

GOSPEL OF THE MESSIAH

Message 18

Text: John 5:1-9

Date: 6/29/2014

INTRO: This will be our last message in the Gospels for a while. We have been covering all four Gospels at one time in a chronological order of events so that we get an overall view of the life of Christ. The synoptic Gospels took us up to Jesus' forty days of fasting and the temptation in the wilderness. Then they fell silent. John then took up the story and told us about what happened after that. Jesus called several disciples and went to Galilee and turned the water into wine at Cana. From there He went to the Passover feast in Jerusalem and cleansed the temple and did a few unrecorded miracles. Nicodemus came to see Him and we had almost a chapter on that visit. Then John told us about John the Baptist's affirmation that Jesus was the Christ.

That brought us to John 4, and Jesus visit to Samaria, and the conversion of many Samaritans. At the end of that chapter Jesus had gone into the Galilee region and when He came to Cana, by His word He healed a nobleman's son who was at Capernaum.

Now John will give us chapter 5 and the chapter will deal with another visit of Jesus to Jerusalem. I find that He made 8 trips to Jerusalem. And in this trip to Jerusalem Jesus will heal a man who had an infirmity for 38 years. This will take all of chapter 5 because Jesus arouses the wrath of the Jews. We will be looking at that in this message.

But before we get into all that, from John 5:1 I want to show you why I believe Jesus ministered for just over 2 years and not for 3 or 3 1/2 years. So look at 5:1 (read). It may not look like it, but this verse is used to determine if Jesus ministered for either 2 or 3 years. It says, "Now after this there was a feast of the Jews." Here is the question that determines if Jesus ministered either 2 or 3 years: "Which feast is this talking about?" If it is a Passover, He ministered for over three years. If not, then likely only some time over 2 years.

Let me give a helpful quote here from the Jamieson, Faucette and Brown commentary. Here is what they say, "*What*

feast? No question has more divided the Harmonists of the Gospels, and the duration of our Lord's ministry may be said to hinge on it. For if, as the majority have thought (until of late years) it was a *Passover*, His ministry lasted three and a half years; if not, probably a year less. Those who are dissatisfied with the *Passover*-view all differ among themselves what other feast it was, and some of the most acute think there are no grounds for deciding. In our judgment the evidence is in favor of its being a *Passover*, but the reasons cannot be stated here."

Let me show you the problem if the feast spoken of here is the *Passover* from the bar chart of the harmony of the Gospels I have done (Bar chart one, explain.)

So, you might ask, "What feast do you think it is talking about?" I am quite certain that it was Pentecost. You know that Pentecost stands for 50 days after First-Fruits which happens right after *Passover*. That is just under two months after the *Passover* and fits very well the events that transpire between John 2:13 and 5:1. There is no doubt to me that it cannot be a *Passover*. If John 5:1 was a *Passover*, then out of the entire length of the Gospel story, 71,347 words in my calculations, only 2132 words are given to one entire year of his ministry, and of that entire year, only John gives any events that happened, and that, only a few.

Let me add as well that Christ's ministry is usually given as about 3 1/2 years. Next Christmas, Lord willing, I will show you why I believe Christ's ministry was either 2 or 3 years and not 2 and 1/2 or 3 and 1/2 years. And that question has to do with when Christ was born. Now all of that is not greatly significant, but it is of interest to me and it may be to you as well.

8. Healing at Bethesda

-The healing of the infirm man

So we begin this account of the healing at Bethesda by reading verses 2-4 (read). The Sheep gate was, I understand, the gate by which the sacrificial sheep from Bethlehem entered the city when they were to be sacrificed. The name Bethesda means, according to J. Vernon McGee, the house of mercy or the house of olives. Let me

mention as well that some newer versions will leave out verse 4 because it is missing in certain manuscripts. It is argued that it has been inserted by someone. It is difficult to make good sense of the passage if it is left out. I believe it belongs in the text.

Now, the Scripture does not say whether these healings actually did take place or not. It would seem from the fact that so many sick people waited here that there must have been something to the account. One could hardly claim medicinal value to this water, since there were people with all kinds of different diseases waiting for the stirring of the water.

J. Vernon McGee tells a little story about this. He said that he had been invited to speak at a Preventorium that cared for a lot of young boys and girls with weak lungs or tuberculosis. And one young lad quoted this whole chapter with only one mistake. The KJV says that there were a lot of impotent folk at Bethesda and he read, "In these lay a great multitude of important folk." Well, maybe that is a lesson for us. Jesus thought that the outcast Samaritans were important enough to visit, and He thought these impotent folk were important enough. Let me say without reservation, no matter who you are, you are important to Him too.

Whatever the historical facts were about the healings that apparently happened here, at this feast Jesus came by this pool. So let us read verses 5-6 (read). We do not know how old this man was, but we do know he had this health problem for 38 years. And in verse 6 the KJV says, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The NKJV and many others translate it as, "Do you wish to be made well?" I think that is the correct translation, and I think Jesus asked this, so that if he said yes, which was almost certain to happen, the answer would give Him the freedom to heal this man. So look at the sick man's answer in verse 7 (read).

Now verse 8 is again one of those incredible

verses (read). And in verse 9 we have the outcome (read). What do men like Richard Dawkins or Bill Nigh the science guy say to that? But more important still, what do you and I say to that? I say Jesus is the Messiah! Nicodemus said it like this: No man can do such things unless God is with Him. But we have one problem. That day was a Sabbath. You see, the healing being done on the Sabbath was wrong according to the Jews, but to tell the man to take up His bed and carry it was also wrong. They had a lot of detailed rules about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath.

Now we must stop here for a question. This was the Sabbath day. Was it right for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath if He knew what strict rules they had about the Sabbath? Should Jesus have done this on a Sabbath day? He could have done this any other day. Was He right to raise such a controversial issue when He could have done this the next day? When Jesus was baptizing in Judea, and He heard that the Pharisees were claiming He was reaching more people than John, He left there and went north. He seems to have noted trouble coming. But now He seems to openly invite trouble. This man did not seek out Jesus, Jesus sought him out. And Jesus could have picked any day other than the Sabbath. There seems to be something deliberate about this.

I have told you that though most people would not believe this, I am very fearful of legalism or leading people in such a way that they will become legalists. You see, what Jesus knew about these Jews at Jerusalem was that they were legalists. You could get excommunicated for carrying your bed on the Sabbath. They had specific rules about what you could and could not do. I think that Jesus knew that if they did not overcome their legalism in light of such miracles, they were doomed for eternity. So He chose the Sabbath to seek to bring them out of their deeply entrenched legalism.

When you learn some of the strange traditional, non biblical teachings the Jews had about the

Sabbath, one sees that unless they get rid of such notions they will never really come to the truth. On the other hand, Jesus must also know that if they do not accept Him, such actions inevitably lead to His death. Well, in this healing, the Jews have the choice of recognizing or denying truth. And our text will tell us what their decision was.

-The response of the Jews (10-18)

So let us read verses 10-18 to see the response of the Jews (read). Nowhere in their inspired writings did it say that a man cannot carry his bed on the Sabbath when he has been healed like this man had been. But the Jews told him he was not allowed to carry his bed. This man said, "The man that healed me, he said, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" And now they want to know who that Man was, but he did not even know.

It is interesting that we soon find this man at the temple. This tells us something about him. And it is interesting that Jesus followed up on this man. And when He found him at the temple He said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." We are not given all the information about this case. There were a great multitude of people there with infirmities. Why did Jesus signal out this one man? Could it be that this man had before, maybe even long ago repented of his sin, but it is only now that he is healed? We do not know. We do know that whatever ailment he had, it was due to sin. We further learn that if, having once tasted healing, he should fall into sin again, it could get worse. And so, once the man knew who had healed him, he went and told the Jews, which will mean the religious leaders.

Well, verse 16 says the Jews persecuted Jesus, and they even sought to kill Him. Here is their response to truth. Now notice what a vital nerve Jesus had stepped on. If you have attended here at LHEC any amount of time, you will understand that we have been labeled as legalists. And you may have been surprised to hear me say that I am

almost as afraid of legalism as I am of liberalism. These Jews were bound in their legalism. I think that when some of us talk about legalism we have different things in mind. Some seem to feel that as soon as you have some rules you are a legalist. As soon as you say, "You should do this and you should not do that" you are classed a legalist. Let me explain what I mean by legalism. It is when you make any rules or set any standards that the Bible does not set, and you require them for salvation. That, to me, is legalism. To these Jews, anyone that carried a bed on the Sabbath, whether the Scriptures said so or not, was liable to excommunication. Many Christians think that any church that has do's and don'ts is legalistic. But if you check Paul's epistles there are lists of do's and don'ts, but Paul was not a legalist. But these Jews were legalistic to the core. They were ready to kill Christ for this healing on the Sabbath.

Well, Jesus said to these Jews, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Here we are at a verse that needs a whole message. But Jesus said in another place that man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. The Sabbath was set out for man's good. God knew it would be good for man to set aside one day a week to rest. So the Sabbath was for man's good. But to not do things that are for man's good on the Sabbath defeats the purpose of the Sabbath. Let me give an example. Let us say our neighbor's house was burning down and I sit aside because it is the Sabbath, when I could do something about the fire; that kind of rest defeats the purpose of the Sabbath.

What had happened to Israel is that they had become legalistic in every sense of the word. And if they would not come out of that legalism, they would go to hell. That is how serious their legalism was. And Jesus caused them to think about that, but all to no avail. Instead they persecuted Him and wanted to kill Him. That is a revelation of the deepness of their legalism and sin.

My wife and I watched a video of an Egyptian man who had become a Christian. And this is what he said about persecution, "You do not have to persecute anyone unless you are afraid of the truth that they carry." Legalism will kill its opponents.

And so, after this healing the Jews wanted to kill Jesus, but now for two reasons. First, because He broke their Sabbath rules and second, because He made Himself equal to God. The very thing this miracle should have drawn their attention to was entirely missed. Both of these issues before them, they would have to overcome if they are to accept their Messiah, and both they rejected. It was not because the truth did not come to their attention, but because their hearts were filled with sin. Their sin, religious sin, blinded their eyes.

-The teaching of Jesus (19-47).

We go now to verses 19-47 to see the teaching of Jesus. Let us begin by reading 19-23 (read). The issue Jesus has just raised to the Jews is the Sabbath, and working on the Sabbath. In Habbakuk 1:5 the Lord said, "Look among the nations and watch—Be utterly astounded! For *I will* work a work in your days *which* you would not believe, though it were told *you*." As I mentioned in the messages on Habbakuk, the words, "I will work" might well be translated, "I am working a work." God is always at work. God is at work today. If you look carefully you will see Him at work everywhere. In the universe; on earth; in the earth; above the earth; among the nations; in the church; in nature. There is not a place you cannot see Him at work when you stop and consider it. And Jesus has learned how to work from His Father. I think if you were to set up a committee of Evangelicals and they were to decide if it would be a good idea for the Messiah to do on the Sabbath what He has just done here, they would say, "Not a good idea. There are better ways of dealing with the Jews legalism." But Jesus had watched His Father at work and He knew this is what His Father would do. God loves His Son and

shows Him what to do and the Son does what His Father advises.

Now, there are many things in the Gospels I do not pretend to understand. There are others I do understand that I do not have time to expound on here because of the amount of material to be covered in the Gospels. Take for example, the word 'life' zwee, used in the verses before us. It is of tremendous importance, and I have done much study on it, but I do not have time to deal with it here.

Scholars seem unsure of what it means when it says that the Father raises the dead. Is it talking about literal resurrections or spiritually raising people to salvation. I think that here we are talking about spiritual life which is called 'eternal' or 'everlasting life' in the NT. Later He will talk about physical resurrection. And here, I think, Jesus is saying, "God is My Father. He has committed all judgment to the Son and I, the Son can give to you life, if I wish to, and I can withhold it from you. If you do not honor Me, neither are you honoring God Almighty, the One you claim to serve." I think what Jesus is saying is, "The way you just rejected Me for healing a man on the Sabbath tells me that you have no real use for God Almighty. You do not honor Me, because you do not honor God Almighty."

So that takes us to verses 24-30 (read). Jesus now plainly tells them that if they wish to have everlasting life, that which their religion is supposed to be all about, then they will have to believe on Him. And if they truly believe on Him they will have to overcome their legalism. And if they overcome their legalism and believe on Him, they will have everlasting life and they will not come into judgment. They will have passed from death to life, that is, spiritual life. He said the hour has now come that all those who hear Him, they will live; not physically only, but spiritually. God has granted to the Son to have life in Himself, and has granted to Him authority to execute judgment.

And then He says, "Don't marvel at that, as incredible as it may sound. But I am telling you the hour is coming when even those who are physically dead will get up out of their graves at the sound of My voice." Ponder that. They were rejecting Him and some day He will say, "Arise!" And all the dead will be raised up.

Now I want you to notice in verse 29 that there will be a resurrection of life to those who have done good; and a resurrection of condemnation to those who have done evil. I have not time to expound, but let me just say this is not talking about a works salvation. The Bible is everywhere clear about that. Let me add as well that every judgment to come is according to works. But let me mention here as well that this is not talking about one general resurrection that happens all at one time. I believe the Scriptures teach that the resurrection of the just happens first. And the first resurrection does not happen all at one time. I cover all this in the Basic Bible Doctrine or Catechism class. In the first resurrection, Christ was the first-fruits. The Church will be next. Some saints will be resurrected during the tribulation, and the rest at the end of the tribulation. But the resurrection of condemnation happens after the millennium. The unrighteous are all resurrected and judged at the same time.

-Jesus' witnesses

That brings us to the last section of His teaching to these Jews. These Jews might well say, "Listen. Who do You think You are, calling Yourself God's Son, making Yourself equal to Him? Working on the Sabbath against our rules, and saying You do what God Himself does. Just who do You think You are?"

It is as if Jesus has anticipated those questions in this next section. So He says, "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true." It was established in the OT that one must have two or three witnesses. So look at verses 31-35

(read). We saw in John 1, how the Jews sent their religious leaders to check out John the Baptist. And John bore witness that Jesus was the Christ. He called Him the Lamb of God.

Now let me make one note here from verse 35. Jesus said of John the Baptist, "He was...", not, "he is the burning and shining lamp." It may be that John has been put into prison by this time already. However that might have been, John bore witness to Christ and the Jews themselves had recognized him as a true witness.

But Jesus says, "I have even a greater witness than John the Baptist." What greater witness could there be? Well, look at verse 36 (read). The very work Christ had done on this Sabbath day was a greater witness than that of John. We remember that Nicodemus said, "We know you are a Teacher who has come from God because nobody can do what You are doing unless God is with Him." He accepted the witness of Christ's works. As I outline the Gospels, almost half of the Gospels was written to give evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, our present passage included.

Now look at verse 37 (read). The question here is, is Jesus referring to the witness God bore to Him at His baptism when He called out from heaven and said, "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased", or is this a reference to the Scriptures? I think it refers to the Scriptures because Jesus said they had neither heard God's voice at any time or seen God's shape. This is our third witness. So we have the witness of John; the witness of Jesus' works, and the witness of the Scriptures.

But note now that we have yet another witness in verses 38-39 (read). Verse 39 can be translated as an imperative or an indicative. It can read, "Search the Scriptures" or "You search the Scriptures. I think it is an indicative which is how the NKJV translates it. Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life." They did search the Scriptures. But the very Scriptures they searched

testified of Christ and they failed to find Him there. Here is a word for us; we can find exactly what we want to find in the Scriptures, but what we want to find may not be what they actually teach. Some day every person will be judged, not by how he understood the Scriptures, but by what God meant in them. So Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures..." But, He said, "You do not have the Scriptures abiding in you." But these Scriptures were witness to Him as well. Today we have even less excuse than the Jews had. We have these Gospels and the epistles of the NT.

Now notice the fatal flaws of the Jews. First, in verse 40 (read). They were not willing to come to Christ. Nicodemus came at night, but they won't come at all. We find the second fatal flaw in verse 41 (read). The Jews received honor one from another. Oh, the fear of man, it bringeth a snare. I read of a man in England on whose tombstone it said, "He feared man so little because he feared God so much." Oh, what teaching there is in these words. Jesus further said that because they received honor one from another, therefore they cannot believe on Christ. Maybe there is someone here this morning or someone who will listen to this message, and you do not come to Christ for fear of man. What a snare is the fear of man.

So let us read verses 42-47 (read). Jesus closes this passage by saying that He knows they do not have the love of God in them. And He says He will not accuse the Jews to God. Moses has done that already. The very Scriptures they read condemned them. May it not be so with us. Let me just mention that it is important to see what value Jesus places on the writings of the OT.

So, John bore witness to Christ. Jesus' works bore witness to the fact He was the Messiah. God the Father bore witness to Him, and the Word of God bore witness to Him. You need two or three witnesses? Here are four. More than enough! Jesus is the Messiah!

CONCL: Well, in conclusion, I have shown you why I believe

the ministry of Christ was but just over two brief years in length. I have suggested that John's ministry may have been under one year. And then we have looked at one incident in the life of Christ. He healed an infirm man on a Sabbath day. It would seem that He purposely chose the Sabbath day for this healing, and I have suggested it may have been to seek to turn the Jews to truth. Then we saw the reaction of the Jews to that. They persecuted Him and wanted to kill Him. They had turned from truth and had chosen to live in their pride. That is the general way of man.

And out of that rejection came a rather extensive teaching from Jesus that He was the Son of God and He only did those things that please God. He taught that he had life in Himself and He could give this life to those who truly believed on Him. And He said that He had witnesses that confirmed that He was truly the Messiah. The Jews required at least one or two witnesses to establish the truth of a matter and He had three or four. These witnesses included God Almighty, and the very Scriptures in which they searched to find eternal life.

And the way I harmonize the Gospels, the synoptic Gospels will now enter the story. There is evidence that John wrote his Gospel after Matthew, Mark and Luke were done. And it seems that in his Gospel he filled in the blanks. And so between John 5:47 and 6:1, in my estimation, will be about 10 months of the life of Christ that John leaves out. John has given us information on about the first two months of the ministry of Christ, where the others give us nothing. And John will now let them tell the story for about the next ten months. These are action filled months.