Rock Valley Bible Church (www.rvbc.cc)

2024-044

October 27, 2024 by Steve Brandon

Hating the Healer

John 5:10-18

There are aspects of every culture that other cultures find difficult to understand. For instance, in traveling to India and Nepal, it is difficult for me to comprehend how little they regard their environment. They think nothing of littering beside the road. For a child who grew up in the United States, being taught that littering is bad, that I should never throw anything outside the car window, I find this difficult to understand. Those in India, they see the wealth of the United States, and can't understand how we can live in such luxury, while they live in such poverty.

Another difference that I have seen in India and Nepal is the hand-holding between those of the same sex. There is nothing sexual about this. It's the way that the culture shows affection, by reaching out and holding hands. It always makes me feel a bit awkward. I don't understand it. But you will never see public displays of affection in India or Nepal. Public displays of affection between the opposite sex is not culturally appropriate at all.

We look at the Arab world and find it difficult to understand why women submit to wearing the hijab, much less the Burqa, which shields everything but the eyes. During Covid, the wearing of masks was enough to show me how miserable such a practice would be. Many in the Arab world find it difficult to understand the freedom of women in our country.

In our workaholism-America, we find it difficult to understand the culture of Siesta in Spain, where many business are closed from 2-5pm each day, giving people the opportunity to recharge, often taking a nap. It allows for people to stay up later, and have a more vigorous social life in the evening. Many in Europe can't understand why we work so hard in America, keeping long hours with little vacation time.

We don't even understand our own country sometimes. We don't understand slavery, even though it was legal and practiced in our own country until the Civil War in the mid 1800's. We don't understand women not being permitted to vote.

Yet, it wasn't until the 19th amendment in 1920 when women were permitted to vote. We don't understand segregation laws, where there were ladies, men, and colored rest rooms. This didn't go away until the 1960's (60 years ago). Even today, we don't really understand our bathroom policies. There are aspects of every culture that other cultures find difficult to understand.

I bring all of this up because we will see something similar in our text this morning. We will see religious leaders living in light of their convictions on the Sabbath, leading to some behavior is very odd for us. It's difficult for us to understand. Yet, it was the culture of the times of Jesus. So, open your Bibles to John, chapter 5 (if you haven't already). Last week, we looked at the first half of this chapter, in which Jesus heals the invalid at the pool of Bethesda.

Do you remember the story? The backdrop was the pool of Bethesda during one of the Jewish feast days. At the pool were a multitude of invalids, the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. These invalids were at the pool because legend had it that the first one in the pool after the water stirs is healed. Among the invalids was a man who had been unable to walk for 38 years. Jesus saw him and healed him with a word, saying, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And he did. He got up! He took up his bed. And he walked! This man, who had been dependent upon others to get around, for decades, was healed instantly by the word of Jesus. What an amazing story! He was able to begin an independent life after 38 years.

I trust that you remember the picture that we have used to help us remember the story.[1]

The number 5 looks like a wheel chair, which helps us to remember that this man couldn't walk. You can see the pool in the background, with the colonnades. Let's read the full account of the story.

John 5:1-8

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

And let us remind ourselves why John wrote these things. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; John 20:31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). This is why we are looking at this story, so that we might believe in Jesus. So that we might have life in his name.

Now, up until this point in the gospel of John, we have seen the ministry of Jesus flourish. We have every reason to believe in him! He has turned the water into wine, giving great joy to those at the wedding. He has demonstrated his theological acumen against Nicodemus, the leading scholar of the day. He has transformed a city in Samaria, through talking with the woman at the well. He has healed the royal official’s son, who was at the point of death, by simply telling him, “Your son will live” (John 4:50). And now, we see Jesus healing this paralytic by saying,

John 5:8

Get up, take up your bed, and walk.

Then comes the next phrase in verse 9. You may not have really noticed it! But in this story, it is huge! John writes:

John 5:9

Now that day was the Sabbath.

This changed everything about the ministry of Jesus. That Jesus would dare to do this on the Sabbath was unthinkable to the Jews. That Jesus would tell this man to

“take up your bed” on the Sabbath, outraged the Jews. So much so that they hated him, and even wanted to kill him! Thus, the title of my message this morning: “Hating the Healer.” This is exactly what we see in verses 10-18. We see Jesus of Nazareth, healing a man who had been unable to walk for 38 years, and the Jews of the day hated Jesus for it.

From this point on in the gospel of John, we will begin to see Jesus having great conflict with the Jews of the day. In chapter 6, we will see an argument that Jesus will have with the Jews. In chapter 7, we will see the brothers of Jesus against him. In chapter 8, we will see such a strong argument, that the Jews picked up stones to throw at him to put him to death! The conflict won’t end until they finally put Jesus to death on the cross. It all begins here, with what Jesus did on the Sabbath.

Our story this morning picks up in verse 10.

> John 5:10
> So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.”

Fathom the question: Here was this man who had been lame for 38 years, now walking! But they could not see the miracle. All they could see was the Sabbath violation. Mind you, at this point, it’s not yet hostility to Jesus that is driving this question. It was their view of the Sabbath that was driving the question.

This is the point where we, in our culture, don’t understand the Ancient Jewish culture of Sabbath keeping. For us, if we encountered a man who had been 38 years without walking, who was then able to walk, we wouldn’t be concerned about when the healing took place. We wouldn’t be concerned about where or how the healing took place. We would be rejoicing in the healing! Perhaps even looking into how it was done, so that we might have insight into how to heal others paralytics.

Imagine if Joni Eareckson Tada was healed! There would be quite the celebration in all of America! She would go on the talk shows. She would speak in the news outlets. All of America would rejoice at the news! But such was not the case in the days of Jesus. They weren’t rejoicing at this miracle, they were angry. Later, we will see their hostility directed toward Jesus, the one who healed this man because Jesus was daring to heal on the Sabbath.

For the Jews of the day, it was unlawful for this man to take us his bed and walk

home. Now, this wasn't a "bed" like we think today, with a headboard and large mattress. No, this was something more like a sleeping bag, something that you would put in your backpack, something carried with very little effort. That's why many translations translate this with the word, "Mat." Yet, for these Jews, this was unlawful for this man to carry this burden on the Sabbath.

Now, we can read our Bibles and understand a bit about the priority of keeping the Sabbath, but we don't fully understand the depth of what came to be in the Jewish culture of Jesus' day. They went way beyond what the Scriptures required. Sabbath rest was clearly taught in the Scriptures. It is rooted in creation, when God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. This connection was spelled out in the Ten Commandments:

> Exodus 20:8-11
> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

The requirement of the Sabbath was often repeated throughout the Old Testament. Sometimes, even strongly warning the Consider Exodus 31:12-17

> Exodus 31:12-17
> And the Lord said to Moses, 'You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.'

These are pretty stern warnings to the people of Israel! If you didn't keep the Sabbath, it was the death penalty for you. This very thing took place. In Numbers 15, a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day (Numbers 15:32), so they put him in custody and sought the LORD regarding what should be done to him (Numbers 15:33-34). And the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp" (Numbers 15:35). That's exactly what the congregation did (Numbers 15:36). This is one of those cultural practices, that we just can't understand! Stoned for picking up sticks?

Regarding the carrying of burdens, Jeremiah made it clear that this was not allowed on the Sabbath.

> Jeremiah 17:21-22
> Thus says the LORD: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers.

From the perspective of these Jews in Jesus' day, this man's sleeping mat was a burden that he was prohibited to carry on the Sabbath. It's very questionable whether or not this was ever the LORD's intention regarding the sabbath, that carrying a sleeping bag would qualify as a burden. It's also questionable today whether the Sabbath is binding upon us as Christians. It's outside the scope of my message today to address this question fully, but I'm aware of it (and you should be as well).

But, in Jesus' day, the Sabbath was binding. The Jews had been so zealous to protect the Sabbath law that they had codified many regulations, so as to make clear what was allowed on the Sabbath and what was not. The significance of this upon the Jewish culture of the day can hardly be overstated. It is one of those cultural things that we as Americans simply cannot understand. The whole nation shut down every Sabbath day in an effort to keep God's Sabbath laws. We, in America, never shut down. A Sabbath culture is very foreign to us. Yet, not so to the Jews. For them, it was clear: According to their own laws, this sleeping mat was over the limit of what could be carried on the Sabbath.

So, this man was in serious trouble with the religious authorities. When he was accused of breaking the Sabbath,

John 5:11
He answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’”

At this point, you would think that the Jews would have hesitated and stepped back a bit. Jews: “Wait, you were healed?? “You were healed from what?” Former invalid: “I have not been able to walk for 38 years.” “Now I can walk.” “That’s what I have been healed from.” But this wasn’t important for these Jews. What was important was the Sabbath! They were quick to condemn.

John 5:12
They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?”

Notice how they didn’t say, “Who is the man who healed you?” They didn’t ask this question because their culture of Sabbath-keeping so over clouded their thoughts about healing, that they were more concerned about this man’s keeping of the Sabbath than they were about the miraculous power of Jesus to heal!

At this point, for application, it might be helpful for us to think about our own lives. How easy is it to see the blindness of these Jews, to miss the power of Jesus because of their own religious practices. So here’s the question for us this morning: Are there things in our lives that cloud our thinking when it comes to following Jesus? First of all, obviously, sin clouds our thinking. When we love our sin, we won’t love the Savior who came to save us from our sin. Is there sin in your life that you are holding on to that hinders you from believing and following Jesus? Beyond the obvious sin, perhaps you think that you have it all figured out when it comes to following Jesus.

That was the case with these Jews. For them, following the ways of God meant that they needed to prioritize their Sabbath keeping, according to what they thought was proper Sabbath keeping. In fact, they felt the need to compel others in accordance with their rules. Have you thought about that? This guy was minding his own business on the Sabbath day. And the Jews noticed his sleeping bag and said to him, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed" (verse 10).

Maybe for you, you think that you have it all figured out. What God requires of you, what you are doing for God. “I read the Bible. I come to church. I stay away from the really bad things. I inform others of the really bad things that they are

doing. Mostly, I do this on social media, pointing out all of the bad things about our society today." Perhaps for you, you are extremely content in your religious practices. These Jews were content. They knew the rules. They knew the routines. They didn't want anybody coming and upsetting their arrangement with God.

But this is exactly what Jesus does when he comes into your life. He upsets your contentment in following after your own religious practices. He shows that there is a more radical way for you to live, apart from the cultural norms and practices that may have been established in your life so far. This is the very thing that these Jews were hating, something out of the norm. Perhaps this is where our text hits you today. You are pretty satisfied with your religious routines.

Perhaps you have developed your own legalistic requirements in following Jesus, where certain practices are more important than actually following Jesus. Like prioritizing knowledge of the Bible over love. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1). Or like having a compulsion to engage in church activities, as a matter of your own righteousness. Like focusing upon your appearances, and your outward display of religion, as if this is the most important thing in coming to God. If this teaches us of anything, it teaches us about the greatness of Jesus. He can heal. He can push back against the religious traditions that we hold dear to our hearts. Don't think that it was an accident that Jesus told the man, "Take up your bed, and walk" (verse 11).

He just as easily could have said, "Get up and walk!" Jesus was very calculating here. He wanted to confront the Jews of the day regarding the Sabbath. Jesus could have healed this man on Friday. He could have waited a day and healed this man on Sunday. My goodness, he hadn't walked in 38 years, what was one more day? But Jesus knew the perfect time to heal this man. It was on the Sabbath. It was on the Sabbath that Jesus healed. It was on the Sabbath that Jesus instructed this man to carry his bed, full well knowing that the Jews would hate it. I believe that it was all by design. I believe that it was all by design that Jesus didn't let this man know who healed him. John brings this up in verse 13.

> John 5:13
> Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.

Remember the miracle took place by the pool of Bethesda, where there were “multitudes of invalids” at this place (John 5:3). In the commotion of everything, Jesus was able to slip away, unnoticed by this man. But later, Jesus had another encounter with him.

> John 5:14
> Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”

These are startling words. “Sin no more.” They imply that his condition was (in part) due to his sin. Do you remember what Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery? When all of her accusers had left her, Jesus said, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (John 8:10-11). It’s easy to see here that the woman had sinned, and Jesus was telling her to sin no more.

But in the case of this healed invalid, it is not at all obvious to us that this man had sinned before, or that his sin had caused his paralysis. Yet, Jesus said the same thing to the man: "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you" (verse 14).

Further complicating the fact is that Jesus said that the man who was born blind wasn’t blind because of his sin or his parents’ sin (John 9:3). So, not all sickness is as a result of sin. But some may be, as in this man’s case. Even the threat of something worse that my happen to him if he sins, shows that some sickness comes from sin. So be careful, especially when ministering to others who are dealing with sickness. You don’t know the cause of the sickness. To say that it’s because of sin or because of any lack of faith, is to share in the actions of the Jews, who pointed out that it wasn’t lawful to carry his bed on the Sabbath. Listen, if Jesus tells you to carry your bed, it’s lawful to carry your bed, Sabbath or no Sabbath.

I have heard horror stories of pastors entering the hospital to visit the sick, only to rebuke them for their lack of faith. Such counsel is not helpful to those in this hospital, wanting to get well. It’s not our business to assure others of the plans of God in their sickness when you don’t know. Job was an innocent man, yet he was struck with great illness. Yet, let us know that some sickness can come because of sin. David said in Psalm 32:3-4 "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away

through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." What cured David of his illness? Confession of sin: "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5). So, in sickness, sin may (or may not) be the root cause of the illness. It's best to leave it in the hands of the Lord.

Back to our story, after the healed invalid encountered Jesus which we saw in verse 14, we see in verse 15

> John 5:15
> The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him.

Now, there are some who would accuse this man of being a rat against Jesus. He actually is sinning by telling them that it was Jesus responsible for why he was breaking the Sabbath, thereby getting Jesus in trouble rather than him. But notice here what the man told the Jews. He didn't focus upon Jesus telling him to carry his bed. He didn't focus upon Jesus as the reason for his own breaking of the Sabbath. No, he focused upon the healing, the very fact that the Jews were overlooking. He told the Jews "that it was Jesus who had healed him." So I think it's hard to assign this man evil motives other than sharing he was healed and telling them who has the power to heal.

Yet again, in verse 16, we see the hardness of the Jews toward Jesus and this is why they were persecuting Jesus.

> John 5:16
> And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

Note how John says "doing these things." Apparently there were other signs that Jesus was doing. He was healing others. John only tells us of this one invalid who was healed, but there were others. Jesus was healing them on the Sabbath as well, and the Jews were persecuting Jesus as a result. These things. That was just one thing with this man, but Jesus was doing these things.

There's much more going on in the life of Jesus that John doesn't tell us about. Even here in verse 16, we see them persecuting Jesus. We don't see the persecution, but as he does these miracles, especially on the Sabbath, he was

hated. John hints at other miracles happening that aren't written. What John has told us is by design. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). But what we have is sufficient. This one story is sufficient for us to believe. To this persecution, Jesus responded in verse 17:

> John 5:17
> But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

This was the response of Jesus to the accusation that he was breaking the Sabbath. Basically, he said, “I’m following the example my Father. “He is working, so I am working.” In other words, God has not ceased from his labor in sustaining the universe. He continues to work. Yes, He rested on that original Sabbath day when he finished the creation, but he has continued to work. He upholds the universe! That's what Colossians 1 speaks about. Jesus was upholding the universe by the word of his power, sustaining things.

Psalm 121 says God never slumbers or sleeps. He never takes a rest from things. He keeps us. He protects us. He guards us. Jesus basically says "My Father is working, so I am working." Jesus is starting to slam on the idea of what they thought the Sabbath was. In verse 18, we read another explanatory statement. This is where we see the Hating the Healer really come out. This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him. The fact he was breaking the Sabbath was bad enough.

By the way, the sentence of Exodus 31 is death on those who break the Sabbath. We only have one example of that in Numbers 15, where a man is actually killed on the Sabbath. No where else in the Bible is someone killed because they broke the Sabbath. But the Jews still wanted to kill Jesus. Not only was Jesus breaking the Sabbath, but we see the second reason in verse 18.

> John 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 even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Here, Jesus is proclaiming his deity. You see that when he says My Father is working so I am working in verse 17. By saying that he is tying himself with the Father, claiming to be God himself. We'll see this throughout the Gospel of John. In John 1:1 we read "And the Word was with God and the Word was God." We will see him refer to himself as God. In John 8:58 we read "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." I am is Yahweh. Before Abraham was Yahweh. In John 10 he says "I am the Father are one." He is constantly demonstrating the fact that he is God. Even at the end! When Thomas puts his hands inside of Jesus, he says, "My Lord and My God!" He's not swearing here, he's affirming the deity of Jesus!

So the Jews hated the healer because he healed on the Sabbath and because he claimed divinity. He was claiming equality with God. At the end of the day, that's what this story is all about. We talk about the man who was healed, him being one of many. But the bottom line is this. This passage forces us to deal with Jesus, and his different perspective on the Sabbath, running against our religious traditions. That he makes himself equal to God. He is God. This is the one we're called to believe in, Jesus being the Messiah, the Christ. Let us believe in this Messiah.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 27, 2024 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

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[1] This picture is taken from Tom Lach's excellent booklet, "The Gospel of John in Pictures."