



### General background for the series

John's Gospel is so 'alive' from the very beginning. It's hard to read even the opening verses in John and not see that Jesus is so very special because of the life that he has and the life that he will bring. Through chapters 4-11 of John we get to see Jesus make some of the strongest claims on life anywhere in the Scriptures. Jesus miracles and teaching reveal that he is not just the authority on life, but that he is also the one we all need if we are to truly have it. For example:

- In chapter 4 Jesus says he is the one who ends thirst and brings eternal life.
- In chapter 5 Jesus says to hear his word and believe is to pass from death to life.
- In chapter 6 Jesus says he is the bread of life.
- In chapter 7 Jesus says belief in him will see rivers of living waters flow from the heart.
- In chapter 10 Jesus says he has come that people would have life in abundance.
- In chapter 11 Jesus says his the resurrection and the life.

These declarations give meaning to his great life giving works

- The harvest of forgiveness to the Samaritans in chapter 4
- The healing of the invalid in chapter 5
- The feeding of the 5000 in chapter 6
- The healing of the man born blind in chapter 9
- The raising of Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11.

While the life theme heats up throughout these chapters, so does the opposition towards Jesus. The hesitation especially seen in the establishment (Nicodemus) turns to outright opposition. Even at times the crowds get caught up in these things

- Persecution (5:16)
- Plotting his death (5:18; 11:53)
- He has a demon (7:20; 8:48; 10:20)
- Seeking to arrest him (7:30, 32; 10:39; 11:57)
- The accusation that he is a Samaritan (8:48)
- Attempted stoning (8:59; 10:31)

Of course these events should not surprise us given verses like 1:5 and 3:19. The latter is key for it shows our unwillingness to come to the truth, to come into the light and ultimately to find true life. Humanity is wound up in this world of death and it takes a powerful work of God to wake us up to our need. Thankfully, there are some throughout these chapters who demonstrate genuine and growing faith as the words and works of Jesus the life giver are transforming theirs.

### Background and context for chapter 5

In this chapter Jesus returns again to Jerusalem. The contrast of Nicodemus' secretive and confused encounter with Jesus last time he was there in chapter 3, has shown by the open and life giving time with the Samaritans in chapter 4. Jesus finds *spurious faith* among his own people of Galilee, *amazing faith* amongst the Samaritans (who were thought to be beyond salvation) and *hostile faith* amongst the Jews of Jerusalem. This hostility comes to the fore because of a miracle and because of the Sabbath.

### The issue of the Sabbath

The Jews were to keep the Sabbath holy, that is, set apart from all the other days of the week. In honour and trust of Yahweh who rested, they were to have this day distinct as an expression of trust and a means of refreshment. To work on the Sabbath was a serious matter because it showed your life and trust rested not in God's goodness for your welfare and future, but in the work of your hands. In order to 'protect' the command, the Jews had added an entire list of other instructions to go alongside the command to keep the Sabbath which made it near impossible to *not* break the Sabbath.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Jews had added 39 different classifications of work.

## Some helpful questions for your group

### Read 5:1-17

- What is it about Jesus' miracle here that is so extraordinary?
- What do you make of the Jews reaction?
- What does Jesus want the man to stop doing in contrast to what the Jews have said to him?
- What are the Jews 'working on' on the Sabbath? (See.v18)
- How would you contrast the 'life' that Jesus brings compared to what the Jewish establishment brings given these verses?

### Read 5:19-30

- In v.17 Jesus defends his actions on the Sabbath by saying 'My Father is working until now, and I am working'. How do these verses expand upon this?
- What does it show us of the unity between the Father and the Son?
- Jesus speaks not just of the power to resurrect to life, but also to resurrect to judgment. Why are the Jews in a precarious position as they now speak with Jesus? What are they in effect doing?

### Read 5:30-46

- Jesus really speaks to the heart motives of the Jews in this section. What does it show us about what they are really trusting in for life?
- vv.39-40 is a frightening statement from Jesus. How is it that people can know the Bible but not want to gain life from the one it speaks of?
- As a church that often speaks about the importance of knowing the Bible, could we be prone to this same kind of deception? How might we protect against this?
- Why do you think Jesus deliberately healed on the Sabbath? Wouldn't it have been easier and more effective if he just healed on another day?
  - What was he really trying to show?
  - What would it cost him?

### Life implications:

- The Sabbath was a day to remember God's creative wonder and to rest such that God's people would enjoy life more, yet it became a religious duty that restricted life. Do we at times have a similar outlook with areas of our Christian life? (*God has duties for me to keep rather than opportunities for me to be enlivened*)
- In what ways would you life to have more of Jesus in your life in 2016?
  - In what ways does that make you feel a little nervous?
  - In what ways does that make you feel a little excited?

### Prayers:

- That we would be those who trust Jesus all the more as we read the Scriptures and so experience fullness of life in him.
- That we'd except Jesus' judgement on things before our own.
- That we'd rejoice in the Father's generosity in giving us His very own Son that we might have abundant life.

