

Equal With God

John 5:1-18

The Lord had returned from Galilee to Jerusalem. In that city the pool of Bethesda attracted many invalids including people who were blind, lame, and paralyzed. Some had been there for a long time. One man had been hoping for healing for almost forty years.

The Lord gave him a command. "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." The man was instantaneously healed; and of course he responded to the Lord's command by arising, gathering up his mat, and walking away.

It happened that his healing took place on the Sabbath day. Some of the Jews, who saw him walking about with his bed in hand, told him that what he was doing was unlawful on the Sabbath. Obedience to Christ often brings people into conflict with this world, and very often into conflict with religionists.

The man told them that his healer also told him to do just what they had seen him doing. They wanted to know Christ's identity. But the man who had received healing did not know healed him, and Jesus had moved away from that crowded area.

Later Jesus found the man in the temple. Was he there to give thanks? We do not know, but the Lord told him to avoid sin. "Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."

The healed man then did a strange thing. He went and told the Jews who it was that had healed him. It is impossible to know why he would have done so. Perhaps he merely wanted to defend himself, but these self appointed arbiters of the law used the information to persecute Jesus.

The response of the Lord was to identify himself with his Father in heaven. He told them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working. John tells us that, "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."

People sometimes are heard making the claim that what counts in religion is sincerity. Clearly hypocrisy is sin, and sincerity is to be desired, but to be sincere is often to be wrong. The consequences can be very sad indeed. The apostle Paul, before his conversion, was sincerely seeking to put Christians in jail, and hoped to see them executed. He was sincere and quite wrong in his belief and behavior. There are militant religions today whose followers are willing to kill those who do not accept their religion and to do so in the most gruesome manner. They are sincere, and they are sincerely wrong.

But what of the claim that by calling God his Father Jesus was making himself "equal with God?" This is one of the great themes of the gospel of John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1)

One of the early heresies in the history of Christianity was Arianism. Arius had taught that the Son did indeed create all things but was himself created, and therefore could not have been deity. There is a modern form of this teaching that wishes to call Jesus "a god" but refuses to acknowledge that he is one with the Father and the Spirit. Much of the teaching of the gospel of John points to the true deity of our Lord and savior. The most widely used Christian confession of faith (Westminster/1689 Baptist) puts it in the following way.

The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with him, who made the world, who upholdeth and governeth all things he hath made, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowing her, and so was made of a woman, of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David, according to the scriptures; so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

by Joe Nesom