

*“Truth and Conflict”*

Ten years ago, as of the Middle of May, I began a three month Sabbatical, which focused on an Intensive Study of the Gospel of John. The Lilly Endowment provided the funds needed to enable my taking the three month sabbatical. The reason I chose to make an Intensive Study of the Gospel of John was I believe that gospel not only provides an authentic representation of the Ministry, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus the Christ but it, also, powerfully reveals our **Savior’s truly revolutionary Message**. However, for many years most biblical scholars assumed John was written much later than the other New Testament gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and they have claimed the Gospel of John was purely a theological creation, which does not provide a real account of the Life and Ministry of Jesus. Since many biblical experts assume John was a theological creation and not an accurate account of Jesus’ teachings, acts, etc., most have not given serious consideration to the implications of Jesus’ Message in John.

Through my sabbatical study, I closely examined the facts, which support my contention the Gospel of John was not written late and it was not merely a theological construction. My Intensive Study demonstrates the Gospel of John is an early and authentic report about Jesus’ Ministry, Death, Resurrection, Message, and Purpose. I began a school year long sermon series on the Gospel of John immediately after the three month sabbatical, utilizing my sabbatical insights.

The Deacons recently received a request for me to preach again that series of sermons, which were based on my sabbatical study. I agreed to preach an updated version of that school year long sabbatical sermon series. Today’s message is the first of those sermons. During the past 10 years, my insights about Jesus’ Message in the Gospel of John continued to grow. I also discovered additional evidence in other New Testament gospels and books, which I see affirming the authenticity of the Gospel of John’s account.

Today’s Scripture from the Gospel of John includes **multiple meanings about the Truth** found in the gospel **and about the Conflict** shown in the Reading and/or resulting from the claims based upon it. **One Truth is the Gospel of John was an early source about Jesus, which revealed the Truth about God’s Agape Love and how, through it, God transformed our Relationship with both the Divine Creator – Parent and with one another.** The Truth in the Gospel of John is in **Conflict** with many **biblical scholars who challenged that Truth and assumed** both the Gospel of John was **written much later than the other New Testament gospels and it was not an accurate account about Jesus.** The Reading also exposes the **Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious authorities**, which was directly related to their desire to stop him from **proving the Truth of his Ministry and Message over and against their legalistic claims.**

This Text provides information which **documents / its author was very familiar with the location** for the event described in the Reading. Specifically, in vs. 2 it is written, *“Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool with five porches; in Hebrew it is called Bethzatha.”* **Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.** so, the **writer** had to be someone, who was **familiar with the city before its demise and** who was **unaware of its destruction before writing** the gospel. **Archeological studies** of that area verify John’s description. That contradicts the **contentions of many scholars** for they believe it was **written as late as 90 - 120 A.D.** The other New Testament gospels do not demonstrate such detailed knowledge, even though they are thought to have been written around 60 to 70 A.D.

Providing details, which indicate an eyewitness testimony that is often lacking in Matthew, Mark, and

Luke, this Scripture says Jesus found a man, who had been **ill for 38 years**. Jesus asked the sick person if he wanted to get well. In vs. 7, *“The sick man answered, ‘Sir, I don’t have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first.’”* Even the ill individual’s response reveals details, which required first hand observation. At that time, some believed miraculous healing would be received by the first person to enter the water when it was stirred up by an agent of God. The sick man’s response explained why he wasn’t lazy but was never able to get in the water before someone else. Jesus remedied both the man’s difficulty and healed him saying in vs. 8, *“Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.”* The gospel reports in vs. 9, *“Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking. The day this happened was a Sabbath”*. Instead of receiving praise from everyone, the **Jewish authorities were unhappy because this took place on a Sabbath**. They chastised the man in vs. 10, *“so the Jewish authorities told the man who had been healed, ‘This is a Sabbath, and it is against our Law for you to carry your mat.’”* The man said he followed the healer’s instructions. The authorities asked who the healer was but **he did not know the healer’s name**.

Later, Jesus found the healed man in the Temple and warned him to **stop missing the mark – to stop sinning**. What did Jesus mean by that? Strangely enough, instead of the man seeking to learn from and follow his healer, **he went to the authorities and identified Jesus as his healer**, so they would blame him, instead of the former sick man. The Gospel of John says in vs. 16, *“So they began to persecute Jesus, because he had done this healing on a Sabbath.”* He confronted them in vs. 17, *“Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is always working, and I too must work.’”* God is still working and people of faith are called to be the Divine’s agents as part of that continued work even on the Sabbath or any other holy day! **God’s work is Loving us Sacrificially** to heal us and bring us back into a **New Relationship** with our Divine Parent and one another.

The synoptic gospels of Mt., Mk. and Lk. tend to portray **the conflict between the Jewish authorities, especially the Pharisees, and Jesus as stemming from his challenging their interpretation of the Law**. Supposedly, Jesus was not attacking their legalistic approach but only their misrepresentations of the law. So, if they merely agreed with his legal interpretations, they would have become allies? No. This Scripture indicates a **different source of motivation for their Conflict**. In vs. 18 the Gospel of John states, *“This saying made the Jewish authorities all the more determined to kill him; not only had he broken the Sabbath law, but he had said that God was his own Father and in this way had made himself equal with God.”* The authorities were upset by **Jesus’ claim to an authority which eclipsed their own and their laws – one which was based on him having a special relationship with God!**

**Jesus told the truth when he talked about his authority and his relationship with our Divine Parent!** The Gospel of John is by far, of the New Testament gospels, the one, which most clearly shows Jesus revealing the nature of his special relationship with God. Many **biblical scholars have rejected the authenticity of John’s report**, so that gospel’s **significant witness is greatly discounted**. Next Sunday, we will do a close examination of Jesus’ claim to authority using John 5:19-29 as its basis.

Summarizing, **facts**, such as the existence of the pool reported in today’s Reading and the significant details, which demonstrated the sick man’s status and the **True source of Jesus’ Conflict with the Jewish authorities argue powerfully for the authenticity of the account reported in the Gospel of John**. If Jesus is not calling us to be better Pharisees, then what is his Message and how will you and I respond? Amen.