pushing, climbing over each other, etc... to be “first” into the water so they could be healed at the expense of the others who were trying to also get there first?

Do we have to know? We don't. Ultimately, what we must understand is at that time the people by this pool believed that when the waters “were stirred up”, the first to enter the pool would be healed. This is the backdrop to Jesus healing this man here, And Jesus would show them that they didn't have to strive to be the first into the water at the expense of other people --- that He was the better way. We'll cover that tomorrow.

Day 773 – TUESDAY: May 19<sup>th</sup>

John 5:5–18

Daily Deep Dive:

Verses 5-6 – What’s interesting to me here is that we are given a very specific amount of time that this man had been suffering. Why did God want John to record this exact time? 38 years before this time frame, Jesus had not yet been born. 38 years before, He would have existed as part of the God Family, known as the Word. My assumption would be that the Word (preincarnate Jesus Christ) would have heard this man’s prayers for approximately 6 or 7 years (assuming that Jesus is around 31 years old here and spent 9 months in utero). Did God allow Jesus to have these memories as a human or bring them to remembrance through the Holy Spirit? Notice verse 6 here says Jesus “knew that he already had been in that condition a long time”.

Verse 7 – It’s interesting to me that Jesus doesn’t even respond to what the man says in verse 7. He doesn’t confirm or deny anything about this strange situation. I should mention that when they excavated this site where the pool was discovered, that the Roman’s had built a Temple over top of this pool to Asclepius. This is significant in the fact that Asclepius was the Roman god of healing/medicine. His symbol was the famous staff with a serpent wrapped around it (aka the Rod of Asclepius), which is still used today as a medical symbol. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and especially after Emperor Hadrian rebuilt the city as Aelia Capitolina in the second century A.D., the area appears to have been transformed into a healing sanctuary. People would visit Asclepius temples seeking miraculous healing through use of “sacred” waters, rituals, sacrifices, etc. Nonvenomous snakes often roamed these temples as a symbol of renewal and healing through the shedding of their skin. There is debate over whether Roman healing worship developed later at this site (already known for being a famous healing location, or whether the healing idea was already influenced through Hellenization and adopted by the Jewish people.

Verse 8 – Jesus doesn't have this man enter the water, or do anything associated with this site. This man is healed without rituals, simply by the word of Jesus: "Rise, take up your bed and walk."

Verse 9 – We learn here that this is another example of Jesus healing on His Holy Sabbath day.

Verse 10 – According to the traditions/laws that the Jews had established, it was unlawful to carry anything in either hand, in their bosom or on their shoulders that weighed more than just a couple of ounces (weight of two dried figs). Additionally, it was specifically also against their laws to roll up a bed on the Sabbath. All of this was thought to be "work".

Take note that in verse 8 Jesus had specifically told this man to take up his bed and walk. Jesus would never command a man to sin, and this was not a sin to do on the Sabbath day.

Verse 13 – Here it seems that Jesus, not wanting to draw attention or make a scene at this location ("a multitude being in that place), immediately after commanding this man to "Rise, take up your bed and walk.", slips into the crowd and disappears, likely before anyone can notice what had just miraculously occurred.

Verse 14 – Notice that Jesus draws a connection to this man's condition and sin. Specifically commanding him to "sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you". We know that not all trials and health conditions are as a result of sin, yet, here clearly this one seems to be. We aren't given any more specifics than that.

Verse 16 – Here notice that these religious leaders aren't in denial about the amazing miracle that had just occurred in this man's life. He had been in this affliction for 38 years --- and now he's been healed. But instead of sharing in this man's joy and marveling at this amazing

miracle, what do they do? They want to kill the Man responsible for doing this because it was done on the Sabbath. Their religious ideas had clouded their ability to see and reason clearly. The NKJV uses the word “persecuted”. This word in the Greek typically meant “to pursue intensely”, “chase after”. And because in this verse it’s in the imperfect tense, it means they kept doing it. In the first century, this word would be used for a hunter pursuing his prey or a soldier chasing an enemy. The imagery is active and relentless.

Verses 17-18 – After this healing next to the pool of Bethesda and the conflict with the man carrying his mat on the Sabbath, this verse at first glance felt abrupt to me and out of context. However, after considering this more in the Jewish context of this man working on the Sabbath by carrying his mat, and Jesus working on the Sabbath by healing, it makes sense that Jesus would make a clarifying comment about work. We understand per Genesis that the God rested (ceased) from the creation work, but clearly God still sustained the universe and life, and certain things like judgment, love and mercy. They never stop.

Here Jesus was making the case that God is always (at all times) active in certain things/work. And THEN Jesus makes the explosive statement “**and I have been working.**” We aren’t left to wonder what they thought this meant or how this made them feel. We see in verse 18 that this made them want to kill Him even more because not only did He break (in their minds) the Sabbath, but He claimed God was His Father (and all that they believed He was claiming by that).

Day 774 – WEDNESDAY: May 20<sup>th</sup>

John 5:19 – 24

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 19 – In response to their reaction to His statement: "**My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.**"

Jesus responds again. It's important as we consider His response, that we keep firmly in our minds what is the issue at hand, which is that to them Jesus is trampling on/breaking God's law about the Sabbath by healing on the Sabbath. Jesus brings this whole argument back around to God and God's work again. How can Jesus do these miracles? Does He Himself have the power to do His own miracles? Or is God the Father ultimately doing the miracles and thus the work? Jesus was simply an extension of the Father doing what the Father was doing and wanting Him to do. God the Father was doing the work they were condemning. If you would like to dive deeper into whether Jesus Christ Himself had the power to do miracles apart from God, I gave a sermon back in 2022, entitled: "Was Jesus Christ a Demigod?"

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/was-jesus-christ-demigod>

Another aspect of this verse is that in their Jewish culture, the son typically grew up learning the trade of his father. They would start watching and then practicing the same trade. The son would essentially apprentice under his father. Jesus is using this well-known cultural aspect to make a comparison between Him learning as a good Son from His Father.

Verse 20 As we see in the next verse, in this culture a loving father would teach his sons the trade they knew. If the father didn't, it would harm their son's development and ability to grow and make a living. God the Father, as the greatest example of love, would of course show His Son what to do. Jesus essentially tells them that they haven't seen anything yet. The miracle of healing this man by the pool of Bethesda was nothing in comparison with what God would do through Him --- which He's about to explain.

Verse 21 – The Jews knew God's Word. They knew the recorded accounts of God healing and resurrecting people back to life (through Elijah in 1 Kings 17 and Elisha in 2 Kings 4). Jesus continues to work off

this idea that what His Father is doing, He learns and also does and will do. Would they ever criticize God for healing or resurrecting someone on the Sabbath? No, of course they wouldn't. So why would they criticize Jesus?

So how does Jesus, the Son, give life to whom He will? Clearly one way we will see Jesus do this is that God will work through Him to raise people back from the dead. The Gospel accounts record three individuals that Jesus raised back from the dead (compare Luke 7:11 – 17, Luke 8:40 – 56, John 11:1-44). However, at this point in John 5, Jesus hasn't done any of these yet, but they are coming in the future.

I would argue, Christ even in physical healing was giving "life" back to individuals. If you were a leper, paralyzed, etc., and Jesus restored you to health, I imagine you would feel as if you got your life back.

The greatest meaning here I believe is to look at what Jesus was truly offering. Eternal life! He is offering the opportunity to hear and understand, to repent, to be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, to grow and change so as to one day become a spirit God-being. In just seven more verses we will come to the amazing statement, "for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice". But before we come to this verse, let's see how Jesus continues to advance this idea.

Verse 22 – A review of the Old Testament reveals many scriptures talking about the judgement of God. In Psalm 9:8 "He shall judge the world in righteousness, And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness." In Psalm 96:13 "For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth." In Ecclesiastes 12:14 "For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil." In Joel 3:12 "For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations." There are many more examples (Isaiah 2:4,

Malachi 3:5, etc...). The Jews hearing His words that the "Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" would clearly have understood Jesus to be claiming to be not only God's Son, but also the God that all of these verses were referring to.

Why would God the Father not do this judging? Why wouldn't the Father judge everyone? Well, He could, and it would be within His right to do so. But Jesus had the unique experience that made Him uniquely qualified to judge mankind. In Hebrews 4:15–16 it says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Jesus lived this life; He experienced temptations; and He is the perfect Judge for mankind.

Verse 23 – It doesn't take away anything from God the Father for Jesus Christ to be honored, or even worshiped. God the Father and the Son are in perfect unity of purpose and mind. The idea of honor in the Greek is "to prize", "to value", "to esteem". It says we are to honor the Son "just as" we honor the Father. The Greek for "just as" can mean "in proportion as" or "in the degree that" (Thayer's dictionary). Neither should be ignored or minimized. Both God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are worthy of worship, honor and praise.

Verse 24 – This verse is one of the richest salvation passages in the Gospels. Let's break it down. Jesus begins in the Greek with "amēn amēn" (ἀμήν ἀμήν). This came from Hebrew 'âmên (אָמֵן). Amen can mean "so be it", "truly", "surely". Typically, when "amen" is placed at the end of a line, it carries the idea of "so be it" or "may it be fulfilled" -- but when it comes at the beginning of a sentence, it carries the idea of "surely", "truly" "of a truth" (Thayer's).

In the Greek it contained the idea of "firmness". When we went through the Old Testament, we talked about how in Hebrew when you had the same word twice in a row, it strengthened the meaning. This is

the same here when Jesus said “amēn amēn”. It would mean “most assuredly”, “most truly”, in other words, “What I’m about to tell you is absolutely firm and you can trust and build your whole life on it.”

He then tells us two important things:

First, we must “hear” His voice. In the Greek, this is in the present tense indicating it is not a onetime action --- but carries the idea that we keep hearing and continue to be attentively listening to Jesus. In the Hebrew language you had the word “shema” (or shâma` - שמע). This contained all the meanings of hearing, understanding, responding, and obeying. In their culture, they clearly understood “to hear” meant responding and obeying His words.

Second, we must “believe in Him who sent” Him. Again, this believing is in the present tense indicating ongoing active trust and faith. This is important because Jesus throughout this whole section has been emphasizing that He was sent by the Father. He does the works of the Father. His words come from the Father. Rejecting Him is the same as rejecting the Father. He is building a unity between the fact that believing in Him, following Him, obeying His Words, is the same as believing, following and obeying God, and vice versa. When you obey and have faith in Jesus, you are obeying and having faith in God the Father, and vice versa. The obedience and faith in each of the two go hand-in-hand, and cannot be separated. It comes with hearing, obeying and faith in both God and Jesus Christ? Everlasting life! That’s not only what we’ve been called to, but its truth is seen as a present reality. We have it. It’s laid up for us and is waiting simply for the right time.

Then the verse says, **“and shall not come into judgment”**.

We understand that in scripture, Christians now are in a period of judgment (1 Peter 4:17) --- and that we each will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).

In Romans 8:1 it says something profound: "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." In this idea of "condemnation" is the thought of an "adverse sentence". It's meant to bring the imagery to mind of someone standing in a court receiving a "guilty" verdict and the sentencing/punishment that comes along with that. Each of us should have received a "guilty" verdict for breaking God's law(s). However, Jesus took on the responsibility for our sins and freed us from receiving our condemnation. That case (for our sins) has been heard, and Christ has paid what we deserved. That case can't be tried again, and we do not have to stand and face sentencing/punishment for those sins. We are no longer under a death sentence. We also have the ability to daily come before God and ask for forgiveness from any current sins we've committed. As God's people, called to live differently from this world, as we yield and are led by the Spirit and we "walk" in that Spirit and choose not to reject God's way and not to walk in the ways of this present evil world, then we demonstrate to God that we continue to hear/obey the words of Jesus Christ --- and have faith in both God and Jesus Christ --- and therefore there is no condemnation (no judgment) against us. Yet, God is still evaluating our faithfulness and our works, and there will be rewards handed out based on what we do. May each us keep striving to grow and overcome, to do good works, to repent when we make mistakes, and to keep enduring faithfully to the end!

In a similar way, Jesus then says, "**but has passed from death into life**". Earlier we talked about the present tense of verbs in the Greek --- which shows an ongoing continuous action (or something that should be ongoing). Here the Greek for "passed" is not present tense but the "perfect tense". In Koine Greek the present tense describes a completed action with continuing present results. So, the action is done, yet the impact of that completed action has ongoing results.

Here Christ is talking about someone who has left “death’s realm” (being under the death penalty) and is now in “life’s realm” --- and now remains in this new condition with all that comes along with it. Being in “life” means living each day in a reconciled relationship with God the Father, having access to the Father and having participation in what God is doing in His plan.

How does this fit the greater context that Jesus has been describing? John 5 has been about authority, life-giving power, resurrection and judgment. Jesus is showing that He is the Way. That those who remain in a committed relationship with Him, following and striving to obey, fall into a new category of “life”, free of the condemnation of “death” that will come to its fullest reality when they are given a new spiritual body. In no way are we talking about “once saved always saved” --- where a person can live however they would like because they “accepted Jesus”. We are talking about a person who has been truly called and drawn by God, committed to God and Jesus Christ through baptism, received God’s Spirit through the laying on of hands by an ordained minister of Jesus Christ, and remains committed through action in their life to becoming like Jesus Christ and repenting when they fall short.

Day 775 – THURSDAY: May 21<sup>st</sup>

John 5:25–29

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 25 – Here, Christ talks about both a future reality (the hour is coming) and also a present reality (and now is) regarding the fact that the “dead will hear the voice of the Son of God...and live.” Looking to the future, not a present reality, Jesus describes a time when the literal dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and live again. This looks forward to the resurrections of the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:52). But in the present reality, before baptism/conversion, we were all, as Ephesians 2:1 describes it, “dead in

trespasses and sins”. That was our state. But then we heard the voice of the Son of God. Not everyone has “heard” that voice and been “awakened” during this life. Most haven’t. Most haven’t received that opportunity.

Let’s read the fullness of Ephesians 2:1 through 5: “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”. We are a part of those who have already heard His voice and lived, even as we understand that we look forward to the time of the first resurrection --- when we will be transformed into a spiritual being.

Verse 26 – God did not receive life from another source --- and He doesn’t depend on another being for existence. Not only is God an eternal being without beginning or end, God also has the unique ability to bring life out of nothing. He has life in Himself. This refers to both physical life and physical creation, but also to the ability to give eternal life. John has already told us in John 1 that Jesus Christ, as the Word, was with God and was God. So here it’s not trying to make any claims about Jesus Christ being a created being. We have already seen through this whole section and the Gospel accounts as a whole, that as a human Son of God living on this earth, Jesus received authority, judgement, disciples, glory, the Holy Spirit, etc. from God the Father. As a human, Jesus did not inherently possess life in Himself, to call people out of darkness, or to grant them eternal life. This was “granted” to Him by the Father.

Verse 27 - After all these statements, we might expect Jesus to say here, “because He is the Son of God”, but He doesn’t. He says, “because He is the Son of Man”. Why? He’s clearly been making the point that He is the Son of God. Why now the shift? Throughout the Old Testament, the phrase “son of man” is used more than 100 times to simply mean a human being --- a regular man. Jesus may be emphasizing that He is a real human man --- and that while He was God still in identity --- He was not some demigod with part man and part god powers. Throughout this section, He has been emphasizing that He doesn’t do anything apart from the Father, and He is preparing to make that statement extremely clear in verse 30 (“**I can of Myself do nothing**”). However, in addition to this point, there was a prophetic phrase from Daniel 7:13–14. It says: “I was watching in the night visions, And behold, *One* like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed.” Notice here in Daniel that it describes this Being in the vision as being “like” the Son of Man. In this vision, Daniel sees a Being that appears like a human being but isn’t. And He comes to another Being, here called the “Ancient of Days”, but clearly represents God the Father. Here the Ancient of Days gives to this One who is “like the Son of Man” dominion, glory, authority and a kingdom that should last forever. Here in John 5:27, the context is that He is receiving authority, honor and the right to judge. This connection of themes between these two chapters is undeniable. Jesus Christ is “the Son of Man” that Daniel saw! In Daniel 7 there are two Beings: the Father (called “the Ancient of Days”); and a Son (called “One like the Son of Man”).

Verse 28 – This is a clear reference to Jesus Christ’s direct involvement in the resurrections.

Verse 29 – Here in this verse we see two general categories of resurrections, but not necessarily two events that take place at the same time. This passage shows the ultimate outcomes of humanity. A resurrection to life (first resurrection to eternal life), and a resurrection that will involve judgement, in which those who ultimately reject God and Jesus Christ will be condemned to eternal death. It’s important to note that it’s not Jesus’ focus here to get into a long and detailed discussion on timing and all the details involved in judgement. We certainly are striving to be a part of the resurrection to life at the second coming of Jesus Christ. All of the rest of mankind, who have never truly known God and His Way, will have an opportunity to be resurrected during the second resurrection --- and will be judged during a period of understanding and opportunity. I should point out that the word here translated “condemnation” in the NKJV involves the whole judgement/sentencing process. A judgement can result in a verdict of “not guilty” as human beings accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and walk according to the Spirit. We as firstfruits of God have already accepted Jesus Christ --- and strive daily to walk according to the Spirit. May we never cease in committing our whole lives to becoming like Jesus Christ in every way possible!

Day 776 – FRIDAY: May 22<sup>nd</sup>

John 5:30 – 39

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 30 – Similar to verse 19, Jesus here plainly reveals that He of Himself can do nothing. This is important to understand as it shows us that Jesus was a full human being even while being God in identity. Therefore, since Jesus could do nothing of and by Himself, every time we see Jesus perform some healing or miracle, including any miracle on the Sabbath, we automatically know the action had God the Father’s

stamp of approval by the fact the miracle took place, because it was God the Father who made all things possible.

Therefore, within every judgement or decision made -- who to heal or not to, when to do a miracle or not, whether or not to heal or do something on the Sabbath-- Jesus always was operating perfectly within the will of His Father. None of us can say "we do not seek our own". We each have biases, selfish desires, etc. that lead us to show partiality and make imperfect decisions. God the Father and Jesus Christ are the only perfect judges who are free of prejudice, partiality, biases, etc.

Verse 31 – Here Jesus begins a sort of legal dialog. In that culture, everyone knew that a person's own unsupported testimony was not legally valid in a court. In Jewish culture, a man could not testify as a witness even for his own wife, because they were considered one (John Gill commentary). Other witnesses were needed to testify whether something was true or not. Jesus has been accused of breaking the Sabbath. He has now gone through a long set of statements to reveal that He is God's Son and working only within God the Father's will. He will not try to be His own witness that He is God's Son and the Messiah. Other witnesses would need to do that. Who are those witnesses?

Verse 32 – This verse is a bit vague, but all the commentaries I read, believe Jesus is referring to His Father (and this is why translators chose to capitalize "He" in the statement. This makes sense that first and foremost, God the Father's witness, as evident by the miracles Jesus is able to do, which is the greatest testimony that could be given.

Verse 33 – The NKJV says "You have sent to John". The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem had sent priests and Levites to John the Baptizer in John 1:19-, who had told them he was not the Christ --- but that He was coming. Then in John 1:29-30, when he saw Jesus, he said ""Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the

world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' And John 1:32 tells us plainly that "...John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him."

These are two witnesses! That was all that was needed (Deuteronomy 17:6, Matthew 18:16)!

Verse 34 – After God the Father's witness, Jesus didn't need anything from any man. Jesus reminded them of what John the Baptizer said in addition to what He is now claiming, to remind them that they are staring face-to-face with the One who can save them.

Verse 35 – John the Baptizer was no longer functioning in this role, as he was now still in prison. John the Apostle, described John the Baptizer in John 1:7–9 saying "This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world." A lamp in the first century was not self-sustaining. It had to be lit by another source and continually supplied with oil. John was a lamp! He was empowered by God's Spirit and existed to point others toward Jesus Christ rather than himself. This might also be a reference to the prophecy in Psalm 132:17 where it says "I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed."

There may be one additional layer here. John the Baptizer is not only described as a lamp, but as "burning". Luke uses this same word in Luke 24:32 to describe how the disciples "heart burned within them" when the resurrected Jesus Christ had appeared and spoke to them. Here in John 5:35 it could be a reference to John the Baptizer's zeal and fervent dedication. His preaching stirred the crowds and brought people from far and wide to hear him. Even many of the leaders

temporarily admired him. For a time, they enjoyed the excitement and hope surrounding John's preaching about the Messiah to come.

Verse 36 – Again, even greater than John the Baptizer's witness of Jesus, was the very works, such as healing this man by the pool of Bethesda. They were evidence and a witness to the truth of Jesus Christ, and that He was directly sent by the Father.

Verse 37 – In John 1:18 it previously told us: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*." Here in verse 37 we have another statement, that "You [all] have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form." These scriptures are foundational scriptures that help us to understand that the God being that the individuals of the Old Testament interacted with (saw and heard) was the preincarnate Jesus Christ, and yet, God the Father was always involved in perfect unity with the Word (preincarnate Jesus Christ). John 17:26 in the NLT says "I have revealed You to them, and I will continue to do so."

Verse 38 – Jesus is not merely saying they don't know the scripture, the religious leaders, and many of the Jewish people in general knew the text of the Old Testament. God's Way had not become a part of them. They had not internalized and practiced the Truth of God. Jesus Christ was the living embodiment of God's Way and we was living it right in front of them, and yet they did not recognize God's character in Jesus.

Verse 39 – They thought that by understanding God's Word and building a hedge around His law, that they could earn salvation; but the reality was all of God's scripture pointed to Jesus. The more I study God's Word, including the Old Testament scripture, the more I have come to see so much of the symbols and practices of the Old Testament were always designed to point to the coming Savior of

mankind. These people, who thought they were standing up for God by rejecting Jesus couldn't have been more wrong, because they didn't really understand God's Word and what God really wanted them to become.

So who were the witnesses?

1. God the Father Himself
2. John the Baptizer
3. The works that Jesus had done
4. The Scriptures that pointed to Him

Day 777 – SATURDAY: May 23<sup>rd</sup>

John 5:40–47

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 40 – Here Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. Even with all the witnesses pointing to His identity, the religious leaders refused to come to Him because He didn't fit into the box they wanted Him to fit in.

Verse 41 – The NKJV here says, "I do not receive honor from men." The Greek word here translated "honor" is a very rich and flexible word. It can mean honor, glory, one's reputation, praise, status, recognition, and esteem. In classical Greek, it dealt with people's opinion, judgement or what people think about someone. The context means that Jesus wasn't looking for social esteem or public honor from men.

Verse 42 – Had they had the love of God in them, then they would have been in alignment with Jesus Christ, and would have seen as He saw, but they did not.

Verse 43 – Jesus came in alignment with God the Father, but they were rejecting Him. If someone came without the witnesses that Jesus had, and did not come from the Father (but instead came by their own

authority and sought their own way), if it fit within the Jewish religious system they would accept that individual.

Verse 44 – They were more focused on what each other thought, and receiving the praise of men, than being concerned with what God actually thought of them. This will be seen very clearly when we come to John 12:43 (“for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”).

Verse 45 – Jesus Christ did not come into the world to condemn the world (John 3:17), but instead, it was the laws that condemned them as sinners. They put their trust in their law keeping (that was their identity), but it was the law that was condemning them to death --- and should have made their need for Jesus (as their Savior) obvious.

In addition, the laws of God, built on the foundation of love, were being lived out right before them. No one else had ever lived by the law perfectly, and no one lived God’s love perfectly as Jesus did. If they really loved God’s law, and what Moses taught them, they would love, appreciate and accept Jesus Christ.

Verse 46 – Jesus is saying that the writings of Moses—the Torah or Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy)—ultimately point to Him. The Jewish leaders believed they were followers of Moses, yet Jesus declared that Moses himself testified about the coming Messiah (for example, Deuteronomy 18:15). This can be seen throughout the writings of Moses: in the sacrificial system, where the offerings and symbols foreshadowed Christ (especially in the early chapters of Leviticus); in the symbolism of the Passover lamb; in the imagery of the Day of Atonement and the Tabernacle; and in accounts such as the bronze serpent, the manna from heaven, and the rock in the wilderness. Together, these laws, symbols, and events pointed forward to the work and role of Jesus Christ.

Verse 47 – Belief in God’s law and what Moses wrote goes hand-in-hand with what Jesus was teaching and living. If they didn’t really believe and understand what Moses had recorded, how could they believe Jesus who taught and lived by God’s law? They couldn’t.