

The lame man at the pool of Bethesda: Christological and doxological significance of characterisation in John 5



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In any research of the biblical themes in Scriptures, the exegete must exercise discipline in strictly adhering to an exegetical process wherein the text is permitted to speak for itself in the context of the passage. This article therefore explored the literary traits and analysed characterisations in the story of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda as portrayed in John 5 through a 'narratological and exegetical' approach, considering literary, social, cultural and historical criticism with significant attention given to the text of the author or narrator. It is very important to know the author's theological viewpoint as seen in the characterisation of an anonymous character in the related gospel narrative, because it may be easily be overlooked due to the lack of attention for a minor character. The author's theological point of view is revealed in the characterisation of the lame man, the Jewish religious leaders, and of Jesus. Although the lame man himself is generally regarded as one of the 'minor characters' who appears in the gospel, the narrative of the lame man's healing is an important part of John's Christology and doxology, establishing Jesus as the Son whom God the Father sent to do God's work not for his own glory, but for the glory of God the Father. An analysis is undertaken of the literary traits and various characterisations evident in the seven scenes of John 5's account of the healing of the lame man, comparing him with other minor characters in John 4 and 9 who were healed.

Contribution: In this article a narratological and exegetical approach is employed to identify the Christological and doxological significances in John 5 by exploring the literary traits of the narrative point of view and character presentation through the theological perspective of the narrator.

Keywords: John 5; doxology; Christology in John; lame man; narratology; characterisation.

Introduction

The story of the lame man's healing in John 5 is the third miracle sign in the book of John, following the narratives in John 4 of the Samaritan woman and the healing of the royal official's son. This is the first miracle within the section designated as the Festival Cycle running from John 5 to 12. This designation derives from the fact that the sign miracles and their narratives and discourses found in these chapters are set in the context of Jewish festivals (Culpepper 1998:148–149). This cycle begins with an unnamed feast (Jn 5), and is followed by a year of festivals from Passover (Jn 6) through Tabernacles (Jn 7–10). While the narrator reveals Jesus as the Messiah and emphasises the importance of believing in him to receive eternal life in the Cana Cycle (Jn 2–4), the Festival Cycle develops the theme of increasing opposition from the Jewish religious leaders against Jesus.¹

The story of the lame man's healing at the pool of Bethesda consists of the healing itself, dialogues between key actors, and Jesus' discourse in his defense. Close examination of the rich portrayal of the interactions between Jesus, the Jewish leaders and the lame man reveals how the narrator uses the tool of characterisation to present and develop theological lines, particularly Christological assertions and the eschatological nature of Christ's work. Both Jesus' healing act and the subsequent polemic discourse with Jewish religious leaders that follow, clarify or implied to the reader his identification as the Son of God the Father. His ability to heal, proves that the Son has the divine authority and power to give life. The failure of the lame man to respond in faith to his healing,

1. It starts with Jesus' healing of the lame man after which their hostility toward Jesus is increased as portrayed by the narrator's comment in John 5:16, 18. The conflict between them intensifies (Jn 6:41–59, 7:14–52, 8:48–59, 9:13–34; 10:24–39). Following the raising of Lazarus from the dead by Jesus, they plotted to kill him (Jn 11:53). This section closes with a plan by the chief priest to kill even Lazarus (Jn 12:10).

contrasts with others healed by Jesus such as the man born blind – a distinction the narrator uses to highlight the doxological importance of a proper response to the Christological truths revealed in the healings. Christological and doxological themes run through the narrative of the lame man's healing, as the Father alone receives glory while the Son's authority to judge at his second coming, is demonstrated.

The setting (Jn 5:1–3)

John's recording of the story of Jesus' public ministry takes a new turn in John 5, as the narrator introduces a healing episode after the events in Cana in Galilee. In doing so, the narrator sets the stage for the coming sign that Jesus will perform by stating *Μετὰ ταῦτα*. Jesus went up to Jerusalem (Jn 5:1a). The motivation for the journey was *ἑορτὴ τῶν Ἰουδαίων* (a feast of the Jews). Although no precise *ἑορτὴ* is mentioned, it was likely one of the three major feasts namely Passover, Pentecost or Tabernacles that required Jews to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate (Brown 1966:206). Perhaps the narrator intentionally mentioned the feast without its name in order to keep the focus on the miracle and its attendant context of generating a Sabbath controversy.

The narrator's introduction of the theme of feasts portends a shift in emphasis from faith, which was the theme of the Cana Cycle (Jn 2–4), to more theological truths that John builds in the Festival Cycle (Jn 5–10) as Jesus goes up to Jerusalem. The Sabbath is the first theological theme encountered here, as the narrator focuses on the fact that the lame man's healing took place on the Sabbath (Jn 5:9). The Sabbath, of course, is a time designed by God for physical and spiritual rest or refreshment, serving as a reminder to the people of Israel of their covenantal relationship with God. However, during AD 1, the Sabbath had been perverted from God's original purpose, with excessive restrictive rules created by the governing rabbis for the observance of the Sabbath, making the holy Sabbath-keeping an overwhelming burden.² This is very likely the reason why Jesus chose to heal the lame man on the Sabbath, and why the narrator emphasises Jesus the Messiah as Lord over even the Sabbath.³ From John's use of the expression 'feast of the Jews' (author's emphasis) in John 5:1, differences between the Johannine community and the Jewish community are already implied by the author. Moloney (1998:167) points out that the association of the feast with the Jews reflects the *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine community, celebrating the saving presence of God in a way that differed from that of the Jews. These differences will lead to intensifying debates between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders as the Festival Cycle (Jn 5–10) unfolds.

The narrator provides a brief background to the scene in John 5:1–3, with the precise location of where the lame man was healed. The setting is specified as *ἐπὶ τῇ προβατικῇ κολυμβήθρα*

2. A major section of the Mishnah is devoted to rules for the Sabbath (see Neusner 1991).

3. John 5:17–18 and following Jesus' defence discourse, imply this truth.

in Jerusalem, called *βηθζαθά* in the language of the Jews – the place with *πέντε στοῦς*. At that time *τῇ προβατικῇ* was a small opening in the north wall of the temple where the sheep were washed in the pool before being taken to the sanctuary (Köstenberger 2004:178). The pool of *βηθζαθά* was also the place where invalids lay in the hope of being healed. *Βηθζαθά* may mean 'house of mercy' (Laney 1992:106), explaining the invalids' hope. The reader may assume that all the characters involved in the lame man's healing were part of the Jewish community (Smith 1999:39).⁴ Also, the narrator projects an image of suffering sheep in the Jewish community as the invalids among *πέντε στοῦς* are described as *τυφλῶν, χωλῶν* and *ξηρῶν*. However, as the alleged healing powers of the pool were probably characteristic of pagan cults, the Jewish religious leaders almost certainly did not approve of such superstition (Köstenberger 2004:179).

Narrative analysis (Jn 5:5–18)

It is within the socio-cultural context of the Jewish feast and the location being a traditional healing site, that Jesus sees a man who has been sick for 38 years. Although his sickness is not specified, it seems that he is paralysed or lame as indicated in John 5:8–9. The length of the lame man's plight indicates the hopelessness of his situation. Because his sickness has kept him from participating in any socio-cultural life, the lame man has been alienated and lonely. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:111) have read the lame man as a representative of the socio-economically deprived, and not as spiritually dead. Stibbe (1994:75) also argues this case by pointing to *τὸν κράβαττον*, which is the type of bedding used by the poor. For the narrator, however, it is not the socio-economic or socio-cultural misfortune of the lame man that is the focus: it is the man's inability to respond to Jesus with faith. As Collins (1976:122) argues, the lame man's representative role can be understood only when he is compared and contrasted with the man born blind (Jn 9) whose response in faith stands in stark contrast.

The narrator tells us that Jesus *γινούς ὅτι πολλὸν ἤδη χρόνον ἔχει* (Jn 5:6), which is similar to Jesus' fore-knowledge of the Samaritan woman during their encounter (Jn 4:18). Despite his divine knowledge of the lame man's condition, Jesus asks him, *θέλεις ὑγιῆς γενέσθαι*. The term *θέλεις* connotes the attitude of a 'strong and determined will', not just a wish or desire (Kittel 1965:45). It is likely that Jesus asks what is otherwise obvious – the lame man's desire to walk – to make clear the nature of the demand and the determined will required.

The lame man's response, *Κύριε, ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἔχω ἵνα ὅταν παραχθῇ τὸ ὕδωρ βάλη με εἰς τὴν κολυμβήθραν* (Jn 5:7), shows that he is unaware of who Jesus is and what power Jesus wields to help him *ὑγιῆς*. He is merely seeking just another *ἄνθρωπον* to carry and put him in the pool so that he might be made well. The lame man perceives his predicament as one of lacking someone who could carry him to the pool

4. Brodie (1993:236) also mentions that the background of the lame man's healing episode is predominantly Judean because of terms like Jerusalem, Hebrew and Sabbath.

when the water was stirred. The stirring of the water could have been created by random springs, with superstition at the time attributing the stirring of the water to an angel of the Lord who could come down from time to time (cf. the gloss in Jn 5:3b-4 found in some later manuscripts).⁵ Thus, Bryan (2003:11, 14) points out the lame man's understanding of God as one who periodically infuses the pool with impersonal power, which is accessed in a purely arbitrary way. The lame man's complaint that there is no one who can help him to get into the pond when it is stirred up is even more ironic, because the reader knows that the real healing water can be found in Jesus himself based on his encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4 (see Culpepper 1998:138).

Ignoring the pool and its superstitious healing power, Jesus commands him, *ἔγειρε ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει* (Jn 5:8). Jesus grants his wish unreservedly with no requirement or any mention of 'faith' or 'believing'.⁶ The reader could be sure that the response of the lame man is an immediate obedience to Jesus' command, but this is only possible, because the narrator indicates that *εὐθέως ἐγένετο ὑγιής ὁ ἄνθρωπος* (Jn 5:9) between the command and the response. Although the response to Jesus in John 5:9, in comparison with 5:7, may appear as a progression, no mention of faith on the part of the lame man is recorded: the healed lame man just walked away (Jn 5:9a). The imperative verbs *ἔγειρε*, *ἄρον*, and *περιπάτει* suggest that the lame man needed to experience God's healing power to be healed, and he did. In this regard, Moloney (1996) suggests:

There are some preliminary indications in this man's story that he may be on [a] journey to true faith. Although he began without understanding who Jesus was and what He could offer, he has responded unquestioningly to the word of Jesus. (p. 5)

That said, it is also possible that the lame man may not have been on the journey to true faith, fearing a continued state of ex-communication from the Jewish people as experienced before the healing happens. Interestingly, Staley (1991:60) views Jesus' command to the lame man to work on the Sabbath negatively, while the lame man proves to be a daring and risk-taking individual as he accepted Jesus' Sabbath rule-breaking command. However, such a reading ignores the reality that Jesus intentionally works on the Sabbath to show that he is equal with God the Father in light of the entire text (see Bennema 2014:189). It was Jesus who made the initial approach to the lame man. Jesus offered him healing, and commanded him to perform certain actions. The lame man is able to act in response to these commands, because Jesus has performed a miracle without the stirring of the water. The healing miracle performed on the lame man and his subsequent obedience comes from the initiative of the sovereign Lord, Jesus. Jesus acts with the divine knowledge and power of the Creator, God.

⁵The omission of John 5:3b-4 from the earliest and best witnesses has led many scholars to omit them as not original (see Metzger 1994:179).

⁶Michaels (2016:339) notices this in contrast to the story of the paralytic (Mk 2:5) in which Jesus saw the 'faith' of those who brought him through the roof, and the story of the royal official's son in Capernaum, where the father first believed the word Jesus said to him (Jn 4:50), and later 'believed, he and his whole family' (Jn 4:53).

The Jewish religious leaders appear on the scene and accuse the lame man of breaking a Sabbath law as he carries his mat. The lame man does not accept responsibility for this unlawful work on the Sabbath. He excuses himself, saying that he only did what the healer told him: *ὁ ποιήσας με ὑγιῆ ἐκεῖνός μοι εἶπεν, ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει* (Jn 5:11). It is not an exact quotation of Jesus' command, *ἔγειρε ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει* (Jn 5:8), omitting the instruction *ἔγειρε*. Howard-Brook (2001:125) points out that, while *ἄρον* and *περιπάτει* imply Sabbath violation, *ἔγειρε* insinuates rebirth or resurrection. Given the resurrection connotation of *ἔγειρε*, the reader or implied reader may conclude the lame man's omission of this word reflects him not having moved beyond his initial understanding of Jesus (Jn 5:7) despite having been suddenly and completely healed of his sickness which lasted 38 years (Howard-Brook 2001:125). The Jewish religious leaders want to know *τίς ἐστιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος*, willing to accept the man's excuse of breaking the Sabbath law as they focus on Jesus, the real target of their investigation. Their anger at the healing on the Sabbath was not the first time the religious leaders found themselves directly opposed to Jesus' actions. They encountered him once before when they challenged his act of driving the money changers from the temple (Jn 2:18-20).

It is worth noting that the narrator describes the lame man as *ὁ δὲ ἰαθεῖς*. Moreover, as Jesus *ἐξένευσεν ὄχλου ὄντος ἐν τῷ τόπῳ*, the Jewish religious leaders cannot pursue Jesus any further (Jn 5:13). Here we see vividly how the lame man's response to his healing is quite different from that of the man born blind (Jn 9). He essentially blames Jesus, *ὁ ποιήσας με ὑγιῆ*, for the Sabbath violation because of the act of healing. The Jewish religious leaders are more focused not on the healing itself, but rather on the man carrying his mat, which was forbidden on the Sabbath (Brown 1966:208). Although Köstenberger (2004:181) argues that the lame man did not actually break any biblical Sabbath regulations, it is possible the Jewish religious leaders had in mind passages such as Exodus 31:12-17, Jeramiah 17:21-27 and Nehemiah 13:15-19.⁷

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:109) explore the comparison and contrast of the lame man's healing with the healing of the man born blind (Jn 9), which also takes place on a Sabbath. Staley (1991:61-62) argues that the lame man was indeed standing up to the Jewish religious leaders, comparing their authority with those of the healer, and he then would say that *ὁ ποιήσας με ὑγιῆ* also has the power to abrogate Sabbath law. Thomas (1996:13) also positively regards the lame man's response as establishing the authority of *ὁ ποιήσας με ὑγιῆ*, giving the healer power over the Sabbath law. That said, it seems that Staley and Thomas are too charitable in their characterisation of the lame man in contrast to the context of the narrative. What is important to consider here, is that the lame man is ignorant of Jesus' identity, because Jesus *ἐξένευσεν ὄχλου ὄντος ἐν τῷ τόπῳ* (Jn 5:13). Although this

⁷The Mishnah mentions for instance that 'the generative categories of acts of labor prohibited on the Sabbath are forty less one: he who transports an object from one domain to another' (*m. Shabbat* 7:2). However, there was an exception to carry a bed with a person lying on it (*m. Shabbat* 10:5; see Köstenberger 2004:181).

appears as if the healed man's ignorance of the identity of Christ is attributed to Jesus' absence after the healing, an alternative reading is that the healed man is so happy to be finally healthy that he neglects to identify the healer (Kim 2005:67). Regardless, the lame man's response is not a positive confession, leaving him failing as a witness in contrast to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4) and the man born blind (Jn 9).

The narrator opens a new scene starting with *μετὰ ταῦτα* (Jn 5:14), separating the encounter between the lame man and the Jewish religious leaders. It is also the scene that does not mention the Sabbath. Again, Jesus takes the initiative and finds the healed lame man *ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ*. The exact location in the temple is not specified, nor is time frame since the healing. The institution of the Sabbath is set aside for a moment and replaced by the institution of the temple. Jesus recalls the healing miracle, *Ἴδε ὑγιῆς γέγονας* (Jn 5:14b). Its perfect verb tense indicates the healed man's continual state of well-being and perhaps comparing his healing to other healings at the pool of Bethesda that proved less than permanent (Morris 1995:272). Jesus commands the healed lame man, *μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε*. Sin will lead to the healed man being worse off than he was during his condition of sickness for 38 years. The reader or implied reader may expect that *Ἴδε ὑγιῆς γέγονας* is equivalent to 'Behold, your sins are forgiven' (Michaels 2016:342). Thus, Jesus moves the conversation to a spiritual level by introducing the concept of sin. The syntax of Jesus' command emphasises urgency and implies that the healed man should abstain from a pattern of sin (Carson 1991:246; Morris 1995:272; Ridderbos 1997:189).⁸ Although Jesus did not attribute every instance of physical suffering to sin, he acknowledged that sin may well lead to all kinds of sufferings. It may be in this case that the narrator implies the correlation between sin and judgement by mentioning *χεῖρόν σοί τι γένηται* (see Borchert 1996:235). The narrator demonstrates that Jesus transcends the theological and legal demands of the Sabbath law.

The rabbis associated sin with God's punishment through suffering and death, but in the name of God, Jesus speaks in the temple, breaking the link between the Sabbath law and physical suffering as God's punishment.

The lame man's physical problems have been overcome, but Jesus' warning indicates that more sufferings will be encountered unless the problem of sin is resolved. Sin will lead to a situation that is more damaging than physical sickness – most probably, of course, a reference not to a worse physical condition, but rather to eternal punishment for sin considering the context of the narrative (cf. Jn 5:22–30).⁹ In the Johannine narrative, sin is defined narrowly as unbelief or rejection of the Son whom God the Father sent. That is why Jesus *μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε*, warning the healed

8. Carson, Morris, and Ridderbos are against a simplistic generalisation of the negated present imperative, although the narrator implies that no more sin should be committed.

9. Howard-Brook (2001:126) argues that Jesus' warning can be related to the warning, *ὁ δὲ ἀπειθῶν τῷ υἱῷ οὐκ ὄψεται ζωὴν, ἀλλ' ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐν' αὐτόν* (Jn 3:36).

man that he faces the more urgent issue of sin and judgement. There will be condemnation at the last judgement of Jesus.

From this scene of the lame man's second encounter with Jesus, the reader becomes aware that the healed man is not spiritually alive. He does not have faith in the Son of God who gives the eternal life even after having had two encounters with Jesus. In stark contrast to the man born blind (Jn 9), the lame man takes no effort to even find out the name of his healer. Eventually he even turned him in to the Jewish religious leaders for having broken the Sabbath law (Schneiders 1999:153). As *ἀπῆλθεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος* to answer the question asked by the Jewish religious leaders (Jn 5:12), the healed lame man and Jesus were separated. There is no sign of faith or of following in *ἀπῆλθεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος*. Rather he went to report the name of the healer, Jesus, to the Jewish leaders (Jn 5:15b).

There is no reason why he had to do this. The healed man was in the clear as far as the charge of Sabbath breaking was concerned. The reader is told that the healed man's only response to Jesus' warning (Jn 5:14b), was to report him to the Jewish leaders. His most recent encounter with Jesus in the temple has made no impact on him. After being healed from a disease that left him paralysed for 38 years, the healed man shows no expression of gratitude toward Jesus in the entire narrative – in stark contrast to the man born blind (Jn 9) who defends Jesus and pays the price by being excommunicated from the synagogue (Ridderbos 1997:190). That is why so many scholars say that the lame man is a representative of unbelief.¹⁰

The narrator then turns to the trial of Jesus, asserting that the healed man's evidence against Jesus for breaking the Sabbath law leads the Jewish religious leaders to launch a legal process and persecute him (*ἐδίωκον οἱ ἰουδαῖοι τὸν ἰησοῦν*). The verb *δίωκω* means both 'to persecute' and 'to bring a charge against or prosecute' (Liddell & Scott 1990:440). The imperfect form *ἐδίωκον* indicates that their persecution of Jesus has been constant. From this narrative point onward, there is a trial in process. Jesus defends himself by revealing the truth. Like a defence lawyer's initial appeal summary before the jury in a court, Jesus speaks to them, *ὁ πατήρ μου ἔως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται, καὶ γὰρ ἐργάζομαι* (Jn 5:17b). The Jewish religious leaders think that God could not rest on the Sabbath. Although Genesis 2:2–3 said:

On the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

God could not cease to work even on the Sabbath. If he did, the history of the world would come to an end. Thus, Jesus'

10. Against Beck (1993:143–158), who argues that anonymity necessarily equals ideal function and positive characterisation, Moloney (1998:173) argues that anonymous characters in John draw the reader into identification with the character. However, the reader of John hardly identifies with a man who is in league with 'the Jews' (Jn 5:15).

claiming to be working on the Sabbath is blasphemy to them. However, for the reader or implied reader who believes that Jesus is *ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος* (Jn 1:1b) and *ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο* (Jn 1:14a), it is the logical consequence that Jesus, as God, would work on the Sabbath.

Jesus claims that his Father works on the Sabbath *ἕως ἄρτι*, and that he is also still working *ἕως ἄρτι* (Jn 5:17). The focus here is one of the relationship claimed between Jesus and God, whom he calls *πατὴρ μου*; thus claiming equality with God, leading the Jewish leaders to bring charges against Jesus as they seek to sentence him to death (Jn 5:18). Their actions revealed that they had a clear understanding of Jesus and what he was claiming in asserting that his actions were not subject to Sabbath law, and that God is his Father, which thus equates him to God. Yet, in spite of this understanding, the leaders were unable to see beyond what they viewed as the more immediate issue surrounding Sabbath keeping traditions.

Once the charges are made, Jesus does not deny them. Instead, he boldly defends himself and his action. A trial is set in motion in which the prosecutors and the defendant have different answers to the same question. The defendant, Jesus, sees the Sabbath-keeping traditions on the basis of his relationship with the God of Israel, his Father; the prosecutors, the Jewish religious leaders, judge that Jesus has broken the Sabbath law and deserves to die. In the meantime, the narrator and his readers are aware that Jesus is *ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος* (Jn 1:1b) and *ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός* (Jn 1:14). He is thus the source and Lord of the Sabbath (cf. Mt 12:8). Therefore, the relationship of Jesus with God the Father and its implied Christology are crucial to John's narrative and are central to the following discourse as Jesus defends his case (Jn 5:19-30) and calls his witnesses (Jn 5:31-47). While the prosecutors, the Jewish religious leaders, are present during this discourse, Jesus speaks alone.

Jesus' discourse (Jn 5:19–47)

The discourse of John 5:19–47 consists solely of Jesus' words, with his defence of himself consisting of two parts: Jesus' response to the Jewish religious leaders' charges (Jn 5:19–30), and Jesus' presentation of witnesses (Jn 5:31–47).¹¹ Underlying Jesus' polemic discourse is the assertion that the activities done on the Sabbath that he is defending are nothing other than eschatological judgement activities of God. Throughout his defence, Jesus makes clear that the work he does is done as God the Father has entrusted them to him, based on Jesus' relationship with God the Father. The reader can see throughout Jesus' discourse, both Jesus' total dependence on God the Father, as well as the unity of the Father and Son

11. Neyrey (1988:18) interestingly suggests that Jesus responds to the charges against him in order that he responds first to the blasphemer charge (Jn 5:19–29), and then to the charge of breaking the Sabbath law (Jn 5:30–47). He does not include John 5:30 for the blasphemy charge, because he argues that, although Jesus' defence in verse 30 simply denies the charge with no explanation, that is not the case in John 5:19–29. Most scholars, however, do not agree with this. Moloney (1998:177) sees that the themes of Jesus' first defence are life and judgement, and John 5:30 should thus be included in the first defence.

depicted (Jn 5:19-30).¹² The introduction of Jesus' witnesses (Jn 5:31), *ἐὰν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ*, sets up the next rhetorical question Jesus poses in verse 47.

The discourse, as recorded by the narrator, explains Jesus' relationship with God the Father within the context of the themes of life and eschatological judgement by the Son's authority. Jesus opens his defence (Jn 5:19) by identifying himself as Son of God the Father. He does so with a serious double *ἀμὴν*, responding directly to the charge of Sabbath-law breaking (Jn 5:18).¹³ Jesus explains how God's revelation functions in the life of the Son and for the benefit of others (Jn 5:20). Everything the Son does, flows from God the Father. The Son is totally depending on the Father in all that he does so that the Son might have the privilege of ultimate intimacy with the Father. The Son is at one with God the Father eternally, as well as subordinate to him. The double negative structure of the sentence *οὐ δύναται ὁ υἱὸς ποιεῖν ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ οὐδὲν* (Jn 5:19a) with its stresses on *οὐ ... οὐδὲν* adds emphasis. The Son sees all that God the Father does, and thus he can do exactly what the Father has done. That is why Jesus claims *καθὼ ἐργάζομαι* as *ὁ πατὴρ μου ἕως ἄρτι ἐργάζεται* (Jn 5:17b). Jesus also points out that something new is happening: *ἃ γὰρ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ποιῇ, ταῦτα καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ὁμοίως ποιεῖ* (Jn 5:19b). Jesus implies that it is the Father who led the Son to the lame man and told him to heal (Schnackenburg 1990:103). Because the relationship of God the Father and the Son is love, there is no secret between them (Jn 5:20a). The Father's love for the Son expresses itself in his free self-disclosure, and the Son's love for the Father expresses itself in his submission to the Father's will (cf. Jn 5:30), including death on the cross (Carson 1991:251).

The affirmation of the Father *πάντα δεικνυσιν αὐτῷ ἃ αὐτὸς ποιεῖ* turns to promise as Jesus tells the Jewish religious leaders that greater works will be shown by the Father to the Son *ἵνα ὑμεῖς θαυμάζητε* (Jn 5:20b).

The reader is thus drawn into the unique relationship between the Son and the Father, and can therefore marvel at the Son's greater works that might be part of a revelation of God the Father which reaches beyond the Jewish leaders' Sabbath law. The *μείζονα τούτων δεῖξει αὐτῷ ἔργα* in context refers to giving life and judging (see Moloney 1998:178; Morris 1995:275; Schnackenburg 1990:105). Jesus uses the remainder of his defence, contained in John 5:21–30, to explain what are these greater works. Only the God of Israel can raise the dead and give life (cf. Dt 32:39; 1 Sm 2:6; 2 Ki 5:7; Is 25:8). This lies behind Jesus' statement of *ὁ πατὴρ ἐγείρει τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ ζωοποιεῖ* (Jn 5:21a), but *οὕτως καὶ ὁ υἱὸς οὐς θέλει ζωοποιεῖ* (Jn 5:21b). The reader can link Jesus' statement to the lame man's healing miracle as Jesus commanded him *ἔγειρε* (Jn 5:8). Only the God of the Sabbath is the master of life and death; thus, this power of *ἐγειρε* from death has been given to the Son because

12. What is said in John 5:19 (*οὐ δύναται ὁ υἱὸς ποιεῖν ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ οὐδὲν*) is restated in verse 30 (*οὐ δύναμαι ἐγὼ ποιεῖν ἄτ' ἐμαυτοῦ οὐδὲν*). The third person in John 5:19 is restated in the first person in verse 30.

13. Carson (1991:249) states that breaking the Sabbath was a serious offence, but making oneself equal to God was challenging the fundamental distinction between the holy, infinite God and finite, fallen human beings.

of the existing relationship between God the Father and the Son. Jesus the Son exercises the authority given in ζῳοποιεῖ. Also, only the God of Israel judges the world (cf. Ps 94:2; 105:7; Is 26:9; 33:2; Mi 4:3), but God the Father judges no one; rather τὴν κρίσιν πᾶσαν δέδωκεν τῷ υἱῷ (Jn 5:22).

At this point of the narrative, the exact nature of the Son's judging activity is not described. However, for now the reader is shown the basis of the Son's judging authority. The reason God the Father has given it to the Son is because πάντες, including the Jewish religious leaders, should honour the Son if they wish to honour God the Father (Jn 5:23a). As a result, anyone who does not honour the Son, also fails to honour God the Father who sent him. In fact, Jesus directly tells them that, although Israel is obligated to honour God on the Sabbath, they are persecuting and plotting to kill the Son (Jn 5:16–18). According to the narrator, Jesus' role as the Son underscores both Jesus' equality with God the Father in purpose, and Jesus' subordination to the Father in carrying out the mission. This is precisely what Jesus did: He came to earth, finished all the missions entrusted to him – even the death on the cross – and returned to God the Father (Köstenberger 2004:188).

The reader now knows who Jesus is, and that both God the Father and the Son must be honoured. Jesus states in the first person singular, focusing on the believer, ὁ τὸν λόγον μου ἀκούων καὶ πιστεύων τῷ πέμψαντί με (Jn 5:24a), even though he is addressing the Jewish religious leaders. The results of his life-giving and judging presence are indicated. The one who ἀκούων Jesus' word and πιστεύων the Father who sent his Son, Jesus, ἔχει (present tense) ζῳὴν αἰώνιον, καὶ εἰς κρίσιν οὐκ ἔρχεται (future tense) ἀλλὰ μεταβέβηκεν (perfect tense) ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζῳήν. The eternal life should be given now through faith in the revelation of God through the Son, Jesus. It is not a future promise, but a present one (ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν in Jn 25a). Such a promise is in conflict with contemporary Judaism, which considered the receiving of eternal life to be a future event. It thus represents a strong affirmation of inaugurated eschatology in John's gospel (see Beasley-Murray 1987:76; Carson 1991:256; Köstenberger 2004:188; Moloney 1998:183; Morris 1995:280; Ridderbos 1997:197). Jesus points to himself as the source of life and judgement on a Sabbath festival (cf. Jn 5:1, 9), while doing what the God of Israel has done so far. He does not eliminate the celebration of the Sabbath.

Jesus continues his argument with the authority the Father has given. Starting with ὡςπερ γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ἔχει ζῳὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ as a principle in their theological tradition, it is a logical conclusion (οὕτως καὶ) that the Father τῷ υἱῷ ἔδωκεν ζῳὴν ἔχειν ἐν ἑαυτῷ (Jn 5:26; cf. Jn 5:22). Jesus has already claimed that he ζῳοποιεῖ (Jn 5:21b), and now explains how this is true. From this affirmation, Jesus goes on to address that the judgment of the Son because he is υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου. Köstenberger (2004:189) argues that the phrase rendered 'He is υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου', reads more literally 'He is Son of Man' – the only instance in the entire New Testament of this Christological

title without articles before both 'Son' and 'Man'. The narrator used this title for expressing 'the transcendent character of Jesus' Messiahship and the all-embracing, present-and-future-encompassing mission of Jesus as the Son of God' (Ridderbos 1997:200).

Earlier in John 5:22, Jesus explained that God the Father judges no one, but grants such authority to the Son. Thus, Jesus now claims to exercise it. Jesus proclaimed ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν (Jn 5:25) in the context of God the Father who gives the Son the authority of giving life and bringing judgement. Jesus tells the Jewish religious leaders now μὴ θαυμάζετε τοῦτο, because the handing over of Sabbath authority to Jesus does not change their understanding of the time with its associated judgement. Jesus repeats the phrase ἔρχεται ὥρα (Jn 5:28), but νῦν ἐστὶν is omitted because of the Jewish tradition of the eschatological expectations. In the future, there will be a time when the physically dead will hear the voice of the Son and come out of the tombs into either the resurrection of life or judgement (Jn 5:28–29; cf. Dn 12:2). Those who τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες will rise to live forever, and those who τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες will rise to be condemned. Despite the ζῳὴν αἰώνιον believers claim to possess now, the reader realises the eschatology of John 5:24 might be the continued reality that everyone must come to face: the fact that everyone experiences life and death. The physical reality of death and life is within the dominion of God, as he is in the role of life-giver, and judgement within the dominion of the Son. Thus, acceptance or refusal of the Son now must be the crucial factor in how one's life will be on the other side of the tomb (Jn 5:28–29). The reader or implied reader notices that the conclusion of Jesus' first section of the polemic discourse (Jn 5:30) is much a repeat of the opening remark in verse 19. As mentioned earlier, the difference in the change of pronoun third person to the first person. Jesus emphasises the total dependence on the will of God the Father who sent him. As God the Father is the judge, so also is the Son, Jesus. Jesus' judgement is thus righteous and just, because it is based on the will of God the Father. Therefore, his healing of the lame man cannot be judged in terms of the man-made Jewish regulations on Sabbath observance. The characterisation of the lame man makes apparent Jesus' identification.

As the trial continues, the narrator tells us that Jesus calls witnesses for his defence against the Sabbath-law breaking and blasphemy charges put forth by the Jewish religious leaders. The inability of the Jewish religious leaders to recognise God's revelation of the Son quickly becomes evident. At first, Jesus points out that εἰάν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἑμαυτοῦ, ἢ μαρτυρία μου οὐκ ἐστὶν ἀληθής (Jn 5:31).¹⁴ Under Jewish law, it was not enough for the accused to prove ἀληθής; two or three witnesses were required (Dt 19:15), and those testimonies had to be brought forward. Jesus acknowledges and accepts this situation. Thus, he points toward ἄλλος ἐστὶν (present tense) ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ ἐμοῦ. Although the reader

¹⁴ οὐκ ἐστὶν ἀληθής renders 'not valid or verified' rather than 'not true', indicating a courtroom setting (see Carson 1991:259; Morris 1995:287).

might understand that the ἄλλος ἐστὶν ὁ μαρτυρῶν is God the Father, this is not the case for the Jewish religious leaders. So, Jesus turns to witnesses they have seen and heard, that is, John the Baptist (Jn 5:33–35) and Jesus' miracle works of signs and wonders (Jn 5:36). In John 5:33, Jesus reminds that they sent ἱερεῖς καὶ Λευίτας to John the Baptist for his identification (Jn 1:19). At that time, John the Baptist witnessed to Jesus as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (Jn 1:34) and ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (Jn 1:36). Jesus calls John the Baptist a λύχνος that burned and shone (Jn 5:35), and the reader knows that he is not τὸ φῶς (cf. Jn 1:7–9). The Jewish religious leaders are nevertheless unable to see Jesus as the Jesus to whom John the Baptist bore witness. However, the narrator presents an even more powerful witness for Jesus: the ἔργα Jesus performed that has its origins in God the Father (cf. 4:34). What the narrator may label 'σημείων' is simply carried under his ἔργα. His ἔργα thus include the σημείων, but are not limited to them. Everything he does, is his entire ministry (Carson 1991:261). He continues to follow and respond to the Father's will (cf. Jn 5:30). These acts are seen in many ἔργα that Jesus accomplishes perfectly (Jn 5:36a). Thus, his perfect accomplishment of ἔργα witnesses to the truth of his saying, ὁ πατήρ με ἀπέσταλκεν (Jn 5:36b).

The witnesses of John the Baptist and the ἔργα of Jesus could be seen and heard, but there is also direct testimony from the Father who sent him (Jn 5:37a). The μεμαρτύρηκεν (perfect tense) points to the confirmed state and the significance of God the Father's witness, given that God's testimony is greater than men's (cf. 1 Jn 5:9). The problem is that the Jewish religious leaders have neither heard φωνὴν αὐτοῦ nor seen εἶδος αὐτοῦ (Jn 5:37b). The narrator explains what is meant by φωνὴν and εἶδος (Jn 5:38b), telling ὅτι ὄν ἀπέστειλεν ἐκεῖνος τούτῳ ὑμεῖς οὐ πιστεύετε. The Jewish religious leaders take it for granted that they have the word of God abiding in them (Jn 5:38a), but their rejection of the Son whom God has sent, makes such a belief self-deceit. Jesus is God the Father's φωνὴν and εἶδος, but they do not hear or see him as such. The narrator emphasises that Jesus is ὄν ἀπέστειλεν by God the Father (Jn 5:38b), and that 'No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known' (Jn 1:18). The φωνὴν of God the Father is ὁ λόγος of the Son, Jesus. The narrator continues to point to the Jewish religious leaders' failures. The Jewish practice of ἐραυνᾶτε τὰς γραφάς is regarded as ζῶν αἰώνιον ἔχειν (Jn 5:39), but they refuse to come to Jesus who gives ζῶν αἰώνιον (Jn 5:40). They could not recognise the Scriptures which bears the witness to the Son, Jesus. They need to understand its true Christological point of view and purpose. Their accusations are based on their own study of the Scriptures and their interpretation of the Sabbath traditions (cf. Jn 5:18). The author, however, asserts that the Scriptures are the witness of the unseen God the Father to the Son, Jesus (Jn 5:37; cf. Jn 1:45; 2:22; 3:10; 5:45–47; 12:41; 20:9). According to the author, the Scriptures are being abused by the Jewish religious leaders and they not only refuse to come to him, but try to persecute and kill him. Their refusal is deliberate (Brown 1966:225). For his defence, Jesus finally makes the accusation that the Jewish religious leaders do not have the love for God (Jn 5:42), while Jesus

emphasises that he has no interest in δόξαν παρὰ ἀνθρώπων [human recognition] (Jn 5:41). From ἐγνωκα ὑμᾶς, Jesus rebukes them, because they show no sign of loving God whatever their claims from the Scriptures might be. This leads them to the rejection of the Son sent ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ πατρὸς and the easy acceptance of those who come ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τῷ ἰδίῳ (Jn 5:43). Jesus' authority comes from God the Father who sent him, but this truth is rejected, as they accept all those who might come with nothing more than the authority of their own name. Jesus has rejected δόξαν παρὰ ἀνθρώπων, but they pursue it. Their inability to believe the Son, Jesus, comes from settling for the δόξαν παρὰ ἀλλήλων λαμβάνοντες (Jn 5:44a). Their delusions by misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the Scriptures caused them to be unable to seek and find τὴν δόξαν τὴν παρὰ τοῦ μόνου θεοῦ that all men should seek (Jn 5:44b). Jesus appeals to a principle which applies to all men: No one is to seek his or her own glory, but only the glory of him who sent Jesus.¹⁵ Their self-love caused them to reject the Son, the God-sent Messiah (Carson 1991:264).

Jesus brings up another witness for him, namely Moses. Moses was regarded as the mediator between God and Israel. He intercedes before God the Father for the people of Israel, the Jews (cf. Ex 32:11–14, 30–33; Dt 9:18–29). By God the Law had come to the Jews through Moses, but God also gives ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο (cf. Jn 1:17). Both have been given by God's will, but the Jewish religious leaders are rejecting the latter. Therefore, Jesus can say ἐστὶν ὁ κατηγορῶν ὑμῶν Μωϋσῆς (Jn 5:45b). The reader already knows that the Scriptures bear witness to the Son, Jesus (Jn 5:39). If they believe in Moses, they would believe him: περὶ γὰρ ἐμοῦ ἐκεῖνος ἔγραψεν (Jn 5:46), but they have not believed in Moses. The readers are familiar with the author's pattern in the Johannine narrative of a statement in the affirmative followed by the converse. The narrator is saying that they are wrong to accuse Jesus on the basis of their misinterpretation of the Law. The reader understands the continuity between τοῖς ἐκεῖνου γράμμασιν of Moses and τοῖς ἐμοῖς ῥήμασιν of Jesus which are the same revelation of God. If they are unable to believe τοῖς ἐκεῖνου γράμμασιν of Moses, they cannot believe τοῖς ἐμοῖς ῥήμασιν of Jesus.

Conclusion: Theological significance

In the lame man's healing narrative, the narrator establishes that the lame man and the story of his healing are intertwined with the characterisation of Jesus as the Son whom God the Father sent to do God's work. Jesus has the divine authority and power to heal the lame man. The reader or implied reader clearly sees that the Jewish religious leaders' charges against Jesus are false, because the healing was God's act and Jesus did the healing according to God's will. The narrator also shows through Jesus' encounters with the Jewish religious leaders that the lame man's healing miracle sign has eschatological implications. In his discourse of defence, Jesus,

¹⁵ Jesus said, 'If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood' (Jn 7:17–18).

as the Son of God the Father, reveals God who has the authority to perform miracles and values the giving of life over the Jewish Sabbath tradition. Jesus demonstrated his divine authority to forgive sin and give eternal life to those who believe in him.

Another aspect of Jesus' healing of the lame man on the Sabbath is judgement. While God the Father alone is called the judge who will exercise the eschatological judgement, this authority has been delegated to the Son, Jesus, because of the relationship between the Father and the Son. At this eschatological judgement, everyone will be raised. The Son, Jesus, will judge based on belief or unbelief concerning him: a resurrection of life or a resurrection of condemnation. Because of their delusion or blindness, and the quest for glory from men, the Jewish religious leaders could not see their own spiritual depravity. So they accused and tried to kill Jesus, the Son. The reader or implied reader can see that Jesus' choice to heal the lame man on the Sabbath has significant messianic implications. It presents Jesus as the promised Messiah. Therefore, like their forefathers failed to enter the promised land because of unbelief, the only way to live forever is through faith in the Son, Jesus. The narrator also expressed that, unlike the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus is not seeking his own glory, but for the glory of God the Father. All human beings are made for his glory.

The lame man is unable to heed Jesus' warning and does not progress in his knowledge of him. There is no indication that he comes to believe in Jesus, while, in contrast, the man born blind (Jn 9), progresses in his knowledge of Jesus in a way similar to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4). He even stands up to the Jewish religious leaders. Also, when Jesus finds the man born blind later, the man perceptively responds with belief – something not true of the lame man who was healed. Taking all of these differences in responses into account, the reader should interpret the lame man narrative negatively. For the narrator, the miracles are signs that reveal Jesus' true identity for the purpose of his writing (cf. Jn 20:30–31), but, as we see in the characterisation of the lame man, even miracle signs do not necessarily lead to authentic faith (see Culpepper 1983:138; see also Howard 2006:72).

In this narrative, the observation of the Sabbath is the essential literary and theological background. The reader or implied reader was asked to believe that Jesus was the Son of God who made God known (Jn 1:18). What Jesus had done in the Jewish temple for the lame man on the Sabbath was not only a sign, but also a shadow of the gift of God in the Son who gives life and judges everyone at the eschatological time. Jesus is above the Sabbath and the works he does, which are always good, are allowed on the Sabbath as God himself. It is impossible to honour and glorify the Sabbath God without honouring and glorifying his Son. The narrator demonstrates that it is the Jewish religious leaders who are lost and are judged, because they do not accept Jesus as the Son who gives life.

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