

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **The Decision to Prosecute John 5:16-18**

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus came into this world to die for our sins. This was the mission of Christ. And He was willing to do whatever He needed to do in order to fulfill that mission. He was not living His life in order to pursue comfort nor did He live His life in order to avoid pain. It was all about His mission. This very purposed approach to life will be on display for us this weekend as we continue our study of the Gospel of John.

We are presently examining the controversy that erupted between Jesus and certain Jews after He had healed a man at the pool of Bethesda. This controversy goes from **John 5:1** through **John 5:47**. In an attempt to divide this section of Scripture into bite size chunks, I have chosen to describe it in terms of a judicial proceeding. Therefore, the question that we began to answer several weeks ago was this: What basic elements of a *judicial* proceeding do we find in John 5?

The first element of a judicial proceeding that we find in John 5 is the *crime* and the initial investigation (John 5:1-15). It took us two weeks to examine this particular section of Scripture. The first week we simply considered the crime which is spelled out for us in **John 5:1-9**.

And what was the alleged crime? The alleged crime was that Christ had healed a paralytic on the Sabbath.

After we considered the crime in **John 5:1-9** we then considered the initial investigation in **John 5:10-15**. How did this initial investigation get started? The investigation got started when the paralytic shared his testimony with certain religious Jews who had confronted him about carrying his bed on the Sabbath.

We are now ready to move on in our study of the Bethesda controversy. In doing this we are now ready to consider the second element of a judicial proceeding that we find in **John 5**.

I would hope as we consider this second element that we would be encouraged to make our mission as central to our lives as Christ's mission was central to His life. Christ was sent into this world to die for our sins and He took that mission seriously. We have been sent into this world to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded us. It would be wonderful if we took this mission as seriously as Christ. Hopefully, the message this weekend will help us to do that. This brings us back to the question at hand. What is the second element of a judicial proceeding that we find in **John 5**?

The second element of a judicial proceeding that we find in John 5 is the decision to *prosecute* (John 5:16-18). Let us read these verses "**And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. (17) But He answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.' (18) For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal to God.**"

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These verses outline for us what might be considered the next logical step in a typical legal process.

In **John 5:1-9**, an incident had taken place that certain Jews would have considered to be a crime. These same Jews then launched an initial investigation based on an encounter with the man whom they saw carrying His bed in **John 5:10-15**, and now in **John 5:16-18** we actually see a decision by these Jews to prosecute the case; in other words, we see a decision by these Jews to persecute Jesus.

Let me read for you the first part of **John 5:16**. "**And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus.**" Notice the words "**And for this reason.**"

When the paralytic first told these certain Jews what had happened, he did not know the identity of Jesus. But after Jesus spoke to him in the temple in **John 5:14** this was no longer true. He knew exactly who had healed him and who had told him to take up his bed and walk. And he wasted no time in making the identity of Jesus known to the Jews who had originally confronted him, according to **John 5:15**. Therefore, "**for this reason,**" or in other words, on the basis of the testimony of the paralytic who was carrying his bed, the Jews responded.

What was their response? Let us continue to read the verse. "**And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus.**" When John says, "**the Jews were persecuting Jesus,**" it is referring to an ongoing period of hostile activity toward Christ that would continue throughout His public ministry rather than simply a single incident. In other words, the tense of the verb, "**were persecuting,**" suggests that the Apostle saw the hostile response of these certain Jews in this incident as representative of the kind of relationship that Christ would have with the Jewish religious establishment right up to the day of His crucifixion. Why were the Jews so hostile to Christ over the course of His public ministry? **John 5:16-18** helps us to answer to question.

The religious Jews persecution of Christ was based on two different charges. And what were those two charges?

The decision to persecute Christ was first of all based on the belief that He had violated the *Sabbath* (John 5:16). Let us continue to read the verse. "**And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.**" Obviously, from the standpoint of religious Jews, the things that Jesus was choosing to do throughout His public ministry on the Sabbath should not have been done. That is why they chose to persecute Him. What were those things that Jesus did in **John 5:1-9** that the religious Jews would have felt He should not have done? What did Jesus do in **John 5:1-9** that the religious Jews would have felt was a violation of the Sabbath?

The religious Jews would have viewed the *healing* of the paralytic in John 5:8-9 as a violation (Matthew 12:9-14). In order to support this thought let me read for you the story of another healing that took place not very long after the incident that we are now studying. Let me read for you **Matthew 12:9-10**. "**And departing from there, He went into their synagogue. (10) And behold, there was a man with a withered hand. And they questioned Him, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' – in order that they might accuse Him.**"

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They were hoping that He would answer either yes, or no. And no matter how He answered they were prepared to charge Him with violating the Sabbath based on what they believed to be true. However, Christ did not answer yes, or no. He rather chose to explain to them that doing good is always legal even on the Sabbath, and then in their presence He promptly healed the man. What was their response? It certainly was not positive. It says that they went out and counseled together how they might destroy Him.

Clearly, religious Jews considered healing a man on the Sabbath to be forbidden. This would mean that in the eyes of the religious Jews that not only would the healing of the man with the withered hand in **Matthew 12** have been forbidden, but the healing of the man by the Pool of Bethesda in **John 5** would have been forbidden as well.

But there was another thing that Jesus did at the Pool of Bethesda that from the standpoint of these religious Jews would have been considered a violation of the Sabbath. What would that be?

The religious Jews would have viewed Christ's *command* to the paralytic to take up his bed and walk in John 5:8 as a violation. In fact, Christ commanding this paralytic to take up his bed and walk seems to be far more upsetting to these religious Jews than the healing of the paralytic. Why do I say this? All we have to do is to remember how these Jewish religious leaders responded to the ex-paralytic when he shared his testimony with them.

How did they respond? Did they respond by asking him in **John 5:12**, "**Who is the man who healed you.**" Is this how they responded? No! Rather, they responded by asking him, "**Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk?'**" Their attention was focused entirely on what Christ told the paralytic to do rather than on what Christ did for the paralytic.

Certainly it was a terrible thing in the sight of these Jews that someone would choose to break the Sabbath by healing the paralytic, but it was far worse, from their perspective, for the person that had healed the paralytic to then encourage the person healed to break the Sabbath. Obviously, someone like this could not be ignored no matter who He was.

But when the Jews learned that it was Jesus, the well-known miracle worker, who had healed this paralytic the situation in their minds became even more alarming. I am sure when they heard that Jesus was the one that had commanded the paralytic to pick up His bed and walk they would have seen Jesus as a significant and growing threat to their religious system and therefore to their whole way of life. And they certainly were not going to sit idly by and watch their religious system be ripped apart. For them, Jesus had in a sense declared war on everything that they held dear when they became aware that He was not only violating the Sabbath, but more importantly was encouraging others to violate it as well. This can be compare to how we might feel about Osama Bin Laden today.

In prosecuting their case against Christ, what was the first charge that these religious Jews brought against Him? Their first charge was that He violated the Sabbath. He violated the Sabbath by healing the paralytic and then encouraging the paralytic to violate the Sabbath as well. In their minds, Jesus was a threat and they would not have been in any mood to ignore this initial charge or to show Him any mercy.

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Would Jesus defend Himself? If He did, how would He do it? We don't have to guess. The Scriptures tell us what happened next?

Jesus, in John 5:17, defended Himself against the charge that He had violated the Sabbath. Let me read this verse for you. "But He answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.'"

Let me ask you a question. Do you think that Christ's defense is meant to get Him out of a difficult situation or to make His situation even more difficult? Clearly His defense was purposed to make His situation even more difficult.

His defense was not about saving Himself but rather about taking Himself one step closer to fulfilling His mission. His defense was not about saving Himself, but rather it was all about saving us.

What did He in essence communicate when He told them "**My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working?**"

Let us begin to answer this question by looking at the first two words of this verse. What are those first two words? "**My Father.**" These words are very important words. Calling God "My Father" was not the way Jews usually referred to God. Mostly Jews referred to God as "our Father." While they might use "My Father" in prayer, they would qualify it with "in heaven" or some other expression to remove the suggestion of familiarity. Jesus did no such thing, here or elsewhere. He habitually thought of God as in the closest relationship to Himself.

Would the Jews have been uncomfortable with Jesus referring to God as His Father? Of course they would. They would not only have been uncomfortable with Him doing it, they would have been upset with Him doing it. It might be the same thing we would feel if we heard someone refer to God as "My Old Man."

But these words, "My Father", communicated far more to these Jews than simply an uncomfortable familiarity with God. And the reason these words did this was because of what else Jesus said. Let us continue to read **John 5:17. "My Father, is working until now, and I Myself am working."** In essence, what is Jesus communicating by these words?

Jesus, after calling God "My Father," reinforces the intimate relationship He enjoys with Him by claiming a prerogative that God alone could claim.

Let me ask you this question. When **Genesis 2:2-3** tells us that God after His creative acts rested, did this mean that He rested from all His work or just His creative work? The answer of course would be that He rested from His creative work only. This is the answer that every Jew in the time of Christ would have given as well.

Therefore, when Jesus said that God was "**working until now,**" implying that God was working even on Jewish Sabbaths, this would not have caused any problems for the Jews. They would have known that what Jesus said was in fact true.

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But now look at the final words of Christ's defense in **John 5:17**, "**And I myself am working.**"

This is an amazing statement. When Jesus began His defense with the words "**My Father,**" He alerted the Jews who were listening to Him that He considered Himself to have a very close relationship with God. And they might have wondered, "How close a relationship does Christ think that He has with God?" But when He said, "**And I Myself am working**" any question about how close of a relationship He thought He had with God was answered.

Jesus communicated in John 5:17 that His relationship with God was so close that he was able to work on the Sabbath in the *same* way as God was able to work on the Sabbath. Jesus in essence was saying to these Jews, "You can no more charge me with breaking the Sabbath than you can charge God with breaking the Sabbath."

Was what Jesus said true? Absolutely! Will it diminish the hostility of these Jews toward Him? Absolutely not! The defense was truthful but it in no way helped to soothe the hostility of these Jews toward Christ or to think of Him as less of a threat.

Look at their response in **John 5:18**. "**For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him.**" They apparently, even before what He said in John 5:18, were ready to kill Him and now they were even more eager to seek His death. Why?

This brings us to the second charge that the Jews brought against Christ. The decision to persecute Christ was not only based on the belief that He had violated the Sabbath but that He had made Himself *equal* with God (John 5:18).

Let us continue to read the verse, "**because He was not only breaking (or in other words destroying) the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, thus making Himself equal with God.**" Though the Jews may not have understood in what way He was equal with God we certainly do? We recognize that He was God Himself, or in other words, He was God the Son.

This is an amazing thing. Jesus, when being confronted by these religious Jews, chose to give a defense, but the defense that He chose had nothing to do with saving Himself. It was all about saving us. His defense was designed to take Him one step closer to the cross. His defense was designed to take Him one step closer to fulfilling His mission.

What about ourselves? Are we approaching our lives in the very same way? Are we willing to make decisions that will make our lives more difficult simply because we want to get one step closer to fulfilling our mission? You might say, "What do you mean?"

We have been called to go and make disciples. Going is always difficult. It takes an effort. It means that we will need to manage our lives in such a way that the cares of this world will not prevent us from taking time to nurture relationships with the unsaved world.

Of course, there is always a price that is paid once those friendships are built. Sometimes those friendships will be challenging, perhaps even uncomfortable, but hopefully the Lord will bless those friendships. Hopefully the Lord will privilege us with seeing men and women come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

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Then of course when God blesses our efforts in going with fruit our work has only just begun. As spiritual parents we will then be subjected to all the demands that are entailed in bringing a baby Christian to maturity in Christ. Of course this is not easy at all, but our lives of course should not be all about what is easy, should it?

### CONCLUSION

Jesus came into this world to die for our sins. This was His mission. And He did not simply sit back and wait to see if that mission would be fulfilled apart from any purposed or conscious effort on His part. He purposed to do whatever He had to do and to say whatever He had to say in order to fulfill that mission. We have seen that clearly in the passage that we studied this weekend.

Hopefully we would be as committed to fulfilling our mission as Christ was committed in fulfilling His. Hopefully we would not sit back passively and think disciples will be made and people taught to obey Christ apart from our purposed effort. This just won't happen. We must be willing to step out in a conscious way to fulfill the mission that Christ has given us. We must be willing to step out in a conscious way to fulfill the mission that Christ has given us even if we know we that we might as a result of those conscious efforts make our lives more difficult. Why should we be not only willing to do this but even eager to do this?

Let me read for you the first verse of the song entitled "*And can it be that I should gain?*"

And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Savior's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That Thou my God, shouldst die for me?

It seems that if God was willing to die for us that we should be willing to live for Him and seek to fulfill the mission He has given us even if living for Him and pursuing our mission might make our lives at times more difficult.