

The Son's Authority

John 5

What We Found

At a pool called Bethesda, whose five porticoes skeptics doubted until archaeologists dug them up, a man had been ill thirty eight years. We checked the number and found it in Deuteronomy 2:14: thirty eight years is the span from Israel's leaving Kadesh-barnea until they crossed the brook Zered, the years in which that whole generation of fighting men perished in the wilderness, dying within sight of promise. Augustine and many readers see in the man faithless Israel in one body, camped beside water that could not heal. Jesus asked him the question he asked this man, and asks each of us, do you want to be healed, and the man answered with a thirty eight year old answer, worn smooth instead of a yes. The healing needed no pool at all: rise, take up your pallet, and walk.

Then one sentence detonated everything: my Father is working still, and I am working. In the theology his hearers shared, God alone keeps working through the sabbath, sustaining the world, giving life, judging; and Jesus claimed that exemption as his own. John 5:21-23 then puts those very works in the hands of the Son, who gives life to whom he will and to whom all judgment has been given. His enemies decoded it instantly, he called God his own Father, making himself equal with God, and John never says they misunderstood. We held the great discourse with both hands: the Son does nothing of himself, and whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise, so that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father. Everything is gift, and the gift is everything. And we sat in the chapter's courtroom, where Jesus called four witnesses, the Baptist, his works, the Father, and the Scriptures, and we read the famous verse where it lives: you search the Scriptures... yet you refuse to come to me. The searching is not the destination. He is.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 17

Augustine puzzles lovingly over the number thirty eight. Forty is Scripture's number of completeness in the law, and thirty eight falls short by exactly two: the twofold command of love of God and love of neighbor. The law without charity leaves a man two short of forty, paralyzed beside religion's own pool. Only when Love himself walks up and speaks does the man finally stand.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 5

On the words that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father, Cyril presses the logic: equal honor is intelligible only between equals in nature. God, who gives His glory to no other, could not command for a creature the very honor owed to Himself. Either the Son shares the Father's nature, or heaven has commanded idolatry. The Church's worship of Jesus has stood on this verse ever since.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Gospel of John, on chapter 5

That the Son does nothing of himself does not diminish him, for the Son receives from the Father the very same nature, power, and operation, whole and undivided. His receiving is his eternal begottenness, not a creature's dependence. One power, one work, two persons: everything is gift, and the gift is everything.

Live It This Week

- **Answer the question.** In prayer this week, let Jesus ask you directly, about one specific area you name: do you want to be healed? Answer him honestly, yes, no, or not yet, and tell him why. He can work with honesty; he waits out excuses.
- **Keep an hour of sabbath.** The Lord of the sabbath healed on it because the sabbath was made for restoration. Claim one deliberate hour this Sunday, no screens, no errands, for rest and worship, and let the Father who is working still do the working.
- **Search with the Church.** Take one of this week's Catechism paragraphs (589, 679, 998, or 2173), look it up, and read it next to the verses it cites. Ten minutes of Scripture read inside the Church's living witness: the searching that ends in coming to him.

Memory Verse

John 5:24 (RSV2CE)

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Before Next Session

Read John 6, the whole chapter; it is long, and it is the summit of the first half of our study. Session 7: The Bread of Life. Come rested. Keep your tallies going, and keep your guess sealed.

Catechism References

CCC 589, 679, 998, 2173.