

God is at Work

John 5:15-29

Here in John 5 we are early in Jesus' public ministry. Imagine if you were this man who was **paralyzed for 38 years** and that you had come to this pool because you heard an angel would stir the waters every so often and if you could get in at that time, you would be healed. In addition to the tragedy of your condition, you had also been abandoned by your family and friends. ***So you are alone in the world*** – unable to work; unable even to drag yourself into the healing waters of the pool.

And then a Jewish man walks up to you and says, ***“Get up.”*** Suddenly you feel strength surge back into your lifeless legs and you jump up. You're barely on your feet before the Jewish leaders find you and yell at you for carrying your mat. It is, after all, the Sabbath. And every Jew knows you can't carry anything on the Sabbath – because that would be considered “work,” and work is forbidden on the Lord's holy day of rest. Look at verse 11.

But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, “Take up your bed, and walk.” John 5:11

He didn't even know who it was. All he knew is that the One who could put strength back into dead limbs could probably determine how much weight was ok to carry on the Sabbath. Jesus found the man again and verse 15:

“The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.” John 5:15-16

This is the background for a foundational teaching of Jesus about His work. Jesus had the nerve to heal people ON THE SABBATH. You probably know ***“Keep the Sabbath”*** is one of the ten commandments. Did you also know the Pharisees had **39 additional rules** that specified how far you could walk and what you could and could not do in order to be sure you were obeying the one law to “remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.”

Did Jesus break the Sabbath law according to the 10 commandments? Of course not! Did he break one of the Pharisees' 39 special prohibitions. Yes. And that was the issue. It was not about work. It certainly wasn't about carrying a mat to sleep on. It was about AUTHORITY. ***Who was this Jesus to encourage someone to violate the domain of the Pharisees?*** This was their turf! This was the Temple area!

“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.” John 5:18

John explains the REAL ISSUE. It was not about a little rule violation – a Pharisee demerit. It was about Jesus' identity – claiming to be one with God – claiming to be equal with God.

They were right to identify this as the central issue – and it was the very reason they would have him executed by the Romans less than three years later. Jesus was a threat to their power – to their control. He was upsetting their whole religious system. That was why he couldn't be tolerated, and even at this early stage of his ministry they started looking for a way to kill him.

For the Jews this was a threat. ***For us, it is our great comfort and the essence of our faith.*** Jesus IS the Son of God. He IS equal with God the Father. Because of this claim the Jews sought to kill him, but because of this claim we know we can trust Him.

Today, as we walk through John 5, we will see that FAITH IS SPELLED R-I-S-K.

“Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K.”

- **R** – “Rely on me completely”
- **I** – “I am always working”
- **S** – “Step forward with me”
- **K** – “Keep it about me.”

These are **four messages from Jesus** to us as we seek to follow Him. Remember, to experience God we need to hear His voice and as God speaks to us it always leads to a crisis of belief. It leads us to a crossroads and we must decide to OBEY even when we don't fully understand. This feels like RISK. It forces us to take a step of faith when things don't make sense and the outcome looks uncertain or even dangerous.

In Jesus' case, starting His ministry, **the risk was very real.** For Jesus to trust the Father's plan and direction **he was not just RISKING His life, He would soon be SACRIFICING His life.** And this is the example we are called to follow – the example of Jesus, relying completely on the Father, knowing the Father was always working and fully committed to joining in the Father's work; stepping forward with the Father in perfect obedience and courageous faith; always keeping it about the Father's glory.

Brothers and sisters – faith is spelled RISK. When the Lord begins to speak to you, will you have the courage to obey? ***Will we take the risk to:***

- Have that difficult conversation
- Walk across the room to connect with a co-worker;
- Walk across the driveway to connect with a neighbor;
- Begin to repair that damaged relationship
- Move toward a change in your career path
- Adjust your schedule to reorder your priorities
- Sign up for a short term missions trip to some place, like CUBA
- Host a dinner for your neighbors
- Volunteer with a ministry in the church or an outreach in the community
- Meet with a trusted friend to share what you're really struggling with and ask for prayer...

The journey of following Jesus is a journey of faith and faith is spelled RISK. ***If we never take a risk we never stretch the muscle of our faith and we never grow.*** Let's walk through these messages from the Lord. First:

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

1. R - "Rely on me completely"

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever 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." John 5:24

There are two conditions necessary for saving faith: hearing and believing. It is impossible for someone to believe in Jesus if they don't HEAR about Jesus. ***"Faith comes by HEARING and hearing by the Word of God."*** This is our great privilege – to proclaim the Word of God so people can hear the good news about Jesus and have the opportunity to believe.

Notice the **PRESENT TENSE**. Whoever hears and believes HAS eternal life. Period. That's it. No other conditions. Hear the good news. Believe He is the One sent by the Father – and you HAVE eternal life. Judgment will not be in your future because you have crossed over from death to life – you have been transformed from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ; you have become a new creation simply by hearing and believing!

Faith is what saves us in the first place and faith is what we must exercise every day as we walk with Jesus.

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

1. R - "Rely on me completely"

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is who bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

This is our theme verse for the whole Experiencing God series. So we printed it on the little business cards in your worship program today. Faith is spelled RISK – and faith fundamentally is about what you rely on; the ONE you rely on. Can we truly say we are relying completely on Jesus? ***Are we trusting in the Lord with ALL of our hearts?*** Or are we actually leaning pretty heavily on our own understanding?

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

1. R - "Rely on me completely"

"I am the vine; you are the branches... apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

- Stop trusting in your own **wisdom** and plans

We may say we trust in Jesus – but functionally, practically, do we really trust in Him? Do we COMPLETELY trust in Him? Do we really live like He is the vine and we are the branches? Or do we actually trust quite heavily in our own wisdom and plans?

Do you remember the story of **Corrie Ten Boom**? We were blessed to see the DeArmon CAST presentation of The Hiding Place in December – a beautiful stage version of the classic film from the '70s.

Corrie was the youngest child of a watchmaker named Casper. She was born in the late 1800s in the Netherlands where she grew up and learned her father's trade. In addition, she and her sister Betsie started a youth club for teenage girls to teach them the Bible and other skills like drama, sewing and other crafts.

Casper led the family to exercise their faith by helping the people around them. The youth club was one expression of this. Another was service. When a friend or neighbor had a need, they were quick to provide whatever help they could. So it was quite natural, when the Nazis came in to occupy the Netherlands in the 1940s, that Casper and his family did what they could to help the Jews and the mentally disabled who were being systematically hunted down and exterminated.

Even though they lived half a block from the police headquarters, they relied completely on the Lord and His protection – taking in any Jew who came to them for help. This is why they needed to create a HIDING PLACE – so the Jews could be concealed during the frequent gestapo raids. They were not a wealthy family, but they trusted the Lord to provide. And He did provide in many creative ways.

A friend of the family was in charge of the food ration cards. Corrie went to ask for five extra ration cards to feed the extra people in their home. But as she asked for this help, suddenly she heard herself asking for 100. And remarkably, the friend took the bold risk of giving her 100 of the cards.

Faith is spelled RISK. ***The Ten Boom family represents the courage to risk because they trusted completely in the Lord.*** They also show us the second message that God is always working – even in the darkest of times.

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

2. I - "I am always working"

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." John 5:17 NIV

It was **a Sabbath day** – but Jesus did not shut off His love. He would not set aside His compassion because the Jews had set up a detailed list of rules you could not do on the Sabbath. They tried to STOP HIM from working. To this He said, "My Father is ALWAYS working."

The Pharisees wanted Jesus to submit to THEIR rules. ***Jesus said He had to submit to the FATHER'S rules.*** And God's way is to do good, even on the Sabbath. God's primary rule is the rule of LOVE. Religious people have the primary rule of CONTROL. To this Jesus said, "I must live under GOD'S control. His work is more important than yours. His rules therefore are more important than yours."

Here is the rub – whose work is more important? The Pharisees felt like their rules were most important because they believed their work was more important than God's work. They had convinced themselves, in fact, that **their work WAS God's work.** They could not

conceive that Jesus was doing God's work because what Jesus was doing did not line up with what they were doing.

Can we relate? ***Don't we come to ASSUME that what we are doing must be what God wants simply because it's what we've been doing for years and years?*** We are in danger of making the same mistake the Pharisees did – believing our work is more important than God's work.

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

2. I - "I am always working"

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." John 5:17 NIV

- Stop living like your work is more **important** than mine

What is the test of this belief? **The way we PRAY.** Do we live as if we desperately need God? Then we would be people of prayer. If we are not people of prayer then whatever we SAY we believe what we TRULY believe is that our work is more important than God's work.

Now, I'm not saying we should all become monks and move into monasteries. Martin Luther said, "I have so much to do today I must spend three hours in prayer." But he was a medieval MONK. We should embrace the PRINCIPLE without making it a LAW. "I have so much to do today I must stop for a few minutes to pray."

Make prayer the resting place of your heart. Like a bird that flies out about its work but always comes back to its nest, make the Lord your nest. Continually come back to Him. Make Him your resting place. This is called "practicing the presence of God." It is called continuous prayer. It is cultivating a LIFE of prayer without becoming a slave to a LAW of PRAYING.

You might be ***a slave to the law of praying if you are plagued by guilt*** – feeling that you never pray enough. A life of prayer is a life of JOY because it is a life of freedom.

Hear this – "My Father is always working," Jesus says, "and I too am working." **GOD is doing the work.** You don't have to do the work. All we have to do is rely on the Lord – on His wisdom and plans – and truly believe that His work is more important than ours. Then you will feel freedom instead of guilt. You will feel joy instead of fear. God is working and He invites us to join Him in that work. Jesus calls us to labor with Him but He assures us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

If you feel that your burden is heavy it probably means you are carrying the yoke of RELIGION not the yoke of Jesus. Let go of the burden of a law of praying and embrace the freedom and joy of **a LIFE of praying.**

Let's stop living like our work is more important than God's work. Let's truly believe that His work matters most. And let's reorient our lives around this truth. There again is the key work of *Experiencing God* – ADJUST.

Casper Ten Boom believed this deeply and instilled this conviction in his girls. God is always working. Even when everything seems bleak. Even when the Nazis took control and darkness seemed to be winning. In the misery of Ravensbrook concentration camp, Betsie encouraged Corrie and the other inmates to **give thanks for the fleas and lice**. This didn't make any sense at the time – who wants to be itchy and miserable from fleas and lice? But Betsie was right – since their quarters were infested the guards stayed away and let them have Bible studies – to worship, share and pray freely.

Do you have some figurative “fleas and lice” in your life right now? Do you believe that God is working even in the hardships of your situation? Listen to verse 21:

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

2. I - “I am always working”

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.” John 5:21

What is the work that God is doing? **Ultimately it is the work of RESURRECTION**. God takes dead people and brings them to life. If you have trusted in Jesus, this is true of you. You were dead in your sin BUT GOD raised you up to new life in Christ and seated you with Jesus in the heavenly places. God took your sin and the death you deserved and transferred all of that to Jesus, giving you the life of Jesus in exchange.

This is also what God does every day for us! ***He raises us up to new life – every day!*** I'm not saying we have to get saved anew every day. I'm just saying we must rely on the life-giving power of God every day. And He truly does “raise the dead” in our situations, doesn't he? Doesn't He take our suffering and use it for good? Doesn't He take our hardest situations and work through them? God is ALWAYS working – even in our biggest challenges.

There was no greater hardship than the cross. As Jesus knelt to pray in Gethsemane, preparing for the cross, he struggled to see how the Father could be working in that. But He submitted to the Father's will because He believed in the Father's plan and trusted the Father to work even through the cross.

And the cross, of course, is ***the ultimate work of God***. It was the ultimate suffering, the ultimate sacrifice – but it became the ultimate triumph. God will do the same thing with your suffering and mine. This is what He does – He raises the dead and gives them life.

You may feel like you are among the dead today. But I have good news for you! ***God is in the business of RAISING THE DEAD!*** This is precisely the work He does!

You may know someone and be **praying for someone who is dead in their sin** and blind to their condition. God is always working in the hearts and lives of people. Just as Jesus spoke to Lazarus in His tomb and said, “Lazarus, come out!” So Jesus still speaks to the

hearts of sinners and calls them to new life in Him. The Son of God gives life to whom He will!

Hear what Jesus is saying to us: Rely on me completely; I am always working. Third:

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

3. S - "Step forward with me"

"The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise." John 5:19

Every risk begins with **a single step**. Think of the great first steps in the Bible:

- When Abram left his homeland and set out for an unknown place.
- When Moses left the wilderness and went back to Egypt.
- When Joshua crossed the Jordan to enter the Promised Land.
- When David left the camp and stepped out to face Goliath.
- When Mary said "Yes" to the angel of the Lord – that was a courageous step.
- When Jesus left heaven to be conceived in Mary's womb.

And the most courageous step of all was when ***Jesus carried his cross up to Golgotha***. Imagine that first step as he felt the weight of the cross on his shoulders. One step.

How did these Bible heroes take these incredibly brave steps of faith? How did they risk it all? Jesus tells us. **They just do what they see God already doing**. They aren't INITIATING, they are RESPONDING. God is the One initiating, and they are simply saying "Yes," to Him.

This gives the wonderful assurance that **you are not stepping out ALONE** – but rather are stepping forward with the Lord. And that makes all the difference! This is what the Lord promised Joshua as he led the nation of Israel into the well defended land of Canaan.

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

3. S - "Step forward with me"

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened... for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9

- Stop letting fear control you

The Lord – the God of Israel – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – ***the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is the One who goes with us!*** Jesus Himself promised to be with us to the end of the age. This is why He sent the Holy Spirit so He could fulfill that promise. The Holy Spirit is with us all day, every day. **The believer in Jesus is NEVER ALONE!** Psalm 23 promises:

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

3. S - "Step forward with me"

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” Psalm 23:4

- Since I am with you, you have nothing to **Fear**

Many in our church family have recently walked through the valley of the shadow of death. Some of you are in that valley right now. Here is the word from our Good Shepherd – “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.” **He is with you right now.** Right beside you. Walking with you. Even carrying you.

Think of the valley the Ten Boom family walked through. Every day the police were a constant threat. One day the gestapo came and took them away. The threat of death loomed over them, and then – suddenly – the shadow fell. Ten days after they were taken, Corrie and Betsie’s father, Casper, died. Separated from the Father – and learning he had died – must have been devastating. All around them in the concentration camps people were dying. Betsie – the impossibly positive woman of faith – herself got sick and eventually died of that illness.

Corrie should have been killed in the gas chamber. The other women in her room were all killed that way. In the end she was released due to a “clerical error.” Of course, we know it was no error. This was God’s will for Corrie – to live nearly four decades beyond the war. Betsie had to live through two years of suffering in labor camps. Casper had to live to see his girls torn away from him.

They all had their unique valley to walk through. But the Lord was with them all. Betsie summarized their faith by saying, ***“There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still.”***

God is deeper than your suffering. He is present with you in your suffering, and He will sustain you through it. Walk with God through your challenges. Walk with Him through your sadness. Walk with Him through your fear.

Pastor Tim Keller wrote a book called *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. It’s a great title. He says – “You can’t run through grief and loss. But you shouldn’t lay down in it either. Walk. And above all, walk with GOD.” Walk with God through your challenges.

And walk with God into your next assignment. For the Ten Boom family it was helping desperate refugees. What is your next step God is calling you to take? Faith is spelled RISK. When God begins to speak to you it will feel like danger, insecurity, change – RISK.

But God doesn’t send you on ahead alone. He promises to take each step WITH YOU. And that changes everything. Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. We can’t produce any fruit on our own. But if we walk with Jesus HE can produce limitless fruit through us. IF we follow the last message and keep it about HIM.

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

4. K - “Keep it about me”

“So that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.” John 5:23

Jesus was absolutely committed to the Father. He lived a perfectly GOD-CENTERED LIFE. He never wavered in this, never faltered. Jesus trusted completely in the Father's plan and in the Father's will. Jesus operated perfectly within the Holy Spirit's leading and empowering influence. Jesus kept His life and ministry perfectly focused on glorifying the Father.

Jesus was the perfect mirror. God the Father glorified Jesus – mainly through the resurrection – and Jesus reflected all of that glory right back to the Father. This is our job – to be little mirrors, reflecting the glory back to God. All He has given us is not FOR US but for us to honor Jesus.

- **Your talents and abilities** are not about you – they are to help you bring glory to Jesus.
- **Your resources and finances** are not for you – they are to help you honor the One who gave them to you.
- **Your time and energy** are not YOURS – they are entrusted to you to manage to serve the kingdom purposes of the KING.

Time, talent, treasure – none of it belongs to us and none of it is ultimately FOR US. All we have is ultimately to show the world the goodness and love and mercy of God.

The Pharisees were broken mirrors. They had totally lost sight of the purpose of Scripture – to glorify God and lead people to love Him. Instead, they made it all about THEM – their rules, their reputations, their agendas. This is why Jesus rebuked them so fiercely:

Faith is Spelled R-I-S-K

4. K - "Keep it about me"

"How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" John 5:44

- Stop living a **Self-Centered** life

If our goal is to win praise from PEOPLE we lose out on the only praise that matters – the glory that comes from God Himself. That's what happened with the vast majority of the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day. They were consumed with a hunger for praise from each other and missed the fact that their own Messiah had come.

But brothers and sisters, we can do the very same thing today. If we get caught up in winning approval from other people, earning praise for ourselves, we could easily miss out on God's greatest purpose for our lives – to bring glory and honor to Jesus. If you keep SELF at the center of your life you will miss the joy and purpose of a truly God-centered life.

To follow Jesus is to live a life like He did. Jesus was perfectly centered on God the Father. He trusted completely in the Father and was fully devoted to the Father's will and the Father's plan – even when it didn't make sense to his human understanding and even when it literally cost him his life.

Faith is spelled RISK. If we never take a risk we never exercise faith. **Safety is a myth.** It's an illusion. There is no safe place. The Ten Boom family often reassured each other that we are safest in the center of God's will. That remains true for us today.

So what does it look like for us to take God-glorifying risks?

- Let's take small steps every day – little acts of kindness, efforts to engage people with the love of Christ and to start spiritual conversations.
- We've set up a table with lots of evangelistic resources to help with this.
- You've already been given a color wristband – just wearing that could remind us to pray for opportunities and could itself help start conversations.

For some in this room the risks will be bigger. The Lord will make it clear what He would have YOU do. For some it might mean a short term missions trip. For some it might mean praying about a change in vocation. For some it might mean praying about doing your same job but relocating somewhere in the world where they don't know Jesus at all and where missionaries cannot go.

Of the remaining **frontier people groups**, many of them cannot be reached through traditional missions – where westerners walk in with Bibles and the Jesus Film. One way the Lord is now embedding gospel workers in these hard to reach areas is by courageous business people being willing to spend a year or two or five in Saudi Arabia, Iran or Afghanistan.

One pastor challenges his people to ***“put your yes on the table and let the Lord put it on the map.”*** No doubt that feels like an enormous risk.

- Rely on Jesus completely.
- He says to us, “I am always working”
- Step forward with Jesus beside you – in the obedience of faith and
- Keep it about Him.

If it's all about Jesus and your life is centered on God and His will – you will be the safest possible and the most fruitful possible!

The Lord will work out the details.

Let's pray!