

The Gospel of John 5:1-23

I The Inadequacy of Religion's Law Keeping and the Sufficiency of the Son's Life-Giving (5:1-9)

- A. This story takes place during a religious feast, in the religious center of Judaism, i.e., Jerusalem. The specific setting is by the sheep gate which signifies the entrance to the sheepfold. (10:1) The sheepfold is the place where the sheep are kept until the shepherd comes for them and takes them into the green pasture. There by the gate is a pool, called Bethesda, house of mercy, surrounded by five porticoes, which signify the shelter of the religion of law-keeping, a shelter like that provided by the sheepfold. At this place there was a multitude of the sick and impotent people, under the shelter of law-keeping. (**Rom.7:7-24**) They sat there waiting for the waters to be stirred up by the angel, the agent through which the law which cannot give life, was given. (**Gal.3:19,21**) They were unable to lift themselves, by self-effort, into the waters of law-keeping. Here, the Lord appeared.
- B. This story signifies that when the practice of law-keeping in the Jewish religion became an impossibility because of the impotence of man (**Rom.8:3**), the Son of God came to enliven the dead (**v.25**). The law could not give life (**v. 21**). "While we were yet weak" (**Rom.5:6**), He came to enliven us. The means for healing in the religion of law-keeping does not profit the impotent man, because he has no strength to fulfill the law's requirements. The law-keeping in religion depends on man's effort, man's doing, man's make-up. Since man is impotent, the law-keeping in religion becomes ineffective. With the Lord's enlivening, however, there is no requirement. All the impotent man needed was to hear the Lord's voice and he was enlivened (**v. 25**).
- C. The case of the impotent man exposes the inadequacy of religion. The Jewish religion was formed according to the Divine Word. It worships the one true God in the correct way. The holy city, the holy temple, the feast, the Sabbath, the angels, Moses, and the Scriptures are all good things of this religion, but they could do nothing for this impotent man. Religion does not belong to God's economy and it cannot fulfill God's purpose. God had no intention of having a religion. His intention was to give His Holy Word to His people, revealing to them that the coming One, the Son of God, would be their salvation and life for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This coming One would be everything to them—righteousness, holiness, redemption, and glory.

II Religion's Opposition to Life (5:10-16)

- A. Many religious people worship God and try their best to please Him, to behave themselves, and to make themselves perfect. Yet, it is all without Christ. This kind of religion is always in opposition to Christ and to the genuine followers of Christ in life. This chapter unveils the inadequacy of the typical religion and its opposition to Christ. In this chapter, the main thing in the negative side that we must see is the inadequacy and vanity of this religion. On the positive side, this chapter shows us the adequacy and sufficiency of Christ, the Son of God, as life to enliven people. Christ as life is sufficient to enliven us.
- B. Life's enlivening breaks religion's ritual. Religion is offended by life and begins its opposition to life from this point. The Sabbath is for man (**Mark 2:27**) and should be a rest to man. Religion's law-keeping did not bring rest to the man sick for thirty-eight years, but life's enlivening did it in one second. Yet, the religious people cared only for the sick man's rest. What a life we have! We do not need any religious things. As long as we have Jesus, all religious things mean nothing. As long as we have Jesus, we have life. We must let go of religion with all its things. They could not give us life, but Jesus does. Jesus enlivens us. Jesus gives us life, which brings us joy, rest, light and everything we need. Praise the Lord!
- C. The real significance of this case is the difference between religion and Christ, which is the difference between the law-keeping and the enlivening of Christ. Religion's law-keeping is good, but we are weak. Religion's law-keeping may be effective but we cannot meet its requirements. However, when we hear His voice, we pass from death into life. The contrast in this case is that religion requires, but Christ's word quickens. In principle, the situation of today's religion is the same. The religious people still care for their religious rituals at the sacrifice of peoples' experience of life. The Lord, on the other hand, cares for people's experience of life, rather than religious rituals.

III The Son Equal to the Father in Giving Life and Executing Judgment (part 1- 5:17-23).

- A. On one hand, the religious people kept the Sabbath, but on the other hand, they sought to kill Jesus. Because of their religious concept, they thought that to kill those who would not keep their religious ritual was to offer service to God (**16:2**). This is Satan's poisoning of people with religion, causing them to murder, just as when he poisons people with sin. The religious Jews persecuted Jesus because, on their Sabbath, He worked to enliven the impotent man.
- B. Then He explained that He worked because the Father is working. He said, "My Father is working until now, and I [also] am working" (**5:17**). This not only offended the religious Jews, but also caused them to consider that Jesus was blaspheming. According to their concept, He "not only broke the Sabbath, but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (**5:18**). They felt it was blasphemy to God. Yet, this "blasphemer enlivened the impotent man. His enlivening of that man testifies that He is equal with God and the Father in giving life to people. Their suspicion, hatred and murderous intentions proved that their religious activity was ineffectual and could not enliven them
- C. The religious Jews kept the Sabbath of creation. They did not know that because of man's fall the Sabbath rest was broken. Neither did they know that the Father and the Son were still working for fallen man's redemption in order to fulfill God's original purpose, which is the building of God's eternal habitation. What God worked on was the old creation and that work was finished. (**Gen. 2:1-3**) What the Father and the Son are doing is the new creation through redemption for God's building. This work includes the Son's life-giving, which is manifested in this case. In this matter, the Father and the Son are one. (**10:30**) Whatever the Father wants to do in the matter of life-giving, the Son does it accordingly. The Son of Man will execute judgment over all the unbelieving ones (**5:22-23, 27, 30**). Since He is a man, He is fully qualified to judge man. The Father gave all judgment to the Son "that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father" (**5:22-23**).