

Session 7: Controversy, Jesus' Second Trip to Jerusalem (John 5:1-47)

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Abstract

In this session, Dr. David Turner examines the pivotal Sabbath controversy triggered when Jesus heals a paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda and commands him to carry his mat. When confronted by the religious leaders, Jesus defends himself by identifying as the Father's agent, possessing divine authority to work and execute judgment just as God does. This discourse introduces inaugurated eschatology, demonstrating that future resurrection power and judgment are active in Jesus' current ministry through people's responses to him. Jesus appeals to a series of five witnesses—including John the Baptist, his miraculous works, the Father, and Moses through the Scriptures—to validate his divine identity and expose his opponents' misreading of the Torah.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Controversy in John 5 (John 5:1-47)

- A. Jesus' second trip to Jerusalem
- B. Comparison between the healing in John 5 and John 9
 - 1. Lame man at Bethesda as an unsympathetic character who aligns with Pharisees
 - 2. Blind man in John 9 as a sympathetic character siding with Jesus
 - 3. The role of sin: Bethesda man told to 'sin no more' versus blind man's illness not being due to sin

II. The Miracle and the Sabbath Dispute (John 5:1-18)

- A. The healing of the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda

1. Historical and archaeological context of the pool (north of the Temple Mount, five porches, mikveh usage)
2. Jesus' command for the man to carry his bed (sleeping mat)

B. The Pharisaic accusations of Sabbath-breaking

1. Carrying a bedroll construed as work under Jewish rabbinic tradition (Mishnah)
2. Jesus' defense: 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working'
3. Charges escalate from Sabbath-breaking to blasphemy (making himself equal with God)

III. Jesus' Discourse on Divine Agency and Eschatology (John 5:19-30)

A. The relationship between the Father and the Son

1. Jesus as the Father's authoritative agent (concept of the shaliach)
2. Jesus doing nothing on his own initiative but only what he sees the Father doing
3. Distinctions in systematic theology regarding Jesus' human and divine operations (acting through the Father's Spirit without measure)

B. Inaugurated Eschatology

1. The present reality of eternal life and judgment ('a time is coming and now is' in verse 25)
2. The future physical resurrection ('a time is coming' in verse 28)
3. Present response to Jesus setting people's eternal destinies

IV. The Five Witnesses to Jesus' Identity (John 5:31-47)

A. The limitation of self-testimony (admitting Pharisaic perspective)

B. The distinct witnesses validating Jesus:

1. Jesus' own testimony
2. The witness of John the Baptist (verses 32-35)
3. The witness of the works (the signs given by the Father, verse 36)
4. The witness of the Father himself (verse 37)
5. The witness of Moses and the Scriptures (verses 39-47)

C. The irony of the Pharisees' Scripture study

1. Searching the Scriptures for eternal life while refusing to come to Jesus
2. Moses as their ultimate accuser before the Father due to their disbelief in his writings

V. Theological Implications and the Sabbath

- A. Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 12, Luke 6)
- B. The purpose of the Sabbath and the Torah (to aid humanity, not be a burden)
- C. Honoring the Son as the only way to honor the Father (parallels with Revelation 4-5)