

Salvation and the Sabbath

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the gospel according to John chapter 5. John chapter 5, and if we just read again from the beginning.

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, an Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five-roofed colonnades.

In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame and paralysed. One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 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?

Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be healed? As you know, today is the 1st of November, and for many, the 1st of November is All Saints Day.

It's primarily remembered in the Roman Catholic Church as a day which celebrates and commemorates all the saints. But according to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, in order to become a saint, you first of all have to die.

[1 : 1 9] You then have to wait about five years or even longer to be freed from purgatory, and then enter heaven. And then after all that, only according to public opinion can those who are still living venerate you to a position of being a saint.

And today on the 1st of November, the Roman Catholic Church, they celebrate and commemorate All Saints, All Saints Day. But as you know, yesterday, which was the 31st of October, that was All Hallows' Eve, or Halloween, which is the day before All Saints Day.

And in contrast to All Saints Day, which commemorates and celebrates dead saints, Halloween commemorates and celebrates dead sinners. But you know, for many people, Halloween is just about kids dressing up as ghouls and ghosts and having a party.

But you know, for a Christian, the 31st of October isn't about Halloween. It's about the Reformation. Because on the 31st of October, that day marks Reformation Day.

It was on the 31st of October, 1517, that the German reformer Martin Luther, he nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany.

[2 : 4 0] And those 95 theses, they were the spark that ignited the Protestant Reformation, which would spread across Europe. And what emerged from Reformation Day was what we have come to know and love as the five Reformation solas.

There are five Latin phrases which summarize the truths of Scripture in opposition to the erroneous doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. And these five Reformation solas, they are sola scriptura, Scripture alone, sola fide, faith alone, sola gratia, grace alone, sola Christos, Christ alone, and sola deo gloria, the glory of God, alone.

And these five Reformation solas, they teach us and they emphasize to us what true biblical Christianity really is.

But you know, in the years prior to the first Reformation day, Martin Luther had this long and personal struggle with the question, how can I be made right with God?

How can I experience peace in my heart? How can I have assurance of salvation? Of course, Luther, he had tried everything. He had followed the system of Roman Catholicism to the letter.

[4 : 00] But he still didn't know the simplicity of salvation. But that was until Luther discovered what Scripture alone taught about salvation.

What he discovered in Romans 1 verse 17 was that the righteous shall live by faith. The righteous shall live by faith. And you know, those words, they transformed Luther's life because Luther came to realize that salvation is not about the sensational and the spectacular.

It's about silent and simple faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is not about the sensational or the spectacular. Salvation is about silent and simple faith in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my friend, a sinner is made a saint. Not by good works. Not by church attendance. Not by Bible reading. Not by their prayers. Not by penance.

Not by monetary gifts. Not by public opinion. A sinner is made a saint. Simply by grace alone. Through faith alone. In Christ alone. My friends, salvation is not about the sensational and the spectacular.

[5 : 15] It's about silent and simple faith in Jesus Christ. And you know, is that not what we saw last week with the healing of the royal official's son? We saw that salvation is not about the sensational and the spectacular.

It's about silent and simple faith in Jesus Christ. And you know, that's actually what we're being reminded again this morning as we begin chapter 5 in John's Gospel.

Because in this chapter, we witness a man with a sickness who came to experience salvation on the Sabbath. We see here a man with a sickness who came to experience salvation on the Sabbath.

And this morning, I'd just like us to consider this passage under two headaches. Two simple headaches. Salvation and the Sabbath. Salvation and the Sabbath.

So first of all, salvation. Look again at verse 1. 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.

[6 : 28] In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for 38 years. And so John the Evangelist, he introduces this next section in his Gospel by informing us that Jesus once again went up to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the Jewish feasts.

We saw back in chapter 2 that Jesus went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Passover. But Jews, they went up to Jerusalem. Actually, they went up three times a year.

They went up to celebrate the feast of Passover, the feast of Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles. And when you read John's Gospel, something that you should always take note of is when he mentions that a feast is taking place.

Of course, we would usually just skip over these little notes that John leaves for us. But John mentions all these feasts in order to give us context. But he also gives us, he mentions these feasts in order to give us a timeline of his Gospel.

In fact, John mentions the feast of Passover three times in his Gospel, so that we'll have a timeline of events that leads us up to the hour when Jesus will offer himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[7 : 52] But, you know, when John tells us here that there was a feast of the Jews and that Jesus went up to Jerusalem, he says this not because it was the feast of Passover.

We'll see that Jesus goes to the feast of Passover in chapter 6. And the feast of Passover was held around March, April time. And so in this chapter, chapter 5, Jesus is in Jerusalem, not for the feast of Passover, but for the feast of Tabernacles, which was held around September, October time.

And the feast of Tabernacles, it was a feast which commemorated and celebrated the Lord's provision of salvation. It was an occasion where the Jews, they celebrated the time when the children of Israel were delivered from slavery and bondage in Egypt.

And they were led by God's servant Moses through the Red Sea on towards the Promised Land. And as you know, the Israelites, they were in the wilderness for 40 years, journeying towards the Promised Land.

And they were moving from place to place while living in temporary accommodation. They lived in tents or tabernacles, which is what the feast of Tabernacles is all about.

[9 : 13] The Jews, they commemorate and celebrate how the Lord provided for the children of Israel in those 40 years of wandering through the wilderness, from slavery in Egypt to salvation in the Promised Land.

But you know, what I find fascinating is that 38 out of those 40 years in the wilderness were wasted years.

38 out of those 40 years in the wilderness were wasted years. And I say that because it took less than a year for the Israelites to travel from slavery in Egypt to the threshold of salvation in the Promised Land.

But you'll remember that instead of entering the Promised Land by faith, it was there at the Jordan that the Israelites, they turned around and they went back.

And they went back into the wilderness, wasting 38 years in the wilderness, living in disobedience and disbelief. They wasted 38 years in the wilderness.

[10 : 21] And you know, when we come to this chapter, John is saying to us, look who Jesus met when he was in Jerusalem, commemorating and celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles.

Look who Jesus met when he was in Jerusalem, remembering what the Israelites did in the wilderness. He met an infirmity in the wilderness.

He met an infirm man who had had his infirmity for how long? 38 years. And what John is telling us is that those 38 years of infirmity in this man's life, they were just like the 38 years that the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness.

They were 38 wasted years. They were 38 wasted years. Because like the Israelites, this infirm man, he had 38 years of the promise of salvation been held out to him.

We're told that he sat at the pool in Jerusalem for 38 years. And he was there waiting for the right time to be healed. He was waiting for the sensational and the spectacular to happen to him.

[11 : 32] He was waiting for an angel to come and trouble the waters. And then he was waiting for someone to carry him into the water. He was waiting for healing to come to him.

And for 38 years, nothing happened. But nothing had happened because for 38 years, this is the thing, he didn't really want to be healed.

He didn't really want to be healed. Yes, he was brought to the place of healing. Yes, he sat in the place where there was an opportunity to be healed.

He sat in the place where he could be freed from the slavery of his infirmity and experienced the promise of salvation. But you know, the question which hung over this man for those 38 long and wasted years was the question, do you really want to be healed?

Do you really want to be healed? In fact, that's the first question Jesus asked this man in verse 6.

[12 : 39] We're told that 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?

Do you want to be healed? And you know, it might seem like a strange question for Jesus to ask. But you know, Jesus was getting right to the heart of this man's problem, which was the problem of his heart.

And the problem of his heart was that like the Israelites in the wilderness, this infirm man had lived in disobedience and disbelief for 38 years.

My friend, this man's greatest problem, it wasn't his inability to walk or his inability to be washed. It was his inability to want what he really needed.

My friend, this man's problem wasn't his inability to walk or his inability to be washed, but his inability to want what he really needed.

[13 : 41] That's why Jesus asked him, do you want to be healed? You know, there was no doubt that he could be healed and would be healed. But the question was, did he want to be healed?

Did he want to be healed? And you know, you might be looking at this passage and thinking to yourself, well, of course he wanted to be healed. Everyone wants to be made well.

Everyone wants to experience help and healing. Everyone wants to be made whole. Of course this man wanted to be healed. But you know, my unconverted friend, what John is illustrating to you this morning is a mirror image of what you are like when it comes to the offer of the gospel.

Because like the Israelites in the wilderness, and like this man in Jerusalem, you have been wasting 38 years or more living in disobedience and disbelief.

Because you know, for 38 years plus, you've been listening to the gospel, but doing nothing with it. For 38 years plus, you've been living with your infirmity of sin, while the offer of salvation is being held out to you.

[15 : 04] For 38 years plus, you've remained in slavery to sin, while sitting on the threshold of salvation. For 38 years plus, you've been waiting for the sensational and the spectacular to happen to you.

For 38 years plus, you've been waiting for the Damascus Road experience. For 38 years plus, you've been waiting to see the bright lights and the voice from heaven to tell you that you're a Christian.

For 38 years plus, you've been so close to salvation. And yet so far. For 38 years plus, my friend, you've sat waiting for the right time to come to Christ.

For 38 years plus, you've been waiting for this convenient season in your life to commit your life to Jesus. But the truth is, my friend, for 38 years plus, you have wasted.

You have wasted opportunity after opportunity after opportunity to embrace Jesus Christ as he has freely offered to you in the gospel.

[16 : 12] And the question which all of this passage boils down to this morning is the same question which Jesus asked this man. Do you want to be healed?

Do you want to be saved? Do you want to experience salvation? Do you want Jesus in your life? Do you want to become a Christian? My friend, as you're confronted with the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ week by week, what is it you really want?

What is it you really want? But, you know, before you answer this question, notice how this man responds to Jesus' question in verse 7.

We're told 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. Do you know when Jesus asked this infirm man if he wants to be healed, the infirm man responds by giving excuses.

He gives him excuses as to why he's not healed yet. But he doesn't answer the question. And you know, my unconverted friend, the same can be said of you.

[17 : 29] The same can be said of you because for 38 years plus, you have been lingering in your lost condition. And when you're asked the question, do you want to be saved?

Or do you want to be healed? Or do you want to commit your life to Jesus Christ? Or do you want to become a Christian? You don't really answer the question, do you? You just give excuses as to why you're not saved yet.

And your excuses are either because of confusion or other Christians or because of the church. But the thing is, it's not.

Christians or the church that are asking you the question this morning, it's the Christ. And you can never blame the Christ for your lost condition.

You can't blame him. And you know, in similar words, you might say, I've been waiting for the Lord to save me for years. Others have been converted before me.

[18 : 29] Others have stepped down before me. Others have come to Christ before me. But I've been seeking the Lord for years. I've been wanting to be saved for years.

Yes, my friend, you want to be saved. But is that your utmost desire? Is that what you want more than anything else?

Is that what you're longing for? Is that what you're pleading with the Lord for? Because, my friend, I can assure you that until salvation for your soul is what you really want, you will go on wasting your life.

Until salvation for your soul is what you really want, you will go on wasting your life. And you know, my friend, my plea to you this morning is don't waste your life.

Don't waste your life. You know, I remember speaking to a woman who said to me that when she turned 60, it shocked her.

[19 : 38] And what shocked her wasn't her age. But what shocked her was that she had reached such a milestone in her life. And she still wasn't a committed Christian.

Because she thought that she would have become a Christian long before the age of 60. But sadly, she had let other things get in the way. And she had wasted her life waiting to be saved.

But not truly wanting to be saved. And you know, it's when she came to the realisation that she had to stop waiting to be saved. And start wanting to be saved.

That she was saved. And you know, my unconverted friend, that's what you need to do. You need to stop waiting to be saved.

And start wanting to be saved. You need to stop waiting for the Lord to save you. You need to start wanting for the Lord to save you. You know, what I love about this passage is that as Jesus passes by this infirm man who had wasted all these years of opportunity waiting for salvation rather than wanting salvation, do you know where Jesus finds him?

[20 : 50] He finds him at Bethesda. He finds him at the house of grace. That's what the word Bethesda means.

And when Jesus finds this man at the house of Bethesda, he saves him. Not by the sensational and spectacular. He saves him by silent and simple faith in Jesus Christ.

And you know, as an island community, we're all familiar with the name Bethesda. It's the name of our care home and hospice in Stornoway.

And as you know, Bethesda is a place which many of our loved ones have benefited from. They've benefited from the care and the compassion of the home and the hospice during the latter moments of their infirmity and illness.

Because, you know, as you all know, when they enter Bethesda, when they enter the Bethesda hospice, many of them are on the threshold of eternity. Of course, some of them are ready for eternity.

[21 : 55] And sadly, some of them are not. But, you know, what better place to be found on the threshold of eternity than in the house of grace? But, my unconverted friend, what I want to say to you today is that your house this morning is called Bethesda.

Your house this morning is called a house of grace. I don't know if you're on the threshold of eternity. No one knows that. But I do know that because the gospel of grace and because the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ has been freely offered to you today, I know for that reason that your house this morning is called Bethesda.

Your house this morning is a house of grace. And the question which you need to answer, and you need to answer it today, do you want to be healed?

Do you want to be saved? Do you want to be a Christian? And if that's your earnest desire, then, my friend, confess your sin and commit your life to Jesus Christ.

Confess your sin and commit your life to Jesus Christ. Because salvation, it's not about the spectacular and the sensational. It's all about silent and simple faith in Jesus Christ.

[23 : 24] And you know, that's what we witness in the life of this man. He came to experience salvation on the Sabbath. Which brings us secondly to consider the Sabbath.

Salvation and the Sabbath. Salvation and the Sabbath. Look at verse 6. 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'm 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. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath and it's not lawful for you to take up your bed.

But he answered them, The man who healed me, that man said to me, Take up your bed and walk. You know, people often worry about what others will think and say.

[24 : 27] If they commit their life to Jesus Christ. You know, I worried about what people would think and say when I became a Christian. I worried that I would receive a negative reaction from my unconverted friends and family.

But one thing I didn't ever worry about was that I would receive a negative reaction from Christians. And yet that's what we see with this man. Because he had finally experienced salvation after 38 long years.

And you know, the first people he encounters are Pharisees. He had met with Jesus. His life had been changed. His heart had been transformed. He had only just started walking.

And then he was confronted by the religious police. The Jews, they were the religious leaders. The scribes and the Pharisees, they were the religious police. And their main concern was not salvation from God, but strictly following the law of God.

And the law which this man was said to have broken was that he was carrying his mat on the Sabbath. Now, the law never said anything about carrying a mat on the Sabbath.

[25 : 38] Because the fourth commandment says, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work. But the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.

In it thou shalt not do any work. Thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

And as the fourth commandment emphasises, keeping the Sabbath day is not something that's relevant to just a past generation in history. No, keeping the Sabbath is actually binding upon all mankind.

Because it's a creation ordinance. It's something that God ordained at creation for our benefit. In six days the Lord made heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.

[26 : 44] Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. And in fact, Jesus affirmed that the Sabbath, he affirmed about the Sabbath that he is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Because the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, we should see the Sabbath as a gift, not a grudge.

We should see it as a delight, not a dread. The Sabbath is to be viewed as a benefit, not a bind, a blessing, not a burden. The Sabbath is to be viewed as a day of rest, not a day of restraint.

It's to be seen as a day of reflection, not a day of restriction. But you know, sadly, the religious police in the first century, they had made the Sabbath day a grudge, a bind, and a burden.

They had made the Sabbath a day of restraint and restriction. The Sabbath had become about the law, and not about the Lord. In fact, the religious police of the scribes and Pharisees, they had implemented 39 additional laws as an appendix to the fourth commandment.

[27 : 56] Of course, their initial intention was honourable because they wanted to protect and preserve the Sabbath. But by implementing these 39 additional laws for their Sabbath keeping, it all became a bind and a burden upon the people.

But you know, as Christians, we can often be in danger of acting just like the religious police, can't we? We can be in danger of inventing and implementing laws in order to try and protect and preserve the commandments.

But you know, what often happens is that these additional laws, they don't become a benefit or a blessing. They become a burden and a bind.

And especially in the case of this man who was newly converted. You know, we can be guilty of inventing and implementing laws about the Sabbath and many other things, and we may do it with a good objective.

But what often happens is that it's not met with a good outcome. But you know, look how Jesus deals with this new Christian and how he deals with the Sabbath.

[29 : 09] Look in verse 14. We're told that afterward, Jesus found this man in the temple and said to him, See, you are well. Sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you.

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. Jesus later met this new Christian in the temple at the Feast of Tabernacles and Jesus said to him, Go and sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you.

Now, Jesus wasn't saying to this new Christian, Go and live a sinless life that nothing bad will happen to you again. No, Jesus was saying, Live your life in a God-honouring and God-glorifying way.

Live your life in a God-honouring and God-glorifying way. And you know, that's what we're commanded to do with every commandment, not just the fourth commandment.

We're to live our lives in a God-honouring and God-glorifying way. And we're to ask ourselves, in all that we do, am I honouring the Lord in this?

[30 : 15] Am I glorifying God by doing this? Am I keeping the commandments? Because as Jesus says, If you love me, you'll keep my commandments. If you love me, you'll keep my commandments.

And so, my friend, living by the law of God is about loving the Lord. Living by the law is about loving the Lord.

Therefore, when it comes to the Sabbath, we should view the Sabbath in the way it was intended to be viewed. It's to be viewed and seen as a gift, not a grudge, a delight, not a dread.

It's to be a benefit, not a bind, a blessing, not a burden. We should consider the Sabbath day today. We should see it as a day of rest, not a day of restraint.

We should see it as a day of reflection where we can read God's Word and meditate on it and consider the things that the Lord has done for us. We can consider it as a day of reflection, not a day of restraint.

[31 : 21] Not a day of restraint. You know, I'm sure you're familiar with the words of A.W. Pink, who was the author of many Christian books that are still in circulation today.

You know, what's interesting about A.W. Pink is that he was a pastor in the United States and naturally in England for many years. But when the Second World War broke out, he and his family, they moved here in 1940.

They moved to the Isle of Lewis and they lived in Stornoway. I think they lived on Lewis Street. And, you know, A.W. Pink, he remained in Stornoway until his death in 1952.

In fact, he's buried in the Sandwick Cemetery in an unmarked grave. But it was A.W. Pink who coined that well-known rhyme about the Sabbath. Where he wrote, A Sabbath well-spent brings a week of content and health for the toils of the morrow, but a Sabbath profaned, whate'er be gained is a certain forerunner of sorrow.

A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content and health for the toils of the morrow, but a Sabbath profaned, whatever be gained is a certain forerunner of sorrow.

[32 : 40] And you know, that's how we should view the Sabbath. We should see it as a gift, not a grudge, a delight, not a dread, a benefit, not a bind, a blessing, not a burden, because when it comes to the Sabbath, it's not about the law.

It's all about the Lord. And the Lord said to us, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. We're to be living by the law. We're to live by the law because it's all about loving the Lord.

My friend, the Sabbath is all about looking, listening, loving, and living. For the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what it's all about. It's all about salvation and the Sabbath.

Salvation and the Sabbath. You know, the question I want to leave with you this morning is, it's just the question that Jesus asked this man who found salvation on the Sabbath.

The question, do you want to be healed? Do you want salvation on the Sabbath? Do you want to be saved on the Sabbath?

[33 : 48] Do you want salvation today? My friend, if you want to be saved today, then I urge you and encourage you and exhort you, go on your knees.

Go on your knees in your bedroom and earnestly and wholeheartedly ask the Lord to have mercy upon you.

Confess your sin and commit your life to the Savior. And you will experience, like this man, you will experience salvation on the Sabbath.

Salvation on the Sabbath. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray together. Our Heavenly Father, we give thanks for meeting us this morning and for reminding us on this Sabbath day that salvation is freely offered to us in the Gospel.

We give thanks that Jesus is one who speaks to us and he asks us personally and plainly, do you want to be healed? O Lord, we know that without Christ we are sin sick.

[35 : 05] Without Christ we are lingering in a lost state, heading towards a lost eternity. But Lord, we pray that we would respond in faith and obedience, that we would come confessing our sin and committing our life to the Savior.

O Lord, bless us, we pray. Bless thy truth to our souls, that thou wouldst keep us on mercy's ground until we find thee. Go before us, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 92. Psalm 92 in the Scottish Psalter and we're singing from verse 15.

Psalm 92. Now, Psalm 92, it's titled as a song or a psalm for the Sabbath day. Psalm 92 is the psalm that the Jews would sing every Sabbath.

And they would sing this psalm because it's a psalm that calls us to praise the Lord. The psalm opens with the words, to render thanks unto the Lord. It is a comely thing.

[36 : 17] And to thy name, O thou most high, do you praise aloud to sing thy lovingkindness to show forth and when shines the morning light and to declare thy faithfulness with pleasure every night.

You know, Psalm 92, it reminds us that when we spend our Sabbath praising the Lord, we will flourish. The Sabbath will be a blessing to us.

That's what he says because he says from verse 12, he says, but like the palm tree flourishing shall be the righteous one. He shall like to the cedar grow that is in Lebanon.

Those that within the house of God are planted by his grace, they shall grow up and flourish all in our God's holy place. So we're singing Psalm 92 from verse 12 down to the verse marked 15, which is the end of the psalm to God's praise.

But like the palm tree flourishing shall be the righteous one.

[37 : 28] He shall like to the cedar grow. He shall like to the cedar grow.

That is in Lebanon. Those that within the hearts of God are planted by his grace, they shall grow up and flourish all.

They shall grow up and flourish all in our God's holy place.

They shall and do it.

CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS

[39 : 44] CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS