

RUF Bible Study – John  
Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister<sup>1</sup>  
Sept. 24, 2008  
John 5 – Do you want to be healed?

This week I finished a book I'd like to recommend to you. In *Same Kind of Different As Me*, the authors tell their tale, how two incredibly different men come to be best friends. One of them is Ron Hall. He's a Texas boy who went to TCU. He didn't have much growing up, but he made it work, and eventually fell in love with a young woman named Debbie, married her, bought a house, finished his Master's degree and started selling art. He made it big.

The other man's name is Denver Moore. Denver grew up in Louisiana as a sharecropper. He was one step up from a slave. He worked for The Boss Man. He never owned a thing, lived in a shack, and he picked cotton. This was in the 1960s!!! He couldn't read, didn't have electricity, and basically had no contact with the outside world, so he didn't know he could have had a better life. He'd never heard of a better life. He only knew his life, as hard as it was. But one day he hopped a train and ended up in Ft. Worth, homeless. He says later in the book that being homeless in Ft. Worth was better than living in a shack as a sharecropper in Louisiana, but it was still hard times.

What hope does Denver have? It seems incredibly desperate, lonely and, well, hopeless.

Our text starts with hopelessness. It moves to hope and healing, but only through conflict. We have here Jesus' first "incident" with the Pharisees and teachers of the law. There is a real sense here that Jesus is on trail. John the writer is trying to build a case for Jesus, using this occasion to put him "in the dock" as it were.

What do you think about Jesus thus far in the book of John? Who do you think he is? Has he surprised you yet? Do you have him figured out? Our text will help us to see Jesus and to understand the gospel a little more. Let's look at three claims, two questions and one verdict.

### **Three Claims**

Jesus has healed a man on the Sabbath, a holy day for the Jews. We'll return to a further discussion of this healing, but it's important to know that Jesus will continue to speak about and work on these holy days and festivals. They are the backdrop of what's going on in John. In this first episode, John discusses Jesus' work on the Sabbath.

This healing gets the Pharisees and Jewish leaders hopping mad. They don't like the attention Jesus is getting (fearing the Romans will notice and that will turn out to be inevitably a bad thing for the Jews), and they don't like this business of working on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath had become a pretty complicated thing. What was meant to be a day of worship and rest to show dignity for mankind and respect to God had turned into something else altogether. There were rules about rules about what you could and couldn't do. You couldn't look into a mirror on the Sabbath. For if you looked into a mirror, you might see a grey hair and pluck it out – and that would be work. You couldn't travel on the Sabbath. But you could stake out a claim 1000 yards from home, and then walk that far (and repeat the process until you got as far as you wanted to go). You couldn't brush your teeth on the Sabbath; they used vinegar. But you could eat something that had vinegar in it.

Both Jesus and the man he healed were breaking Sabbath laws. So the leaders wanted to talk to him about it. He tells them things they don't want to hear.

What are his claims?

*Jesus is one with the Father in his actions. (vv. 19-20)*

Jesus starts this section with "Truly, truly." Some of you King James people would hear him say, "Verily, verily." It means, "Listen. I tell you the truth. You must hear and accept what it is I'm going to say so get ready."

What does Jesus say? Jesus says he is equal to the Father, because he does what the Father does. His identity of action and God's identity of action are the same thing. This means that Jesus' and God's hearts are two hearts beating as one. Jesus is saying he is God. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

*Jesus has the power to give life. (vv. 21, 24-26)*

It would have been staggering for the Jewish listeners to hear Jesus claim to be God. Any Greek or Roman listeners would have been equally offended. That was the stuff of legends, not reality. And Jesus kept going. He says he is sovereign over life and death. He can raise people from the dead. This is certainly only something God could do, but Jesus is claiming it for himself.

---

<sup>1</sup> © Doug Serven, 2008 You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you do not make more than 500 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be explicitly approved by Doug Serven.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2008, website: [www.ouruf.org](http://www.ouruf.org). For this series, I used commentaries on John from Boice, Skip Ryan, Gary Burge, D.A. Carson, Hughes, Wright, Calvin and Leon Morris and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, Fred Harrell and Scott Sherman. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

We should make a connection to his talk with Nicodemus in John 3. There he talked about new birth, about being born again, not spiritually but physically. Here he's talking about both again, but more toward the actual physical resurrection in verses 21 and 25, but more toward the spiritual resurrection in verses 24 and 26. Jesus says later in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus gives life.

*Jesus also claims he has the authority to judge. (vv. 22, 27-30)*

Jesus will judge all mankind. The Father has given judgment to the son, and there will be a judgment day coming. Jesus will be the judge because he is the Son of Man, the great Son of God who sits at the right hand of God the Father to judge the living and the dead.

Friends, do you hear the claims of God here? Some would say that Jesus never claimed to be God. They are not reading the text, or they're doing gymnastics to get around the texts. It's here and it's clear.

Think if you believe these claims or if you want to follow Jesus merely as a good teacher. Jesus will not allow you to hold a belief in him as teacher so easily. C.S. Lewis famously accosts such thought: "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish things that people often say about him: 'I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher."<sup>2</sup>

We might make mention of another possibility. He could be a liar or a lunatic – and he could be just a legend. We're taking some time to point out along the way why we don't think that is true (especially noticing the eyewitness accounts), but obviously some thing everyone just go it wrong and that Jesus never claimed any of this stuff. It was added to his lips later but those who only *wanted* it to be true.

Commentator and pastor Kent Hughes tells the story of D.E.V. Rieu. Rieu had been agnostic all his life and had gathered critical fame when he translated the works of Homer. He then was commissioned to do a scholarly translation of the Gospels. He was 60 years old when he started that work. His son commented, "It will be interesting to see what Father will make of the four Gospels. It will be even more interesting to see what the four Gospels make of Father." Within a year, Rieu converted to Christianity, became a committed Christian and joined the church. He had seen Jesus, as he immersed himself in the Scriptures.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Two Questions***

If those are Jesus' claims, what are his two important questions in this text? (he asks more than two, but we'll look at the two big ones).

Let's discuss the last one first. It comes at the very end of the chapter. 5:46-47: *For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?*

Jesus has turned the tables on his accusers. If he is on trial here in this chapter, he has gone from the defender to the prosecutor. He looks them in the eyes, and says, "How will you believe my words?"

So many of us should identify with the Pharisees here. They are the religious people of the day. They're the well-trained, well-spoken rule keepers. They're fundamentalist, traditional, evangelical American Christians. They're more concerned with doing right and wrong than with Jesus.

They've read the Bible, but they don't get it. They just don't get it. They have studied it. They've been to Bible studies and church camp and done "sword drills" and read the right books. They have taken the Religious studies classes and know all the textual criticism; they have PhDs in Bible. But they don't see Jesus in Exodus. They don't understand redemption through Moses.

They're missing it. Friends, are you missing the gospel? Have you so busied yourself with Christian activities and with judging others that you aren't believing, or have never believed in Jesus? Are you locked into the minutiae of life and study so you can't step back and see the glory of God in Christ? Are you truly thinking about the gospel?

It's a fair question, and one that Jesus asks the "good" people, the religious people in the text. He also asks the "bad" people another question.

We see it through the story of the paralyzed man. Jesus went to Jerusalem, and he walked by a certain pool. This pool was rumored to have special, mythical powers. Every once in awhile it would ripple (probably an underground spring would bubble up once or twice a day). Someone at some point started the idea that this ripple came from an angel. People said that the first person to get into the water from the angel's ripple would be healed. So these hurt and broken people would sit day after day by the pool, hoping for the brush of angels' wings, and maybe this would be the day to get their first.

So it was a day like any other day. The pool was crowded with broken and deformed bodies – the lame, the blind, the paralyzed. Jesus walked into the crowd, and saw one of those people.

---

<sup>2</sup> CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 41

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, 169

A man had been lying there for 38 years. 38 years! I'm almost 38 years old, and that is a long, long time. It's all he'd ever known. He was a paraplegic, but we don't know how or why he had his condition.

Jesus said to him, "*Do you want to be healed?*" That's our second and strange question in our point here. Do you want to be healed?

The man looks up at him and says, 'Duh! Yes. Of course. I've been lying here for 38 years and I don't have anyone to help me get to the water in time. Someone always beats me to it.'" He can't heal himself. He can't get to the water. Even if he did get there, it probably wouldn't work.

Jesus says, "Get up, take your bed and walk." Jesus asks this man to do something impossible. He can't walk – that's the point. But Jesus asks him to.

I think Jesus asks us to do impossible things too. Forgive the one who hurt you. Love your enemy. Be chaste and holy and pure with your body. Flee sexual immorality. There is no way you can do those things unless Jesus makes it happen for you. He asks you to do them.

No lasers. No smoke machine. No timpani in the background. No crescendo as the man slowly tests his legs one by one, unsure if it will work. All we read is this: "*And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.*"

Jesus later goes and finds the man to talk to him further. He tells him he's glad he's well, but he wants him to stop sinning so that nothing worse may happen to you. There seems to be some connection to this man's sins and his condition, though we don't know and can't say what they are. Finally the man knows it was Jesus who had healed him and tells the Jews his name (as if they didn't know already, they needed a more judicial confirmation).

Think about this man's testimony. We're working on writing out testimonies on our leadership team this semester. I've been reading dozens of great stories about how people have come to faith and how Jesus is working in their lives now. What would this man's testimony sound like?:

...I had been lying on the ground for 38 years. All I'd done was lay there. And Jesus walked up and saved me....

That's it. He did nothing to gain healing. He had nothing to add to Jesus. Even now, once he's been healed, he doesn't have any obvious gifts or talents or money or anything to add – just his story about how Jesus saved him.

It's like a kid who asks his mom or dad some questions when picked up from the nursery: Mom, did you come get me because I was smarter than the others? Uh, no. Dad, did you get me because I was funnier than the others? No. Did you pick me because I was prettier than the others? No. Because you were *mine*.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus saves like that. He comes to people who can't do or add anything. He delights in such a salvation. Do you think you're too far down, too far broken, too far weak and helpless for Jesus? You're not. He saves.

It's Jesus' question I want to ask you – Do you want to be healed?

It seems so obvious that of course we want to be healed, but some of us love our sin so very much. If you aren't forgiving someone, don't you feel like you have a power over that person? Every time she calls, you can lord it over her and make her pay. If you won't give up your sexual sin, isn't it because you don't want to? You're afraid to live without it, afraid you won't be satisfied and taken care of by God? If you've been hurt and can't process it and forgive, there is the power of a martyr in our society. You can tell your story on television, and people will listen to you. If you actually and truly forgive, you might have to give up that power.

So we hold on. This man may have had a fine living there as a paraplegic. He would now have to enter into a world of work he had never, ever known. It's possible he would rather stay the way he was.

So Jesus asks him, Do you want to be healed? Jesus' question here seems so obvious, but it's a question for us as well. Do you want to be healed? Is there a place in your heart that you guard away from Jesus? Is there something in your life you've vowed never, ever to tell anyone? Is there brokenness and paralysis somewhere in your life? Are you hopeless for change because you can't ever get to the pool?

Jesus says that pool won't help you. He's saying that he is the living water that wells up to eternal life. He says he is the resurrection and the life, he is the one that gives new life, the new birth we talked about in John 3. This healing is a small picture or sign of the resurrection for us.

It's one you can taste as well, for God heals our hearts still. You can walk with him without sin. You can give up that secret sin. You can start to forgive. You can live a different life. Because of Christ, and he comes and heals you and asks you to give up your seeking and striving but instead to walk with him in a new and different way. To give up and give over to him.

### ***One Mission***

I want to mention here that this passage shows the start of what gets Jesus to the cross, from a human perspective. Jesus healed this man, which is a miraculous story. Jesus talked to the religious leaders of the day about how he is God made flesh to dwell among us and save his people from their sins.

Buried in there is 5:18: *This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

---

<sup>4</sup> From Ricky Jones' sermon on this passage

The Jews weren't just mad at Jesus. They didn't only disagree with him. They weren't engaged in an agree-to-disagree argument with him. They knew what he was talking about. They had seen his work, and heard his claims. He was working and claiming to BE GOD. So what did they want to do? They wanted to kill him. This is fairly abrupt. We haven't heard much controversy to this point, only hints here and there in the book of John.

Jesus had turned the water into wine, and he had cleared the temple. That was probably something that got him some negative attention. He had talked with Nicodemus, who if he had relayed the conversation back to his buddies would have sounded like Jesus was talking like a crazy man. He took off out of the region and talked to this woman at the well, but the Pharisees would have only heard about that, thinking it was not what a holy rabbi should do.

Then this. And they want to kill him. Jesus walks right into the controversy. He could have avoided it. He could have skirted the issue, but he took it straight on. This sealed his doom. It made sure he was headed to the cross to die for his people for their sins.

What's your reaction to Jesus? Is it love because of his healing power? Does he give you hope? Can you respond to him? Are you afraid your testimony won't be spectacular enough? Are you afraid he'll take away the sins you really love?

Or are you angry with Jesus? Wondering why he doesn't heal more people than one? Why does he speak in codes so often? Why do people seem to follow him? Why didn't he heal your mother or father?

Do you wish Jesus would just go away? Maybe you're not ready to kill him, but can you sense the religious frustration with this man?

Do you want to be healed? Do you see Jesus on trial here? Are you thinking about things, about who Jesus is? How Jesus is God, how he brings life and judges? Are you wanted this resurrection healing?

Let's get back to Denver Moore and Ron Hall. They met because Debbie Hall got involved in the mission down in Ft. Worth. They slowly befriended the reasonably suspicious and homeless Denver. They ended up throwing Denver a birthday party, the first he'd ever had. They took him on retreats, and he started going to church with them.

In the end, he was transformed. He became a part of the Hall family, was given keys to the house, and became a painter.

Listen to what he said to Ron, around when Debbie was dying: "God gives each person on the earth a set of keys, keys to live this life down here on earth. Now in this set, there is one key you can use to unlock prison doors and set captives free... Mr. Ron, I was captive in the devil's prison. That was easy for Miss Debbie to see. But I got to tell you: Many folks had seen me behind the bars in that prison for more than thirty years, and they just walked on by. Kept their keys in their pocket and left me locked up. Now I ain't trying to run them other folks down, 'cause I was not a nice fella – dangerous – and prob'ly just as happy to stay in prison. But Miss Debbie was different – she seen me behind them bars and reached way down in her pocket and pulled out the keys God gave her and used on to *unlock the prison door and set me free*... She's the onlyest person that ever loved me enough not to give up on me, and I praise God that today I can sit here in your home a changed man – a *free* man.

How will you believe my words? Do you want to be healed? Do you believe the Gospel?

***John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.***

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee;  
Let the water and the blood, From Thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure; Save from wrath and make me pure.*

*Not the labor of my hands Can fulfill Thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

*Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

*While I draw this fleeting breath, When mine eyes shall close in death,  
When I soar to worlds unknown, See Thee on Thy judgment throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee.*