

Fixing And Breaking

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'd like us just to turn back to John chapter five because today we're resuming our study on John's gospel. As I'm sure you'll remember in the second half of last year, we went through chapters one to four and in many ways those chapters are like a beautiful summer's day because they're breathtaking. John in chapters one to four is showing us who Jesus is because he wants us to know that he's the Son of God and he wants us to believe in him and everything that John says in those chapters is stunning. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. He's the one who's been with his Father forever and he's the one through whom everything else was made. Jesus is the one who brings the joy of the Messianic age. All the waiting is finally over. Jesus has come. He's come to fulfill and replace all the old requirements of the religious system in the Old Testament. He's come to take away all the restrictions that that imposed. He's the one who brings an astonishingly simple message of salvation that whoever believes in him will have eternal life and he's come so that our thirst will be quenched. He brings healing, restoration and peace. And so John one to four in many ways is like walking through the hills on a beautiful summer's day. Everything you see is amazing. As we resume our study we've come to chapter five and here the narrative becomes we could maybe say a little bit more wintry. Not because it's any less stunning. There's so much amazing truth but wintry because from this point onwards clouds of opposition against Jesus are starting to gather and we saw that in the passage that I can read for us and we can read again at verse 18. This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him because not only was he breaking the Sabbath but he was even calling God his own father making himself equal with God.

Our title this morning is Fixing and Breaking and I've chosen that title because that's exactly what Jesus has come to do and that's exactly what Jesus is doing in this passage. Jesus has come to fix brokenness in the world but Jesus has also come to break stuff as well. He's come to break bonkers ridiculous stupid nonsense. And so that's our two headings today. I actually don't know if they're the greatest headings I've ever come up with or the worst but they're there and that's what we're going to use to study this passage together. So first of all we're thinking about fixing brokenness. I don't need to persuade anybody in here today or anyone watching online that there is a lot of brokenness in the world. We see it when we look out across the nation. You see it if you take your phone out and look at the news headlines. You see it if you look across our community and think about the difficult circumstances that many people face and you also see it when you look at your own life. We can see brokenness and pain and sorrow.

Illness, addiction, loneliness, poverty, chronic pain, stress, anxiety, everyone experiences some of these at various points in their lives. And sometimes it's very obvious to the outside world but at other times it can be very hidden. Either way it's awful. The world is full of brokenness today. The world of the New Testament period was no different. There was just as much brokenness then and one place where all that brokenness of life could be seen very clearly was at the pool of Bethesda as is described in verses one to three. I want you to imagine that you are walking around that pool and so you can think of a pool in the middle. I don't exactly know what it would look like but you can just use your imagination and all around it you are walking along and you see people lying there. People who can't get up. People who are who look half-starved. People who are blind. People who maybe can't speak coherently. People whose faces are just a story of years of suffering and pain and you're kind of having to pick your way through just this awful scene of brokenness that's surrounding that pool. When we think of lying by the pool we often think of tenor-eef when everybody's lying there looking and feeling great. I want you to imagine the complete opposite of that. I want you to imagine like a hospital ward in a war zone lying around the pool. That's what we've got here. Among the people by that pool is a man who's been ill for 38 years and he and the others who lay there were waiting for the waters of the pool to be stirred and they believed that if the

waters were stirred then whoever got into the pool first would be healed. Now it's a weeb of explaining to do here because if any of you have got the authorized version in front of you or if you're familiar with the authorized version you'll see that in it there's an extra bit in the authorized version that doesn't appear in the

ESV. You've got versus what we could call 3B and 4 where it says a multitude lay there blindly and paralyzed waiting for the moving of the water for an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water. Whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. Now this is an example of what's known as a textual variant and that's an important thing for us to know about. There are literally thousands and thousands and thousands of manuscripts that have been found containing the writings of the New Testament.

So they've been found over many years Greek manuscripts containing some fragments, some complete books of the New Testament and the amount that's been found is incredible. There's more New Testament fragments found than any other document of that period so that the level of evidence for the New Testament is overwhelmingly amazing really from that kind of archaeological point of view. But because there are so many literally thousands there are some variations between them in other words you've got some you've got some that are slightly different from each other that's what's called a textual variant the texts are ever so slightly different.

[7:19] Now the first and most important thing to say about that is that that all the variants are actually over very very tiny things. There's nothing major in terms of the Christian gospel that hangs on a variant it's actually all very minor stuff but there are a lot of them and you'll have seen them if you read the ESV the NIV you'll often see a footnote where it'll say some manuscripts have da da da da da da and there's a whole academic discipline that's devoted to looking at all of these textual all these manuscripts and all the textual variants and trying to work out what's the correct what one should be seen as the original and so I find all that very interesting you may find it all very boring doesn't matter but but we get confronted with it from time to time in the pages of scripture here we have it here and basically the bit that's in the ESV it's in the AV the bit that's in italics is not present on the earliest manuscripts and for that and for various other reasons people who translated the ESV translated the NIV they leave it out because their they tend to their judgment is that it wasn't original that it would have been added later and there's various reasons for that and I don't want to consume too much time on this just now but if anyone has any questions about that I'm more than happy to chat about it after the service but many many scholars and I would agree with them would say that that bit in italics the textual variant is not part of the original manuscript which is why most translations in the last 150 years leave it out it raises a question for us which is more important which is the question does us did this pool really work okay so when we're talking about this pool you got this pool surrounded by invalids they're all thinking when that water gets stirred up whoever gets in there first gets healed did it really work was it really an angel from god was it really a miraculous provision for healing or was it just a superstition was it just a kind of like a story and and a kind of local idea and did somebody who was aware of that story who was writing out a manuscript think oh that's the pool that the angel came and said I better write that in I think that's the case and and so was this more of a superstition I would say it was I mean I'm as I said I'm very happy to to chat about that with anyone who doesn't agree but I would say it was a superstition another reason for that is that there was a natural explanation for the stirring of the water when you had a pool it would have you know would have streams running into it from time to time those streams may cause the water to stir so there may there was probably a natural explanation it was probably a superstition and the little bit that's in italics there on the screen probably wasn't written by john one thing that we know for certain is that that pool was not working for this man because he's lying there and even if the pool worked he couldn't get into it in time he's caught in this negative spiral where he's waiting for the waters to be stirred when it happens he can't move quickly enough no one can carry him someone gets in there first he's stuck as a chronic invalid beside this pool but Jesus then comes to him and I love how Jesus speaks to this man he asks him a very simple question do you want to be healed the man gives this elaborate answer talking about oh well I can't do this everything's against me it's not fair it's not

going to work Jesus then gives him what's really quite a blunt reply get up pick up your mat and walk and I love how Jesus just blasts through all the complexity and negativity of the man's circumstances he dismantles this spiral of negativity that the man's in tells the guy to get up and

that's exactly what happened and it's a remarkable miracle and there's just there's a few things I want us to notice in terms of how Jesus fixes this broken man first thing I want to notice I'm going to just say three things briefly first thing is that sorry I forgot to change the slide there it should have been on verse five to nine but you can see it there and I can read it for us anyway first thing I want to notice is that this healing miracle like every other healing miracle that Jesus performed is pointing us to the great work of restoration that Jesus has come to do as we said already there's a huge amount of brokenness in the world around us and because brokenness is so prevalent in our communities and in our lives it's very easiest for us to just think well it's just something we've got to accept we've got to just accept that brokenness and suffering is just part of life the bible never ever makes brokenness welcome like that in our experience and that is such a crucial thing that I want you to see the bible teaches us that the brokenness that we see in the world around us and that you may be seeing experience in your own life that brokenness is an unwanted intrusion into the world every illness every injustice every bruise all suffering and pain and anguish Jesus never looks at that and thinks oh well we just have to accept that's the way life is Jesus looks at that and he says that's wrong and that is not the way things are meant to be all the suffering that we experience that people around us experience all the unfairness and horribleness of life all of that can be traced back to the fact that sin has broken God's creation things are not the way God created them to be things are not the way God wants them to be sin has caused so much brokenness the amazing thing about Jesus is that he's come to fix it he's come to put things right now that work of restoration that Jesus has come to do is not instantaneous it begins when he is born and when he dies and rises again it'll ultimately only be culminated when he returns to inaugurate a new heavens and a new earth but in miracles like this Jesus is giving us a glimpse of what he's come to do he's pointing us towards the great restoration work that he has begun his goal is a world where he will wipe away every tear from our eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things will have passed away and I want to say to you that this is one of the reasons why Christianity is so intellectually satisfying lots of people think that you have to leave your brain behind if you want to follow Jesus that is total rubbish this is one of the reasons why Christianity is so intellectually satisfying because if you abandon the bible it means that when you look at suffering in your life or in the world around you ultimately you have to conclude that that's just part of life but with the bible you can look at all the pain and sorrow and unfairness and hurt in the world and you can say I know that that is wrong Jesus has come to heal restore and fix a broken world second thing I want you to see in relation to this fixing is that this work of fixing is done how it's done through his words Jesus just speaks and the man gets up and he is renewed and this is another example of the many many many times when Jesus makes something happen by speaking we see it all throughout the gospel but I want you to ask you a question where's the first time in the bible that we see Jesus doing something by speaking where does it happen first it happens in Genesis chapter one when he says let there be light it Jones taught us that all things were created through him through Jesus and he did it by speaking and that's why it's no surprise that John calls Jesus the word Jesus speaks and something happens that's why when we what we see in Jesus's ministry in examples like this is just a continuation of what he's done from the very beginning of the universe Jesus speaks and it brings life and order and healing and restoration and this is where everything makes perfect sense because this is why the whole of Christianity is grounded on a message it's not grounded on stupid weird religious rituals it's grounded on words grounded on speech grounded on a message and that's why the key thing that we all need to do to be saved is listen and believe what he's telling us and put our trust in him this work of fixing is done through Jesus's words the third thing I want you to notice is that that this incident is an example of what I think we could call blunt grace now I don't think you'll find that term in any theological books but I think that it captures what's going on here if you look at the man again he was stuck in this rut kept on trying something that kept on not working and which is what many people do for years he had placed his hope in this message that when the waters are stirred if you get in there first you're going to be healed that was the message he'd heard that was that was his plan that was his goal and it's a message of complicated superstition because it's like okay there's this thing we've got to wait maybe it'll be stirred if it's stirred gotta get in there first make sure there's someone there it's all very elaborate very complicated very superstitious Jesus comes to him with a message that's completely different he says get up it's a message of blunt grace not blunt in a rude or offensive way not at all but blunt in a way that it just cuts across all the superstitious nonsense that this guy had in his head but this blunt message this clear message is a message of grace you've got a guy who's totally

helpless he can't do anything Jesus does it all and I think the term blunt grace is helpful because I think we see it again later in the passage I think we see it in verse 14 Jesus finds in the temple him in the temple and he says to him see you're well sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you now this can be a tricky verse because you can read it and it's like okay Jesus says sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you so does that mean that everything bad that happens to us is because of specific sins that we've committed um that's a question that people can ask look at this verse it's like okay so-and-so sick what sin have they done is is that the case is it that that that sin is caused sickness is caused by by our sin well the answer to that question is no and the reason that we know the answer to that question is no is because other parts of scripture teaches that there are other parts of scripture that teach us that that suffering is not necessarily because of a specific thing that you've done and you actually will actually discover this later in John's gospel in chapter nine Luke 13 also sets forth the same principle so it might be the case that in these words Jesus is giving the man a general warning to say that you know you need to follow me rather than just turning away from me and now that you're healed just doing your own thing and going back to a life of sin you need to follow me it could be that Jesus is saying that and I'm totally open to that being the possibility at the same time though I think that we can and should recognize that sometimes suffering can be the direct result of specific sinful behavior and I think we'll see that if we imagine an example imagine that this man was a gambling addict now I've got no idea if he was or not um but imagine that he was 38 years ago he had lost everything he'd lost his home his family his job all because of his gambling addiction he became destitute he became malnourished eventually he became crippled every time he got any money he immediately lost it by gambling and he was just in a mess if that was the situation or something like that then you could very much understand it if Jesus said to him don't gamble again so that nothing worse happens to you now we don't know I don't know if that's exactly what's going on here I think it's just a possibility either way Jesus is quite blunt but that bluntness is conveying grace and sometimes we need that there are times when what we need is gentle persuasion and helpful encouragement and everyone one of you knows me knows that that's that's my default that's I'm a great believer in that and I think that's hugely helpful but the ultimate model of how to talk to people is not me the ultimate model is Jesus and when you look at Jesus you can absolutely see that it's not always gentle persuasion it's not always just encouragement sometimes it's blunt grace because when it comes to listening to Jesus when it comes to us reaching out into our community with the gospel when it comes to inviting people that we know to church when it comes to coming on a Thursday night for the first time when it comes to professing faith and sitting at the Lord's table when it comes to putting your trust in Jesus sometimes we need a blunt gracious kick up the backside that's what Jesus gives the man and that takes us to our second heading Jesus has come to fix brokenness but he's also come to break bonkers ridiculous stupid nonsense now there's a lot of brokenness in the world as we said there's also a lot of bonkers ridiculous stupid nonsense in the world especially when it comes to religion and that's exactly what we see in this passage look at verses 9 to 13 verse 9 tells us that the healing took place on the Sabbath and that's what kicks off all the controversy to the Jews this man gets up he carries his mat in their eyes carrying your mat is against God's law this man is doing something wrong but what we need to recognize is that this is one of the many examples that we see in the gospels of how the Jews had added an extra layer of requirements on top of God's law so the God's commandment was to keep the Sabbath day holy to make it a day of rest from work the Jews had added all sorts of extra requirements to that in terms of how that was to be specifically applied in their lives and one of the things that they said was that you can't carry a bed that's working so therefore this man carrying his bed is breaking the Sabbath commandment now we can relate to this in our context because we all know that at one level we have an amazing heritage of Sabbath observance in our communities which we must never lose and we must always fight to keep the Sabbaths in Lewis are the best Sabbaths in the whole of Britain but it's also been a lot of additional requirements added to that over the years that that God never ever asked us to add so no playing outside no going for a walk or maybe the most bizarre one of all what I heard which is not um not from this community but from another community where where children who were running to Sunday school were shouted at because they mustn't be running and it's utterly bonkers I would give my right arm if every village every child in this village ran to Sunday school and so you can think of your own examples there's all sorts of that utterly crazy stuff that's been applied to the Sabbath so we know exactly what was going on here with the Jews the result though is that with these Jews instead of them rejoicing that the man is healed

they're criticizing him in their eyes the healing of a 38 year invalid was bad and it's utterly bonkers and what's even worse is that it seems to have had a very damaging effect on the man because when he's confronted by the Jews he kind of pushes the blame on to Jesus and and then when he does find out you know who Jesus is he goes and tells on him and it seems very much that the man is far more concerned about keeping in with the Jews than he is about following

[26 : 31] Jesus and the reporting of the man leads to confrontation that we read about in verses 14 to 18 sorry that says 19 it should say 18 in that confrontation the the Jews are persecuting Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath Jesus responds especially in that his father's working so he's also working that just escalates the tension and it culminates in verse 18 this is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him not only because he was breaking the Sabbath but because he was even calling God his own father making himself equal with God now here Jesus is talking about about how he's an equal with the father and he'll go on and talk more about that in the next section which we're going to look at in more detail next week this week I want us just to conclude I can't believe it's 12 o'clock already but we're nearly there I want us to to conclude by just noticing a crucial lesson that arises from all of this a lesson that arises from the bonkers ridiculous stupid nonsense of the people who were criticizing Jesus their great criticism of Jesus was that he was making himself equal with God and to them that was a reason to kill him but what I want you to see is that there's a massive irony here because when the Jews were adding all their commands and requirements to God's law when they were judging that this Sabbath healing was a bad thing and when they decided that Jesus deserved to die what were they doing they were making themselves equal with God they were saying to

God your rules aren't quite good enough so we're gonna add our own your terms they're not quite adequate so we're gonna set them instead your ways they're not they're not quite suitable so we'll do things our way instead by adding their own rules by doing things their way they weren't honoring God they were actually saying that God's command wasn't good enough and the minute they did that they were making themselves equal with God the scary thing is that we all do the same thing in fact this is what lies at the heart of the human condition remember when the devil tempted Eve to sin against God in Genesis 3 what did he say he said you're not surely die for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened you will be like God knowing good and evil in other words the devil tempted Eve with the lie that she could make herself equal with God and that has been the constant trait of human behavior ever since we want things on our terms we want to make our rules we want God to listen to us but when we do that we are just trying to make ourselves equal with God we're putting ourselves alongside God we're maybe even putting ourselves above God and saying God you need to do it this way this is the way it's going to be this is how things should work now there's two main ways in which this happens one is that sometimes we do this by being what's called antinomians i'm gonna run out of room there we go antinomians that's basically the person who says i can do what i like God's law doesn't matter anti non-moss is the word for law just don't care do what i like so we can be antinomians we completely ignore God's command so it's almost as if to say oh God don't need you the other way we do it though is by being legalists by saying God i'm gonna set the rules and these are all the rules that if i keep then then God will will be happy with me and and that will set the terms of my relationship with God and this throughout the history of the church people are one then the other in fact more accurately we're all a kind of mixture of them both what it means is that ultimately we are faced with a very very stark choice this whole narrative is kind of forcing us into a corner where we have a very very stark choice to make we either listen to God or we make ourselves equal with God i don't think that there's a third option it's dangerous because it's so subtle and sometimes we can have the best of intentions when we put ourselves in this category imagine two people one of them says

Christianity is not for me fine as i am don't really need God i'm not bothered the other says i need to make sure i'm good enough for God so i'm gonna pray five times a day i'm gonna give to the poor i am never gonna listen to secular music i'm only gonna eat plain food i'm gonna fast twice a week i'm never watching telly i'm celibate and every time i do something wrong i am gonna whip myself 10 times to make atonement those two people look completely different but both of them are doing exactly the same thing they're both making themselves equal with God because neither of them are listening to him and what i hope you can see is that to be here in that side of the equation is absolutely bonkers it's bonkers but it happens in lots of ways here's some examples have any of you said or thought any of the following things the bible's old different world don't need it now you

shouldn't go for a walk on a Sunday I can't serve in church I don't have any gifts it's right for God's people in Carlaway to be divided every week I'm not going to ask somebody to church because only the Holy Spirit can convert someone

Jesus wants me to sit at the Lord's table but I'm not going to do it I want to be a Christian but I'm not good enough I'd love to go to the prayer meeting but I'm worried about what other people will say that's actually the last one's actually making other people equal with God rather than yourself I could give many many more examples Jesus has come to break that bonkers ridiculous nonsense because that's what it is that is what it is but what I want you to see is that Jesus breaks it in the most beautiful way the incredible thing about Jesus is that he actually is equal with God and yet he was willing to lay aside all that glory and status all that he deserved and he came to be one of us he came to save us and this is where you see an incredible contrast between Jesus and the Jews in this passage the Jews were making themselves equal with God they were making up their own commands they were setting in their setting their terms the terms themselves and in their opposition to Jesus they wanted to kill him Jesus actually is equal with God he comes to these people who are making their own rules who think that they know better who actually want Jesus dead and Jesus comes to save them in fact Jesus comes to die for them because ultimately in order to fix you and me Jesus gave himself to be totally broken on the cross that's the incredible reality of the gospel and please please don't allow any bonkers ridiculous stupid nonsense to get in the way of you responding to that gospel by putting your trust in Jesus