

## All In: #2 “The Forest Through the Trees” - John 5

Dr. Matthew Cassidy – 9/11/2011

In the preamble to the book of John, right in the first chapter, I want you to listen as I read:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

1:2 He was with God in the beginning.

1:4 In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. :5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

That is what today is all about. Turn to John 5 and I want you to see that Jesus shows up and talks to religious people and they don't know what to do with Him. They are clearly in conflict.

The story starts with Jesus coming to Jerusalem, entering at the NW corner, using that gate. Right there, when you come in, there is this giant pool with five big colonnades around it. It is called the pool of Bethesda.

It is a superstitious place, almost pagan in nature because at some time somebody must have fallen in that pool and they came out healed. It is a spring fed pool so every once in a while the waters will churn. The story is that the first guy who gets into the pool, right after that churning happens, [they think an angel is doing that] that person comes out healed.

If you think that is odd and superstitious, you just need to open our newspapers and somebody has seen the face of Jesus on a tortilla or somebody might witness a statue crying and that witness gets better. So that is the same sort of thing here.

It is a rather cruel place with false hopes but desperate people go there.

***Wait a minute! Do I want to get WELL?***

There is one individual who has been there for 38 years. He is a paraplegic. His entire life has been crawling around on his hands or using them to navigate life. For 38 years he sat at that pool, waiting for that angel to touch the water, and then he could get in there and be healed.

Jesus walks into that place, that pool of Bethesda, and hears or knows the story of that man. He says:

John 5:6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, He asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

Really? That is the dumbest question I have ever heard or it is the most insightful question that has ever been asked. Since it is Jesus, I am going with very insightful.

**Do you want to get well?** Do you want to do what it takes to get well? Do you want to meet on Wednesdays at 6:30 a.m.?

*I am not a morning person.*

Well, do you want to get well? I have two books and we could read through them together.

*Well, that is a big book. I don't like to read.*

Well, do you want to get well? You are going to have to change the people you spend time with. These friends you are hanging around with right now who are helping to damage your soul and spirit are going to have to be left. You are going to have to cross a desert of loneliness to find new friends who will take you places you could only dream about and who will restore your life. Are you willing to cross that desert?

*Well, I don't know. I don't like being alone. That has always been my biggest problem.*

Well, do you want to get well? You are going to have to go home a whole different way. From now on, you can't go from work to home, going on that street. I know that is the most direct way but it has too many temptations for you, too many bad memories, too many failures. Do you want to get well?

That might be some of the questions Jesus is asking.

To get well, would you pay child support two days early? That is all it is going to cost you.

*But I sure like that dig to her.*

Well, do you want to get well?

There is another way of looking at that question. **Do you want to be well?** Do you want to be fixed and then like everyone else? You will then be like everyone else. You will be normal. Do you want to be well? You will be one in seven billion and then you will have to take responsibility for your life and your choices. Do you want to get well? There will be no more favors, no more head starts, no more advantages, no more special times of focused counseling on you. Do you want to be well? If you got well and you were normal, you would have to go to work. Do you know why they call work *work* – because it is work. If you got well, you would go to work. Do you want to get well?

This first part is not really the meat of this whole section but I want you to see the reason I am spending time with it is that just about every encounter Jesus has with people in this book of John, there is a version of this happening in the conversations. So I wanted to draw your attention to it. Jesus is going to ask people He comes in contact with – do you want to get well? Do you want to do what you have to do to get well? Or, do you even want to be well?

Jesus asks us that every day when the sun comes up. We open our eyes and He asks – Do you want to do this?

Oddly enough, the man's answer is somebody else's fault. Look at verse 7.

John 5:7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

5:8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." :9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

I think John is showing great restraint in his description of this story. If nothing else, John is efficient because no man lying there in that condition for 38 years just immediately stands up and walks. He skips, trots, cartwheels around the cruelty of that pool. He dances. He is happy. He is having a great day, a fabulous day.

## **Legalism**

Then somebody throws a wet blanket on him. Look at the next part of verse 9.

5:9 The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

I have to laugh because he has not walked for 38 years. His first day out, he is messing it up. Is anybody else enjoying that? Oh man, I can't even get this day right.

Let me explain why that Jewish leader said that. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week – Saturday and it goes back to creation. God created everything in six days and on the seventh day He rested. That is good and well.

But the fourth commandment says: Remember the Sabbath day. You shall keep it holy.

That reminds you that was the day that God rested and you should rest as well. I will talk more about the significance of why we should have a Sabbath.

I am just trying to tell you what this religious leader is saying here. *Hey, this is the day we are supposed to be keeping holy by resting and you are walking around with a mat. So we have to put a stop to this as soon as we can.*

5:11, 12 But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" So they asked him, 'Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?'

:13-16 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." The man went away

and told the Jews that it was Jesus who made him well. So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.

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What is going on here? It is something called legalism. You might have experienced it in your Christian life. I did in college. I was involved with a group for about two weeks or so. It is a group that atmospherically is predominantly judgmental. It smothers joy and happiness out of everything that is Christian. It is not uncommon for college students to be involved in this because of their youth and zeal and ignorance. They don't know any better. So that is how I found myself there as a brand new follower of Christ and I ran into this new group. They have rules for everything. It is not about freedom; it is about control. It is the death of worship; it goes flat. Service is a dirge. Following Jesus is a duty. That is what it feels like.

I was in the wrong place with the wrong group of people because they were talking about having a rally where they were going to burn a bunch of these albums. Songs used to come on these flat discs called albums and they were going to burn them. I said – Now, why are we going to do that? They told me – it is the devil's music. I said – Wait a minute. I can understand burning mounds of pornography. That is just bad. Or we could maybe burn a Ford Pinto which has never been a good car. But I want no part of burning classic rock. Are you kidding me? I can't hear the voices. Who plays these backwards? I will go to your rally but I am going to buy not burn. Who are you people and why do you do this?

That was my last experience with them. I did not want anything to do with them.

There is another word, in our common vernacular about this experience, this set of rules for everything and it is *religion*. That is what we would call it today. They have standards of righteousness that is good standing before God but they are manmade. Most often, they are God's laws already, God's laws that keep us safe and whole and that are good. But then it is God's laws + a culture or a tradition or a personality. Usually that personality is preferences or biases. So they take what is good and they contaminate it. They wreck it and ruin it. They twist God's rules and laws around so it is not what it used to be.

Here are some signs, or how you know that you are involved in religion instead of Christianity. These are signs of legalism or religion.

- They quote other people authoritatively. They quote people way back in the day, or last week, as though they are absolutely right. They will quote Bill Bright, or Billy Graham, or Bill Gothard, or Bill Hybels. Did I leave out of the Bill's out? There are a lot of Johns: John of the Cross, John Calvin, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards. Again, some times they want us to follow God but they get lost. So they tell

us how to live our married lives, how to raise our children absolutely, how to vote. They tell us what music God listens to. We need to follow those men and women and quote them more than we would quote the Bible.

God never promised that He would make other people's words protected by His details of being without error. The Bible will be without error. God does all sorts of things to make sure the Bible is kept clean from error. But when other people come along, God is not holding them to that standard. You should not either.

■ The other way of knowing if legalism is present is when you start quoting church history as though it were authoritative – like it has the same weight as the Bible does. In this passage itself, the leaders are quoting Moses or misquoting Moses. But they are going to quote something 2000 years old.

People do that today and now it is 4000 years old or they will quote something 1500 years old. Or, they will say – 500 years ago, during the reformation, these things were established and therefore .... Or 50 years ago. Or 5 years ago. God never said – I am going to preserve history so that it is without error or mistake. When you are quoting history, or people, with the same authority of the Bible, you are probably involving yourself in legalism and religion – and not what Jesus is talking about.

This is not new. Jesus said this: You have heard it said but I say ... Jesus had to say that because in those days, they would quote a rabbi who quoted a rabbi who quoted a rabbi. They would quote John who quoted Bill who quoted this other John that quoted this other Bill. Jesus would show up and say: Look, you have heard it said by all these other people ... but here is what I say. I am going to tell you what the Bible says.

Oddly enough, the reformers were all pointing to read the Bible. Now people point to the reformers. Jesus would show up today and say: Look you have heard it said but I say ... And he would say it today.

■ So, besides quoted people and history as though they had authority, the other sign is criticism is the primary motivation. It is not what you are doing right but what you are doing wrong. Religion and legalism are competitive Christianity. You are looking over your shoulder at the guy who is behind you because they are not running fast enough. You get to judge them. You are running, looking at the guy in front of you and you are wondering – How come you can't be any better and you are feeling pretty terrible. But criticism is the primary motivation. It is all the things you are not doing. Those guys are wrong because they .....

■ Finally, it produces toxicity. There are only two ways of living in this life of religion and

legalism. One of them is that you are extremely proud or you are defeated. You are self-righteous or self-conscious about all the things you are not doing. It is all about how big and important and stupendous you are. Or, you are depressed because you are counting your losses.

It ruins everything that God does. His laws are to protect us; they take those laws and make these lists and ruin it all.

Look at this story. If it were contemporary, it would be analogous to your next door neighbor with a ten year old boy. His name is Hank. Hank is coming home from his baseball field and they get in a terrible automobile accident. Hank's spine is injured and he is in a wheelchair. He can't use his legs for the rest of his life. You are one of those people who gets to stay in your house for your whole life and the decades go by. You see Hank as a teenager, as a young man, as a middle aged man. 38 years go by, really, 4 decades and Hank is almost 50 years old. Then one day you are lying in bed and it is 7:00 a.m. and someone starts mowing by your window. You get up and run out in your bathrobe. There is Hank mowing the yard. – I am mowing the yard! Look at me mowing! – You are yelling at Hank as loud as you can. Hank is yelling back – I am mowing my hard!! 38 years ago, I was coming back from the baseball field and I was going to mow the yard for my very first time. I am mowing this yard!! – You go back into your house and you get your Bible and go back out and say: Hank, it is Sunday. There is no mowing on Sunday.

This wasn't mowing. This was worship. I am showing off. How could you not understand the spirit of this law? How could you torque it to take all the joy out of it?

Jesus hates religion. Do you hate religion? Jesus hates it more.

Do you hate it when people take some of your words and you meant those words to be positive and loving and encouraging; or maybe just helpful. They take those words and quote you to someone else but they have turned those words upside down and twisted them backwards so that they mean all but the opposite. They make you look like a scoundrel. Do you hate when that happens?

Well, God hates it more.

Do you hate bullies? Everybody hates a bully. God hates bullies more.

Jesus hates that these bullies are taking His words and using them to injure other people when they are out there worshipping God by carrying their mats and mowing lawns. That is what this story is about.

The story is about Jesus invading life to get things straight about what He enjoys. It is the nature of a human being to take the general beauty of what God gives us and to control God and others by adding rules to it.

The Word did not become flesh to start a new religion. The Word became flesh to buy us out of adoption and that adoption agency was in hell. Jesus goes to hell for us and says: What is this baby going to cost? It is Jesus, your life; you sign in blood. That is what it is about – Jesus came to set us free – not to bind us. So Jesus hates religion. He hates legalism and what people are doing to the Old Testament and now to the New Testament.

## **John 2 – The Temple**

In John 2 it is the same theme as here. This time the subject matter is the Temple itself. It is a place of worship and worship is a good thing, right? Part of worship is to emulate what God is like. So God requires that the sacrifices be like God – holy and pure, set apart for a purpose. But I don't want your leftover stuff; I want the cows, sheep, doves, all those that are perfect. I want the pick of the litter in all these things. That seems to be a legitimate expectation for giving to God.

Jesus shows up in John 2 on Passover and He has seen what has taken place in the Temple. The whole thing has turned into something like a money laundering deal. Jesus looks at His twelve friends and says: Guys, I am going to need your belts. I am going to make a whip.

If you don't think that Jesus hates religion and legalism, you read John 2 because He whips everything. He whips the cattle, the sheep. He turns over the tables – the exchange rate areas. He lets all the doves fly free. Everybody scatters because He says: I will not tolerate My Father's house of worship to be used as a profit-making corporation.

The people in power had changed all the rules so that the people had to buy the animals from them. They were making bank off of it, using all of that bullying and lists.

That is what Jesus does with the worship center in John 2.

## **John 5 – The Sabbath**

Now in Chapter 5, Jesus is picking on another thing that was good, that God gave us. It is the Sabbath which is for rest, to break the routine and the monotony and just the hardness of life. It is a time of worship. It is a time to reflect that God is my sustainer. It is a day where we live by faith. We say: You know what? I have seven days of stuff to do but I will do it in six days and trust God to get that rest. I am going to keep the Sabbath holy.

It is a great thing but when people don't know what to do about the Sabbath, other people come in and fill in all the blanks. There are 39 prohibitions to describe what it means to *rest*. That word does not

seem hard to me. These are categories – no: carrying, burning, extinguishing, finishing, writing, erasing, cooking, washing, sewing, tearing, knotting, untying, shaping, plowing, planting, reaping, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, selecting, sifting, grinding, kneading, combing, spinning, dyeing, chain-stitching, warping, weaving, unraveling, building, demolishing, trapping, shearing, slaughtering, skinning, tanning, smoothing, and marking.

I don't think people every worked so hard to rest in their whole lives. Can you imagine how hard it would be to rest? All this to say, God gives us the rules to set us free; they take those same chains and use them to enslave us.

Jesus hates religion. He hates all these lists so that you can be better than someone else or think you are winning His favor.

If you look at the passage itself, you will see that Jesus does this. It was not circumstantial that Jesus healed this man on Saturday. He waited and waited until Saturday. Let's go to that pool of Bethesda. Let's make some people mad today. Let's get in a little trouble. Any of you 12? Come on.

That is what is happening here because Jesus wants to make a point.

## ***John 5 – On Trial***

This is a trial in John 5. Look at verse 16.

John 5:16-18 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted Him. Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” For t his reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making himself equal with God.

There are two crimes that Jesus is committing. One, Jesus is doing this on the Sabbath. Then when He was having to explain himself, Jesus said: Well, My Father works all the time. I am working all the time. So, connect the dots. We are the same thing.

Now, Jesus is up for blasphemy plus committing violations of Sabbath laws.

The rest of this section, verses 19-47, that is actually the trial. Jesus is going to do some things to make sure the people understand that He and the Father are the same. He is Lord over the Sabbath.

But in studying this all week long, I found a comment from one of the scholars that I thought was especially helpful for you to understand this morning.

This is a long and complex chapter, and one can get bogged down in the details of its debate and the intricacies of Jesus' argument.

Do you see what it is saying? Don't mess with this, preacher. This next section of Scripture, we are not going to go through in detail because it is long and complex and it is intricate. I will just give you a two-point outline.

Jesus is showing that He has a right to heal on the Sabbath and He has a right to define what that means by first six specific claims (vv 19-30):

- "I am equal with God" (vv. 19-20)
- "I am the giver of life" (v. 21)
- "I am the final judge" (vv. 22-23)
- "I will determine the eternal destiny of humanity" (v. 24)
- "I will raise the dead" (vv. 25-29)
- "I am always doing the will of God" (v. 30)

After that section is done, the next section He will call witnesses. If you read through that, he uses the word testify (vv. 32-47). The things which testify will be:

- Witness 1: God the Father (vv. 32, 37-38)
- Witness 2: John the forerunner (vv. 33-35)
- Witness 3: Jesus' "signs" (v. 36)
- Witness 4: The Scriptures (vv. 39-44)
- Witness 5: Moses (vv. 45-47)

The reason why I don't want to spend time there is because it gets very confusing. You will miss the bigger point which is: Jesus came to set us free from other people's laws. He hates religion and He hates legalism. It is not from Him.

### ***How does Legalism and Religion happen?***

The question I felt like you and I needed to answer, to live the life that Jesus would want us to live, to be All In, is --- How does religion happen? How do people who know their Bible so well, like these Jewish scholars and current scholars and Bible readers, -- how does this happen?

A couple of verses will help us understand that. It is a two-part process. Here is how to get religious instead of spiritual.

John 5:39-42 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life.

Just by studying them.

These are the Scriptures that testify about Me [Jesus], yet you refuse to come to Me to have life. I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.

Here is how you become religious.

1. You study the Scriptures in so much detail that you lose the meaning of them. You lose the forest through the trees. You study the paint stroke in so much detail that you can't even see the picture. You know the letter of the Law but you don't know the meaning of the Law. You have turned the Law which gives us freedom and protects us into something that cages us and ruins us. The most legalistic religious people I have ever met were in graduate school while I was studying theology. Let it go, you guys. Where is the fun?

2. The second thing is that last verse. "I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts." You can't be religious and legalistic and love God; that does not work because we are too busy being competitive.

### ***Meaning of being "All In" – John 2 and 5***

So, what does it mean to be "All In" when we are looking at the life of Jesus, in especially John 2 and 5. What does that mean? It means that we follow the teachings and the life of Jesus Christ, not what other people have heaped on top of that -- not with the add-on's and additions and all the other things. It is reading the Bible first and foremost because it has authority. The Bible has been protected by God and gives us freedom and joy.

One letter to a church that was crushed under legalism was written by Paul. In Galatians, Paul wrote: It was for freedom that Christ set you free. What you began in the Spirit – remember how much fun you had when you were skipping home, are you now perfecting by working. Just enjoy the relationship with Jesus Christ because you are in His lap and He holds you up.

Let me wrap this up quickly. Most of you don't understand the demographics of our church and I want you to know about one group. There are a lot of people who come here and they have never been to church. They are fun to be around because everything is so brand new to them.

Then there is another segment of people who have been going to other traditional churches, Bible-teaching churches like ours. Sometimes they take a while to get used to what we do here and why because they probably don't know that Billy Sunday 100 years ago had alter calls every week at his revival but we

don't care about Billy Sunday. So we don't do what he did 100 years ago. But it takes a while for people to realize that was not in the Bible but that was just in my culture.

Then there are those who are from other churches a lot like ours. They fit in easily.

Then there is this segment that you need to know about Grace Covenant. It is this segment of people who come here. I think God leads them here. It is people who were raised in churches and homes that had this cancer of legalism in them. They were smothered and tortured by rules and laws and love that was only given when you did your duty – conditional love. They usually ran with families that had that same value and went to that same church with those same families. They had books and books about how to behave. Then somehow they break away – go to school or get married – and they come to Austin and find themselves in our auditorium. There is a pretty good swath of people at Grace who come here and who are set free. They fight through all the false guilt that they are bringing with them. They shed those things not in the Bible that are part of the freedom we have when we follow Jesus by skipping and doing cartwheels. This is a safe place for them.

I just want to tell you that the tone around here is such that those can come here and be made well because the cure for legalism and religion is to shout louder that Grace Transforms. The way to fight all the rules that men make up is to say in more places, more often, to more people --- No, no, no. It is grace that transforms. It was God's gift that the guy walked. It is a metaphor of life, of salvation.

Maybe without some of you knowing this the way you give grace to other people is healing them. You have received grace and you have seen its transform your life and you want to give grace to other people from other denominations, from other backgrounds, from other music styles, from whatever. You don't hold prejudice. That is the antibiotic to the injury that was caused to them in the way they were raised. So I want to commend you on being a Grace Covenant Church. You keep that up because we can't do anything else. We have to follow Jesus. That is what it means to be All In from John 5. Follow Him and no one else.

Lord, we lift up our souls to You, that you bought out of hell. You paid a ransom for our adoption. Now we can just enjoy being yours. You hold onto us. You grant us unconditional love. You won't ever put us on some vicious and tormenting treadmill of conditional love. Lord, I ask you help us to fight – especially those who are so ambitious in here – to bring ambition into their spiritual life. I ask that You help to fight that in us and if You would love us more if we were checking off spiritual boxes like we check off our tasks at home and at work. God, let us bathe in love and grace. Let us give that love and grace to other people. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.