**Part A: John 5:1-9**

Today, one way to shut somebody up fairly quickly is to call them an extremist. Do you realize that Jesus is extreme? And this might be one of the most extreme chapters in the Bible. It starts out in a fairly benign way, but gets fairly serious.

**Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.**

One aside: In the 19th century many “scholars” thought this entire place was made up. But then they excavated it in the 1890s and proved it existed exactly like John describes, even with the 5 rows of columns. When people trash the Bible today, just wait.

Let’s look at the photos and set the scene (see PowerPoint images). They washed sheep there. The pool was nasty. This is where the most pathetic people in society hung out. They believed an angel came and stirred up the water, but that was probably the result of an on-again off-again flow of water. This was popular superstition. Imagine a gas station in a poor part of town where poor people assemble to buy lotto tickets, and you’re getting close to what this was.

**One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”**

That question seems insensitive. Where would a man like this go to the bathroom? His life would consist of crawling around in his own filth will calloused hands, begging for barely enough food to survive. For 38 years. Can you even begin to imagine that?

**“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.**

 Jesus healed him just like that. His misery was over. He had sought healing in superstition, he found in it Jesus. Jesus came to heal, but we will see in the next two readings that his miracles point to greater truths. Nevertheless, think about this man. What did he think about God? What did he think God thought of him? Why did God make him wait 38 years. Yet God had not forgotten. He was waiting for this very moment. Some of you are suffering long, difficult afflictions. Some of you have family members who are. You might feel like God has forgotten you. But he has not. We usually cannot answer the question, “How long, O Lord?” We usually cannot answer the question, “why?” But we can say, he has not forgotten you, he loves ad forgives you, and he has an eternal purpose for you.

Tangentially, God cares about disabled people, and so should we. Society tends to forget about them, and perhaps we do too. Shame on us if we do. Right now, we lack wheelchair accessible bathrooms. I know that the church addressed this issue a few years ago, came very close to renovating, but that there were some unexpected complications and instead we decided to start the Vine. That’s all great, God led us another direction. But we should keep in mind: eventually we need to address that issue. Now is probably not the time, but we need to have it in the back of our minds. People in wheelchairs don’t want to be stuck up here without access to the bathroom, and they don’t want to be carried down the stairs. So we pray God will bless us with wisdom and the right path for that when the time comes, and in the meantime, we should all be praying for our homebound members who cannot realistically attend church here on Sunday.

In general, we ask God to give us the same compassion he has for the disabled. This is not just a politically correct thing. This is one of those places where politically correct happens to be right in line with the Bible. Compassion on all people, especially the disadvantaged, is something God demonstrates and demands that we demonstrate. Remember, we sin by doing bad or hateful things, but sometimes we sin simply be not doing good and loving things. We can all consider ways we could show more kindness, mercy, and compassion on those who are disabled.

**Part B: John 5:10-18**

**The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”**

We read a similar story this summer. The Sabbath was a day of rest. God commanded they do no work, but the religious leaders at that time made up a whole bunch of extra laws, included, “do not carry anything from one building to another.” So, they were not mad at the man for breaking a rule in the Bible, they were mad at him for breaking a rule their ancestors had made up. It was worse than violating the Bible, he violated tradition.

Think how callous this was. And yet, are we so different today.

**But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ” So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.**

I kind of wonder: where does this man go? What do you do if you are healed? Well, it seems like he went to the temple. He was truly thankful to God. At the same time, he had not even learned Jesus’ name. This is not exactly what you would call a disciple.

**Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”**

How insensitive of Jesus. He did that sometimes. People came to him for healings, and he ended up talking about their sins. When I visit sick people in the hospital, I think I sometimes forget my pastoral duty to preach to them the law and gospel. And yet even this man, who had suffered so much, needed to repent of his sin. He had lived 38 years of misery, and yet Jesus warns him he is in danger of terrible judgment and suffering—and it will soon be clear he has judgment day in mind—if he does not repent.

Are you ever hesitant to apply the law to yourself? Do you think that your background in life excuses your sin. I think psychology has a lot of useful insights, but at the same time, I do not like the way that today we blame our sin on our upbringing. Maybe I’m a jerk sometimes, but who wouldn’t be with a mother like mine. I might be selfish with my money, but I’ve always been poor. I might not be devoted to church, but one time someone said something in church and it hurt my feelings. We are good at making up excuses. But Jesus wants to confront all of us with our own sinfulness. Because if we do not repent, something bad will happen to us. Our sin deserves God’s punishment. Even this poor beggar’s sin deserved the fulness of God’s wrath.

And so do you. And so do your friends, and so do your kids, and so do your coworkers. Let’s not forget it for ourselves, but also not forget it for others. Maybe the reason you’ve stopped sharing your faith or inviting someone to church is you think God will cut them some slack. Not without repentance. And God is perfectly fair in punishing sinner. It only makes us squirm because we are so used to living around unholiness that we are not as bothered by it as we should be. We all need to hear God’s verdict that we have failed, otherwise the gospel will continue to seem like a waste of time to us and our friends.

When you love someone a lot, you don’t like this. I can’t imagine I would have the nerve to tell a man paralyzed for 38 years that he needed to stop sinning. But it’s what we all need to hear, and if you really love someone, you’ll tell them what they need to hear. Just like when you really love someone, you’ll yell at them to look out for the bus that’s about to run them over.

**The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.**

So they persecuted Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, and his response? He could have said, “Your rules are just made up, and not found in the Bible, so they are illegitimate.” But he takes a more striking approach. And they knew what it meant. This chapter is one of the most strong assertions that Jesus is divine in the whole Bible. He called God his father. They understood what he meant. Back in their day, you didn’t call God “my father.” It was seen as inappropriate. It was only after Jesus revealed the father to us, and made him our father by reconciling us to God, that we started calling him father on a regular basis. The Lord’s Prayer was revolutionary in its day.

And he said that he was working just like his father. Back then they had apprenticeships, and that is the image here. A son who is equal to God. Jesus is equal to the Father in terms of being divine, eternal, all powerful, etc.. But he is subordinate to the father in terms of his function or role. It was Jesus who laid that power aside and took on flesh to save us by obeying the Father for us.

In the next section, Jesus will say a few more things that are clear evidence he claimed to be God. He claims to have the power to give life, to raise the dead, and to judge. These were things that only God could do, and the Jews in his day knew it.

Maybe some of you realize that Satan is always attacking Christianity and trying to undermine it with false teachings. Jesus’ divinity is always under attack. Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to be Christian but deny that Jesus was fully God as expressed here. Many churches do not emphasize that Jesus was divine. They say things like, “He was a radical,” or “He was a revolutionary.” That sort of true, but if you stop there you’re missing the most important part. He claimed to be divine. Please take a look one more time at the phrase, “making himself equal with God.” Did you know that was in the bible? If not, try to remember it. When you have a chance to talk to a Mormon friend, you can ask them, “Did you know Jesus claimed to be equal with God the Father?” When you’re trying to think of a way to share your faith with someone, you can say, “Jesus was God, coming into this world as a human, like a king who sneaks out of his castle dressed up like a commoner.” That’s why we pray to Jesus. That’s why we worship him.

Do you understand what a huge claim this is? If you’ve grown up with it your whole life, maybe you’ve forgotten how amazing this is. If this is true, the only proper response is to fall down in repentant worship. Which is why people have always been threatened by this message. Jesus’ enemies did not miss what a shocking claim this was. They saw that it threatened their comfortable security. It exposed their sin. They couldn’t have it. They ended up killing him because of it.

And we should realize, when we clearly communicate about Jesus to people, some will find it very offensive and threatening. The only way to avoid that is to clam up. We all feel that temptation and sometimes we do. But in our third reading, we’ll see why that is not the appropriate response. Instead, we should follow God’s call to proclaim his praises to all.

**Part C: John 5:19-29**

So these days being an outspoken Christian will mark you. Fortunately, there are still a lot of us left in Spokane, so it will not mark you the way it might in Seattle, but it will still mark you, especially among certain demographics. So should we just clam up about Jesus’ being the son of God?

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

The invisible, eternal, infinite God is revealed in Jesus Christ. They work in complete harmony. There’s nothing Jesus said or did that wasn’t in sync with the Father’s will. And part of that will was giving us eternal life. When we honor Jesus, we are honoring God himself. Believing in God will not be offensive to people of this world. Even believing in a watered down Jesus is not so offensive. But believing in the true Jesus forces everyone to take a side. They either honor him and honor God or reject him as divine, and therefore reject God.

**“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.**

What does eternal life begin? The moment you believe. For many of you it began at your baptism when God first put that water of rebirth and renewal on your head and pronounced over you that you are his. Eternal life has already begun. You may not feel like it, but it’s there. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. You will not perish. Jesus cleansed you of all your sins. He bore them on the cross. He overcame sin and its punishment, death, by rising from the grave. Jesus was condemned in your place. Now there is on condemnation for you. Jesus was judged in your place. There is now no judgement for you. When you hear his voice speaking to you in the word, he calls you to a new life. At the moment you die, you will continue the eternal life you already started. Your soul will go to be with God. You will not experience death because you have crossed from death to life by trusting him.

What a special comfort. Maybe you’re not worried about dying. Well, first of all, accidents happen. We never really know. Second, life flies by. Third, there are people around you with the end on their minds. Open your eyes. Eternal life never ends. Life on this earth is over in the blink of an eye. Which one really matters? Jesus calling us to remember that eternal life is what is important. And you have it! Isn’t that great!

Think how excited we get on Friday at 2 oclock. Who cares what happens in the next few hours, I’m going home soon. I can make it through anything, and even in a good mood, because my rest is coming. Well, our eternal weekend is coming. And it is a gift for all who believe. But not everyone will go to heaven. Jesus paid for everyone’s sins, but not everyone receives that gift by faith. As Jesus said earlier in John, they stand condemned already.

**“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.**

The day is coming soon, and when we look back on this life, the only thing that mattered will be, did you believe in Jesus or not? That makes an eternal difference.

Now, the day of judgment will be a public affair. God will demonstrate his righteousness to everyone. And so he will provide evidence for his guilty or not guilty verdict.  For believers, he will point to the good things our faith led us to do. He will show how you knew him, worshipped him, and followed him. This is not what saves you. It is only Jesus’ blood that saves you. It is only the faith God gives you that connects you to this sacrifice. Yet, the things you did that flowed from faith will be the evidence God points to.

For unbelievers, their evil will speak for them. Since they are not connected to Jesus, they remain in their sins. How sad that they remain in sins that are already paid for.

But this will be the only thing that mattered. Thank God it is already settled. Thank God you already have eternal life NOW. For those of you who are facing serious illnesses, surgeries, or have friends who are, you are already on the path to live forever. Nothing can take that away from you because it is a gift from God. For those of you who have lost loved ones in the Lord, remember that we look forward to the resurrection of the body. If you have lost loved ones who did not believe, I encourage you to simply put it in God’s hands and be at peace. Ultimately, God’s final judgment is his to make, not yours, and can focus on the present truth.

And a final challenge. We live in a society that buries its head in the sand when it comes to aging and death. We revere youth and don’t know how to handle it. Especially younger people. And this might be a barrier to someone coming to know Jesus. Look for opportunities to talk about these things with people. When you or a loved one is suffering, take the conversation to eternal life. make sure you’re clear that we’re only right with God through Jesus.

Let’s end by reconsidering these words of Jesus; **I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. You have eternal life, you will not be condemned. You have crossed over from death to live. May that fill you with peace, joy, and all comfort as you humbly serve your God. Amen.**