

John 5:1-18

Context: It appears that John is drawing a line under Jesus' encounter with the Official and the healing of his son. And while we can't ignore what came before, we don't need to have it direct our reading of this text either. We can arrive at this conclusion because John writes: "after this," and not: "then," or "so," or "now," or "meanwhile." Also, there is a radical change in location, from Galilee to Jerusalem. There's a clear break between chapters 4 and 5. (Of course if it WAS clear, why spend a paragraph explaining it?)

5:1

We are not told what feast it was that was celebrated when Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Commentaries like to speculate. It was either the Feast of Booths (remembering the 40 year wilderness-wandering after leaving Egypt) or the Feast of the New Year. Since John doesn't tell us (as he did when it was the Passover), we shouldn't use the results of our speculation to influence how we read what comes next. It simply removes any questions a reader would have as to why Jesus was back in Jerusalem.

5:2

There are a couple of reasons why John might explain the architectural layout of Jerusalem. First, John is writing after AD 70, when the city was destroyed. Second, He is writing to people who would not have known the specifics of the layout of the city: Gentiles. We have already determined that the audience John has in mind is, at least in part, not familiar with Israel and Jewish customs and culture. I'd go with the second option; there is no reason to believe John wrote after AD 70, and any attempt to prove so (from this text, at least) is being driven by an agenda that has, at its heart, a goal of undermining the authority and inspiration of this text.

5:3

Now it gets interesting!

The ESV (and other translations) skip 5:4, claiming it is a later-addition to the Gospel of John because... well... there's no way that THIS could happen: "...waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water, whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had..."

OK, so why is this not in our English Translations?

- The "most reliable" manuscripts don't have it. (What is it that makes them "reliable"? Just might be a circular argument...)

- Anti-supernatural bias.
- Scandal of particularity, or one-timeliness.

Even if this verse was not in the original manuscript, we cannot rule out that what is stated in 5:4 is true. (It just might not have made it into John's original autograph.)

The information furnished by the missing 5:4 actually helps us understand why this man was located where he was, and lends a degree of irony to the question Jesus would ask.

5:5

John zooms in on what the subject for this story will be. From the general to the particular. 38 years being a paralytic. That's a long time. Enough to become comfortable in misery, accept the condition as one's lot in life, and lose hope in being cured. (Although those around you are being cured regularly.)

5:6

Um... really? Seems like an obvious question to ask: of course the man wants to be made well! Why else would he be at a pool where healing took place? But if he had really wanted to be made well, you would think that, over 38 years, it would have happened. (Or at least this is what someone who puts the worst-spin on things would think.) The REAL question is: what does it mean to be "healed"? We're about to find out!

5:7

The man thinks along the lines he had been trained to think. Healing happens when the angel stirs the water down by the pool. And yet, for 38 years, this "wisdom" had done nothing of benefit for this man. (Do you see the point that John is about to make... blind leading the blind... light and darkness... loving darkness, etc?)

5:8

Notice that the man never really answered Jesus. He assumed that if healing was going to take place, it would happen the way he was told it would happen... but that, for 38 years, had yet to be realized.

But all it took was one word from Jesus... hmmm. Interesting.

5:9

We said that we were not going to let the previous passages govern how we looked at this text. But we can see how this text fits in with what has come before it. Jesus turned water into wine with his first sign, showing that he could do what people could not do. In our last passage, Jesus did what only God can do: heal from a distance. So it seems like this miracle is a step back. Jesus already rescued

someone who was at the point of death from a distance. All he does here is give someone the ability to walk. How is this more impressive?

In the last passage, Jesus did the miraculous. However, even in antiquity, there were people who would play doctor... and with some degree of success. But here is someone who, unlike the son of the official, has been in a condition needing healing for a long time. For 38 years, doctors and witchdoctors have been able to try any and every procedure on the man. Nothing. And now Jesus does more with a word than the medical community could do in 38 years.

I didn't take biology of physiology in college, but I've read a couple of articles in Men's Health. If the man was paralyzed for 38 years, his muscles would have atrophied. Even if his underlying condition was cured, he wouldn't have the strength to walk. What Jesus does is more than heal the condition; he restores the man to health. (And foreshadows the resurrection.)

5:10

The Jews (again, a group of leading Jewish people who are unreasonably antagonistic to Jesus) take umbrage to what the man did after being healed: he did work on the Sabbath, picking up his mat. This begs the question: why did Jesus tell the man to pick up his mat? It was an apparent unnecessary requirement to compliment the miracle of his healing. When Jesus told him to pick up his mat, the man had a decision to make: he could either obey Jesus, or he could have done what the "traditions of the elders" said was lawful for him to do on the Sabbath. The man aligns himself with Jesus; he breaks the accepted understanding of what it means to break the Sabbath.

5:11

The man does not appeal to a different reading of the law; he appeals to Jesus. It's as if he said: "YOU are telling me the Law says I should not do what I did; the man who healed me gave me permission to do it. And he has authority to give me permission to do it!"

The man has chosen sides. He has aligned himself with Jesus... even though he doesn't know his name. He put his trust in him because of the miracle Jesus performed. Jesus has not told him anything about who he is, he just healed him.

5:12

We know. The man does not. Neither do the Jews.

5:13

We should not make too much out of the fact that Jesus had not revealed his identity to the man. John does not tell us why. He simply gives us the reason why the man did not know it was Jesus.

That being said, this example of Jesus preferring anonymity is not unique. Often, Jesus would tell his disciples not to tell people who he was after performing

miracles, he would withdraw to places by himself to pray, and often retreat with his disciples away from the crowds. You can't draw too many conclusions (or personal applications) from this, but you can question someone in a Christian leadership position who seems to delight in drawing attention to themselves. (Now watch as I stand up to lead our discussion of this text and dominate the conversation...)

5:14

Which makes us wonder: what was this man doing wrong that he gets rebuked by Jesus? He is at the temple, doing what good Jews did. What is his sin?

- Possibly the fact that he has gone back to living a life like everyone else.
- He should have gone after Jesus instead of going after the temple. After all, it was Jesus who made him well, not the temple. (Let he who has ears to hear...)

5:15

So now the man figures out that it was Jesus who had healed him. Instead of following Jesus, like his disciples were, the man rats Jesus out. Again, the question is: why?

- Maybe because the man did not like what Jesus told him: sin no more.
- Maybe because the man did not believe what Jesus had said could happen: some worse than being paralyzed for 38 years.
- Maybe the man did not believe that Jesus represented something new; that he preferred darkness to light... and the rules and regulations of Judaism that would have prevented his being healed instead of the one who healed him.

5:16

Not only did the Jews come down on the man for picking up his mat on the Sabbath, but they also came down on Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. Darkness. We've already seen how Jesus has taken the place of the Temple, and with it, all that the signs of Judaism pointed to. (Such as the Sabbath... Jesus brings the Sabbath rest that was promised, and which was remembered weekly by generations of observant Jews. Sad that the Christian church today misunderstands the purpose of the Sabbath in our day...)

5:17

Jesus doesn't answer to a 1st Century understanding of the Sabbath Laws. He answers to his Father... who is working on the Sabbath to restore the creation and making right what sin and death made wrong.

5:18

John comes out and tells it to us like it is. Jesus is claiming to be equal with God.

There are a number of churches that subordinate the Son to the Father. And there are several verses that make it look like the Son is subordinate to the Father. However, any subordination Jesus seems to have in relationship to his Father is one of choice, and not nature. Jesus and the Father are one. And yet, the Father sent Jesus and Jesus obeys the will of the Father. It's like a 6'4 250 pound athlete taking orders from his 5'1 98 pound girlfriend. He does so because he wants so, not because he has to.

We leave this text with a decision to make: either Jesus IS equal to God, or he is committing blasphemy. Need help with your decision? Look at the miracles and signs. Who else could be doing what Jesus did unless God was with him? (A little Nicodemus lingo there...)