

**“New Year: Let’s Work!”**  
**John 5:1-18**

*Introduction:* Pg. \_\_\_\_

Happy New Year! We missed you the last two weeks, but you’ll be happy to hear that we really enjoyed our vacation to see Marsha’s (and *my*) family and have returned refreshed and ready to plunge into the New Year with you. I hope you are ready, excited and expectant for all God has in store in 2016! Another year means another gift from God and another opportunity to make the most of what he has entrusted to us. We can’t do anything about what happened in 2015. It’s not coming back, but we can resolve to make the most of 20-1-6.

As we continue our series in the Gospel of John, I believe this story holds great potential to launch us into the New Year better prepared to take advantage of what God places before us. I know that no one is signing up for a lousy quest in mediocrity. You want to make your life count, and I want to make my life count.

This morning we find Jesus back in Jerusalem. We are going to see him perform another miracle/sign, create a controversy with his actions, but then create an even bigger controversy with his words.

*Read 5:1-18*

*Story*

- Jesus enters Jerusalem, once again, for a Festival. In fact, chapter 5 marks the beginning of the “Festival Cycle” in John that will carry us through the end of chapter 10.
- Though it was a time of celebration in the city, not everyone was full of joy. Life did not stop, which meant the suffering of people did not stop. We see this in *verses 2-3*... “A multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed...” were gathered at the place “Bethesda,” which means “house of mercy.”
- They were hoping for a miracle cure... There was a belief that the waters there could bring them healing. An ancient explanation, which eventually crept into some copies of the ancient manuscript said that an angel came down and stirred the water; therefore the first to enter the water after it was stirred would be healed of their disease. You might have noticed that verse 4 is missing (as is the case in most all modern translations [NIV, NASB, NLT, and RSV] because the earliest manuscripts do not contain the words of verse 4. It is likely that later scribes added this statement based on a tradition that attempted to explain verse 7.
- It is to this scene that Jesus arrived, and there he spotted a man lying there who had been lame for 38 years!

*Compassionate Healing*

- Let’s not miss the obvious here... Jesus did not take a detour around this pool. He was full of compassion. He loved to bring healing to the “have nots.”
- Jesus approached him and asked a curious question, curious because it demanded an obvious answer! “Do you want to be healed?”
- Not knowing he was talking to the one who created everything and has the power to heal anything stood before him, the lame man replied: “No one will help me. Someone else cuts me off before I can reach the pool!”
- And no longer than it takes to speak a sentence, Jesus reversed his suffering of 38 years. Can you imagine?!... The man feels the sensation of strength in his limbs, rises to his feet and walks. If someone had laid in a bed at Mass General for 38 years, every floor of the hospital would erupt with joy. I can see

Jesus smiling at him as he walks off and his disciples staring at one another, shaking their heads yet again in amazement.

### *Sabbath Controversy*

- That is why we are jolted by the end *verse 9 and verse 10*. Not everyone was excited about this man's healing, because it happened on the Sabbath, the day reserved for worship and rest. "Hey, uh, healed guy. What are you doing carrying a mat? You shouldn't be doing that!"
- WHAT?!? Rather than joining in on the celebration; they approach the man with heartless interrogation and condescending instruction.
- Why? These religious leaders followed the tradition of those who "developed hundreds of minutely detailed and burdensome rules about what kind of 'work' was prohibited, including a code that forbade carrying an object from one domain to another." They created rules to try to please God through self-righteous and usually pretentious effort. They were, what we call, legalists, performing their way to God's acceptance and approval.
- These man-made rules were not found anywhere in the Scriptures they claimed to follow. That's why Jesus butted heads with the religious leaders over the Sabbath more than any other issue. Take Luke 13 for example, where the synogogue ruler chastises the people after Jesus healed a women who had been disabled for 18 years: **"There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.' Then the Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?' As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him." (Luke 13:14-17)**
- Jesus called himself the "lord of the Sabbath." (Luke 6:5)
- And as verse 16 highlights, the religious leaders "persecut[ed] Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath."
- But Jesus answered them by saying: "My Father is working until now, and I am working."

T: With these words, the Sabbath controversy escalates to an identity controversy. The words of verse 17 could not pack a greater punch.

### *Identity Controversy*

- Essentially, Jesus affirms a doctrine the Jews already believed: God is always at work. How else could he uphold the universe if he took days off? BUT Jesus does two other things with this statement:
  1. He claims a special relationship to God by saying "My Father." Jews did not speak in this way about God.
  2. He claimed to hold the same divine privilege of working on the Sabbath just like God the Father.
- And the Jews read the implications of his statement like a book. Look at *verse 18*.
- This sign of Jesus and these words set the stage for the intense dialogue between Jesus and the religious leaders that Jon will unpack for us next week.

T: This morning, I want us to focus on the climactic statement of Jesus in verse 17 where he says that he is always working just like his Father and consider could look like for us to . . .

## The Point: Engage in Great Work in 2016 by Reflecting the Working God.

### I. Work as those made in the image of the Working God (5:17)

When Jesus says, “My Father is working until now, and I am working,” we are confronted with a crucial truth about God. *God is the God who Works*. He never punches out, never takes a vacation day, never calls in sick, and never leaves work early, because he never leaves work! Your mind just got boggled.

- In the first verse of the Bible, we are introduced to the Working God who creates everything in existence and enjoys his work.
- When we move down to the end of chapter one of Genesis, verse 27 says: “**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**” (Genesis 1:27)
- As those made in God’s image, we reflect him in all of our work. This means our work should be worship. We actually point to God’s existence and greatness as we work.
- Even those who do not want to glorify God in their work but point to his existence every time they punch the time clock.
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But let me give you one pearl of wisdom: **We were made to work, not for work.**

- We were never meant to find our ultimate satisfaction in our work. As you know, our work is plagued by many **frustrations** because of the **imperfect world** in which we live.
  - **Work becomes a drudgery.** All of the sudden the job we once enjoyed turns into a joyless duty. We work because we have to do it, not because we love to do it.
  - **Work is tainted by others.** Injustice abounds in the workplace. Favoritism, nepotism, lazyism, work hard only when the boss is lookingism, cut cornerism,
  - **Work is frustrating and feels meaningless.** We rarely accomplish all we’d like or perform up to our standards or the standards of others. Stress piles up as the task list is *never* done.
- But not only is our world imperfect, we are **imperfect [us]** as well.
  - **Work becomes selfish.** We value work simply for what it can give us. We work, not to serve God or our neighbor, but to serve ourselves. Work is a means to an end, and if \$\$ is not the end, we become the end, punching the clock to make a name for ourselves.
  - **Work becomes supreme.** *Sometimes we can love our work so much that it becomes our god.* Our emotions, thoughts, and even our identity hang on our work week. Our sense of self-worth often rises and falls with the bottom line or the boss’ approval.
    - If someone asks how your week went, your first inclination is to answer based on your work week.
    - But *we were made to work, not for work*, because we were made for God.
    - Augustine said, “You made us for yourself O God, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.”

T: If those are the ways work becomes *frustrating*, how can we push back against that and experience *fulfillment* as we work in the image of the Working God? Like Jesus...

### II. Work in step with God’s Purposes and God’s Heart (5:17, 13).

Look at verse 17 again: “*My Father is working until now, and I am working,*”

**Is your work united with God’s purposes?** You might be asking, “Well, how can I know if I’m united with God’s purposes, if I’m unfamiliar with his purposes. What are his purposes? What is his mission?”

- We see his mission in the gospel - the good news of Jesus. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ God is restoring people back to God and he is restoring God’s good design for all of creation. He is recovering God’s original *shalom* (flourishing) experienced in the very beginning.

- Jesus possessed an incredible resolve to do GOOD by restoring things to the way they ought to be. We see this in two ways.
  1. He **met physical needs**.
    - He went about healing people. Feeding people. Serving People.
    - He calmed storms to protect people from danger. He reversed death.
    - The way things ought to be!
  2. He also **met spiritual needs**.
    - Jesus reconnected them to God by granting forgiveness and giving them spiritual life through faith in him.
    - Jesus always fulfilled the two greatest commandments... Love God. Love Neighbor.
    - Now we are called to help people love what he loves, think how he thinks, desire what he would desire, do what he would do.
- Is your work united with God's purposes? AND

### Is your work united with God's heart?

- *Our Work must begin with God working in us.* Or to say it another way: Before God works through us he needs to work in us.
- Look back at *verse 14* and note the progression. This is huge!
  - "See you are well." - We've been healed.
  - "Sin no more..." Our response to live for God is always in light of what he has done for us.
  - It is grace-motivated action. We need the grace of Christ to be freed to live for God.
- Where is your devotion to Christ? My prayer is that our devotion to Christ in 2016 would be "Unquestioned" AND "Unignorable." People see the consistency of it AND really have to authenticity of my devotion to Christ.

### Conclusion:

As we begin this New Year, let's pursue God's work in us by pursuing him daily. Let's consider some fresh steps we can take in our faith journey. Call them goals; call them resolutions; call them whatever you want. Let's take advantage of the opportunities he brings us in this New Year. Let me give you 4 quick encouragements to close. It can be summarized with the phrase: **Strive. Daily. Together. For Him.**

- **Set Some God-given realistic, yet audacious goals. (Strive)**
  - Will you spend some undistracted time this week to consider how you can align your life more clearly with God's mission and God's heart?
  - What do you want to see God do in your life and through your life this year?
  - What commitments can you make to see him grow you to be more like Christ?
  - What do you need to give up? In what ways do you need to preserve?
  - In what area do you need a fresh start? Listen, I'm glad God is the God, not just of the Second Change, but of the Seventieth Chance and the Seventieth times Seventieth Chance. Anybody feel me on that?
  - Let's prayerfully consider and set some God-given realistic, yet audacious goals.
- **Recognize 10,000 Daily Decisions determine the outcome of your life. (Daily)**
  - The everyday moments with the everyday challenges and opportunities that come our way make or break us in our pursuit of God and his design for us.
  - If you want to reach a goal or resolution, it's not simply putting it down on paper, it's saying no to the snooze button day by day, saying no to the internet and the 3rd episode on Netflix that night, so that you can say yes to your goals.
- **Do this in community. (Together)**
  - If you attack a God-given Goal solo, you're already setting yourself at a disadvantage. Community motivates. Community encourages. Community supports and bears the burden, absorbs the sorrow and setbacks, and increases the joy and celebration of victory. And Finally . . .

- **Do it all for his glory and your joy. (For Him)**

- When we truly do it for him, with an eye on him as we pick up the Word, with an eye on him when we feel like we can't say no to that next dessert, with an eye on him when we hit our knees in prayer, with an eye on him when we serve, with an eye on him when we forsake social media or box on the wall for quality time with a loved one; when we do it with an eye on him, each action holds great potential to maximize, what? HIS GLORY and OUR JOY.
- I came across a poem by a man named George Herbert that captures the spirit of the kind of work I pray we will engage in this New Year . . . Listen intently to these words from his poem called...

**"THE ELIXIR"**

**Teach me, my God and King  
In all things Thee to see,  
And what I do in anything,  
To do it as for Thee.**

**Not rudely, as a beast,  
To run into action ;  
But still to make Thee prepossess,  
And give it his perfection.**

**A man that looks on glass,  
On it may stay his eye,  
Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass,  
And then the heav'n espy.**

**All may of Thee partake ;  
Nothing can be so mean  
Which with his\* tincture (for Thy sake)  
Will not grow bright and clean.**

**A servant with this clause  
Makes drudgery divine :  
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,  
Makes that and th' action fine.**

**This is the famous stone  
That turneth all to gold ;  
For that which God doth touch and own  
Cannot for less be told.**

Let me try to summarize that poem in one sentence: **When we do what we do for God, even pushing a broom becomes infused with profound meaning, value, and grace. It turns duty to delight and makes drudgery divine.**

Let's get in on that kind of approach to all of life and do all that we do for him.

PRAY

"He loves Thee too little, who loves anything together with Thee, that he loves not for Thy sake." - Augustine