

Fourth Lesson

The Gospel of John

Chapters 5 and 6

Religious meaning of Water in world religions and in Christianity

Miracle at the pool of Bethesda

What is Sabbath? How to interpret and observe Sabbath in our times?

Private and General Judgement of God

Testimonies to Jesus as the Son of God

Miraculous feeding of 5000 people and pastoral implications

Jesus walks on Water

Selfish following of Jesus

Jesus as our Manna

I. **Spiritual meaning of Water:** Science helps us know the properties and function of water in the natural world. Ethics helps us decide how to preserve, protect, and distribute Earth's water resources. Water has been understood and celebrated as a religious symbol and ritual for thousands of years across cultures and religions. water has been used to communicate the sacred value of life - the spiritual dimension of purification, protection, and healing

Water for holy cleansing: Before we come to the christian perspective of water's religious symbolism, let us see the spiritual notion of water in other religions. Hinduism considers River Ganges as the holy river and during festivities, men and women go and bathe. people in India consider the river Ganges an embodiment of the goddess Ganga. This makes the Ganges River both a symbol of life and a place where one can wash away spiritual impurities thereby drawing closer to the sacred source of life.

In Islam, water is the origin of all life on Earth. The Qur'an says water is the substance from which God created the human being it says, "At creation, even God's throne was upon water" For Muslims, ablution with water is an obligatory preparation for daily prayer. The prophet Mohammed states in the Qur'an: "O you who believe! When you rise up to prayer,

wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows, and wipe your heads and your feet to the ankles” (5:6). Ancient Jewish tradition calls people on special occasions to cleanse their bodies spiritually by immersion in a ‘*mikveh*’ bath. Water has also been associated with spiritual protection in many of the world’s religions.

Spiritual meaning of Water in Christianity: In the church, water can be ritually blessed and serve as a spiritual symbol of God’s protection over a person or group touched by this Holy Water. Symbolizing both purification and protection, we dip the fingers of our right hand into a Holy Water font and make a Sign of the Cross as we enter (purification) and leave (protection) the church. Many Eastern Orthodox Christians also drink a small amount of blessed water when saying their morning prayers or put a little holy water in their food as they cook their meals.

Lourdes: The most famous tradition of healing water in our church is that of Our Lady of Lourdes in France. In an apparition on February 25, 1858, Bernadette Soubirous was told by the Virgin Mary to dig in the ground until reaching water and then “drink at the spring and wash in it”. Since this apparition, many people have claimed to be cured by drinking or bathing in the spring water discovered by Bernadette. Thousands of people come every year to the Grotto of Massabielle in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes and follow the instructions given to Bernadette. God sent a great flood at the time of Noah because “the earth was filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11). The prophet Elijah’s first words announce a drought for the sins of Israel (1 Kings 17: 1). When the people of Israel stop their idolatry, God blesses them with “a great rain” (1 Kings 18:41-45). One religious water ritual that draws all these elements of life, purification, protection, healing, separation, and redemption together is the Roman Catholic sacrament of Baptism. In the sacrament of Baptism, we have water poured over us or immerse ourselves in water to be cleansed of sin and admitted into the Christian community.

II. What happened at the Pool of Bethesda?” The Pool of Bethesda was “in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate” ([John 5:2](#)), which places it north of the temple, near Fort Antonia. During Jesus’ time, the Pool of Bethesda lay outside the city walls. It was at this pool that Jesus performed a miracle showing that He is greater than any human malady and that superstition and religious folklore are foolish and feeble substitutes for faith in God.

The name of the pool, “Bethesda,” is Aramaic. It means “House of Mercy.” John tells us that “a great number of disabled people used to lie [there]—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed” ([John 5:3](#)). The covered colonnades would have provided shade for the disabled who gathered there, but there was another reason for the popularity of the Pool of Bethesda. Legend had it that an angel would come down into the pool and “stir up the water.” The first person into the pool after the stirring of the water “was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted” ([John 5:4](#), NAS). On the day that Jesus visited the Pool of Bethesda, there was a man there who “had been an invalid for thirty-eight years” ([John 5:5](#)). Jesus asked the man if he wanted to be healed. The man replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me” (verse 7). Obviously, the man believed the urban legend about the stirring of the water. He blamed the fact that he was never healed on his

tardiness in getting into the water. Jesus swept aside all superstition and bypassed altogether the need for magic water with one command: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk” ([John 5:8](#)). The man was instantly cured, and “he picked up his mat and walked” (verse 9). The man did not need quicker reflexes or beneficent angels or enchanted water. The man needed Jesus.

Amazingly, not everyone was happy about the man’s miraculous healing. The day Jesus healed the man at the poolside happened to be a Sabbath. As the man left Bethesda, the Jewish leaders saw him carrying his mat, and they stopped him: “It is the Sabbath,” they said. “The law forbids you to carry your mat” ([John 5:10](#)). The man told them that he was simply obeying orders: “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk’” (verse 11). The Jews inquired who would so brazenly promote Law-breaking, but “the man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd” (verse 13).

The reaction of the Jewish leaders shows that, no matter how much proof God provides, there will be some people who refuse to see the truth. Jesus was a bona fide Miracle Worker, but the religious leaders couldn’t see the miracle. All they could see was that someone had violated a rule. The issue was not the breaking of God’s command, for Jesus fulfilled the Law and was completely subject to it ([Matthew 5:17](#)). The only thing being broken was a pharisaical *interpretation* of one of God’s laws. So, a blessing meant to increase faith only increased the blindness of those who refused to acknowledge the blessing.

The postscript to the story reveals that the man who was *physically* healed still needed some *spiritual* healing. “Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you’” ([John 5:14](#)). Jesus’ words are a rebuke of an unnamed sin—the man was living contrary to God’s will somehow—and a warning of “something worse.” Now that the man knew who Jesus was, he returned to the Jewish leaders and told them “it was Jesus who had made him well” ([John 5:15](#)). It is likely that the man did this in praise of Jesus, to magnify the glory due His name, and also from a sense of obligation—he had been asked a question and felt he should respond with the answer, once he had it. Little did he anticipate the reaction the leaders would have: “So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him” (verse 16). The Pool of Bethesda was the focus of a local legend about healing, but Jesus showed that faith in legends and superstition is misplaced. In contrast, faith in Jesus Christ—the One who can heal with a simple word, the Savior who can forgive any sin, the true Master of the “House of Mercy”—is never misplaced

III. What is Sabbath? Sabbath in the Bible is usually a day of rest and worship because we read in the book of Genesis “God created the heavens and earth in six days and rested on the seventh day, which he thus confers with special status. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in Creation. (Gen 2:3). In Exodus 20:8 we read “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the

sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy". It was a very important day for the Jews to keep the day of Sabbath very holy. In their zeal for God's law, they became over enthusiastic and forgot the real motif of this important day. They gave extreme importance to God and they showed complete negligence to the human beings. Over the years, the Israelites took the Sabbath from being a time of rest and worship to being a set of needlessly complicated, legalistic rules. But when Christ came onto the scene, He changed things. Jesus always kept the law of love. He did not bother about the rituals, rules, regulations and traditions. According to Jesus, they were created by human beings for the welfare of the human beings. So when they don't help a suffering person, then they lose the purpose of their existence.

According to the pharisees, carrying a mat on the sabbath was work and was therefore unlawful. It did not break the OT law but the pharisees interpretation of God's command to 'remember the sabbath and keep it holy' Ex 20:8 . The Pharisees had added so many interpretations to this law. A man who had not walked for 38 years had been healed but the pharisees were more concerned about their petty rules than life and health of a human being. The Jewish leaders saw both a mighty miracle of healing and a broken rule. They threw the miracle aside as they focused their attention on the broken rule because the rule was more important to them than the miracle. If God stopped every kind of work on the Sabbath, nature would fall into chaos and sin would overrun the world. Gen 2:2 says God rested on the seventh day but this does not mean he stopped doing good. Jesus teaches us when opportunity to do good presents itself, we should not ignore it even on the Sabbath.

The Gospels record seven incidents in which Jesus healed people on the Sabbath. They knew that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath law. Still they invited Jesus to dinner on the Sabbath. Why? Because they wanted to catch Jesus and accuse him of breaking the Sabbath law in order to discredit his name and fame. However their motif did not prevent Jesus from curing the people. He cured the people and defended his healing act on the Sabbath. Jesus was dead against legalism. He had only one law, the law of love. For Jesus the "Sabbath rest" was a time of remembering and celebrating God's goodness both in creation and redemption. It was a day set apart to praise God and do good in his name. of course it was a time of rest and refreshment from work however it was never meant to stop the love of God and neighbor.

For Jesus, the law of love is more important than the law of books and traditions. Jesus says that He is the Lord (Master) of the Sabbath. What does that mean? It means that He is the one who has authority over the Sabbath! Sabbath is His day. He is the Creator, He rested on the seventh day. He can do as He wishes with the Sabbath. So the accusation of the Pharisees that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath law is not at all legitimate. Sure, He was breaking the Sabbath laws, but He had authority to do so. He is the Master, the Lord of the Sabbath. The humans cannot complain about what the Creator is doing. While the claims of ritual sacrifice are important to God, mercy and kindness to human need are even more important. We do this best when we love one another.

The Spirit of the Sabbath in our Christian life: Jesus and His disciples picked grain on the Sabbath in Matthew 12, despite the protestations of the religious leaders of the time. Christ was more focused on doing good during the Sabbath than obeying a set of rules, saying that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” This is a day meant to make life better, not more difficult.

Avoiding work is the most well-known aspect of the Sabbath (Sunday is our Sabbath day) for most Christians, but it’s also one of the most misunderstood. Old Testament law forbade working, but Christ showed us that the definition of “work” is a bit different than we might think. Many believe that it’s a sin to do anything on the Sabbath, but Christ’s activity on this day was for the humanity. He didn’t go out on the Sabbath for personal, money-making ventures—He went out to do good, to provide for people’s basic needs, and to spread His teachings. And so, on the Sabbath, it’s not a sin to work if you need the money to survive. It’s not a sin to cook or clean as necessary, or to go out and do charitable deeds. The Sabbath is meant to be a day of rest from normal work—the kind of work we often find ourselves in as we scramble for money, power, and prestige. It’s a day, rather, to take a break and focus on the truly important things, like God and family.

A Day of Holy Gathering or Family Gathering: Leviticus 23:3 mentions that the Sabbath is a great time for holy gatherings. This doesn’t have to just mean church—a “holy gathering” could be a great group of friends or family sharing a meal together, having a great time, and talking about their spiritual lives. Remember—when Christ was asked what is the most important of God’s commandments, He replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is none other commandment greater than these.” Love God, love one another, and have a good time doing it. There’s no reason not to have a party on the Sabbath.

A Day of spiritual Peace God knows that we, as limited human beings, need a break, both physically and mentally. It’s all too easy to get into busy world of constant work, never stopping to attend to our own mental, physical, and spiritual health. Sabbath is our chance to relax enough to experience the kind of peace only God can bring. Rest is how we quiet the mind and listen to God and find spiritual peace.

A Day of Respecting other human beings and their Rights: Let us not hire people to work on the Sabbath. The commands regarding the Sabbath don’t just extend to us but they extend to those we hire as well. In Exodus, 20:10, God speaks out against this potential workaround. Hiring someone to do the work goes against the spirit of the day. As Christians, we should be ambassadors for God, encouraging others to get to know Him and His church. When we keep the Sabbath holy by refraining from normal work, but hire someone else to do that work for us, we display the kind of hypocrisy that drives people away from God. So we have to give our gardener, pool guy, or masseuse a break, and promote peaceful rest on the Sabbath.

A day of unplugging from the world: This is the best thing we can do for inner peace. This means that we can turn off the news. We can log off of our social media

accounts. We can withdraw into the comfort and seclusion of our home. This is important. More than ever, we're connected to all of the bad news coming in from all over the world. And believe it or not, this has an effect on us, causing stress, anxiety, and depression. But if we take the Sabbath for what it is—a gift of peace, rest, and spiritual renewal—we will find respite from this never-ending flow of negativity. In the end, this is what the Sabbath is all about: disconnecting from our normal, everyday life and reconnecting with the grand, overarching grandeur of God. That's why the Sabbath is a day to which we can look forward.

Sabbath is a gift and not a day of Do's and Don'ts: We have been talking about things we should and shouldn't do on the Sabbath, but these admonitions can only take us so far. In the end, this day isn't about legalism. It isn't about what you can and cannot do—that's not the best way to think about it. Instead, consider the Sabbath for what it is—a gift. It's our chance to enjoy our relationship with Him, and to have a day of peace. Let us treat it this way, and we won't have to worry about lists of dos and don'ts.

IV. Private and General Judgement of God

John 5:25 Amen, amen, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. 5: 28-29 Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation.^t

What is the difference between particular judgment and the final judgment?

The particular judgment is what happens at a person's death. God judges the person, who either enters into eternal life (purgatory and heaven) or hell. Whereas the final judgment occurs at the end of time when all the dead are resurrected. The righteous inherit the new world and the wicked are condemned to hell. The particular judgement is "private" and occurs immediately after death. The second is "general or public" and occurs on the Last Day at the resurrection.

Jesus will come at the end of time to judge all human beings. This is called the *parousia*, His second coming. It was foretold by the angels as He ascended: "This Jesus who is taken up from you to heaven, will come in the way in which you saw Him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11). However, those who die before the *parousia* will be judged immediately at their deaths. This is known as the particular judgment. The Epistle to the Hebrews says (9:27): " It is appointed to men to die once, and after that comes the judgment". Then, "Each one will receive his pay, according to his works" (1 Cor 3:8).

There are three possible outcomes to the particular judgment. Those whose love for God has been perfected in this life are taken straight to heaven, where they enjoy endless happiness in the face to face vision of God. Those who die in God's love but still love Him imperfectly must be purified in the intermediate state of purgatory. Those, however, who reject God's love by mortal sin and die without repenting are condemned to the everlasting

torments of hell. The general judgment at the end of time simply solemnly confirms the particular judgments of each one, with the difference that then the body as well as the soul will receive what is due it. And all God's judgments will be revealed as most just.

V. Testimonies to Jesus as the Son of God

1. 5:33 John the Baptist who prepared the people for the coming of Messiah and after Jesus came, He made a solemn and public testimony about Jesus as the Son of God to his own disciples and the people who followed him
2. 5:36 Jesus' works of healing (a man at Bethesda) and performing miracles (changing water into wine)
3. 5:37 Testimony by God the Father as His Son
4. 5:39, 46 The Scriptures (Luke 24:44). The Pharisees prided themselves on being the true followers of their ancestor Moses. They were trying to follow every one of his laws to the letter and they even added some of their own. Jesus' warning that Moses would accuse them stung them to fury. Moses wrote about Jesus (Genesis 3:15/Numbers 21:9; 24:17/ Deut 18:15) yet the religious leaders refused to believe when he came.

The religious leaders knew what the Bible said but failed to apply its words to their lives. They knew the teaching of the Scriptures but failed to see the Messiah to whom the Scriptures pointed. They knew the rules but missed the Savior. Entrenched in their own religious systems, they refused to let the Son of God change their lives. It is a pity that some become so involved in 'religion' but miserably miss Christ. It is sheer pride that some use the Bible only to find fault with other people instead of helping them to know Christ more like Jesus did with the Samaritan woman. The Bible does not tell us how the heavens go but how we should go to heaven. It is not a book of argument but a book of faith

VI. **5:41 "I do not accept human praise"** whose praise do we seek? The religious leaders enjoyed great prestige in Israel but their stamp of approval meant nothing to Jesus. He was concerned about God's approval. This is a good principle for us. If even the highest officials in the world approve of our actions and God does not, we should be concerned. But if God approves, even though others don't, we should be content.

VII. Miraculous feeding of the 5000 people

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle found in all four Gospels (Mark 6:35-44 with Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:12-17, and John 6:1-14). That explains its importance to the early Church. While the Gospel story is a clear sign of Jesus' power and his divinity, It however declares very solemnly and silently kindness, compassion, mercy and empathy of Jesus to the poor and the hungry ones. We may regard the incident both as a miracle of Divine providence and also as a messianic sign in which Jesus multiplied loaves and fish in order to feed his hungry listeners. The lesson for every Christian is that,

no matter how impossible his or her assignments may seem, with Divine help they can be done because "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Jesus was testing Philip to strengthen his faith. By asking for a human solution (knowing there was none) Jesus highlighted the powerful and miraculous act that he was about to perform. When Jesus asked Philip where they could buy a great amount of bread, Philip started assessing the probable cost. Jesus wanted to teach him that financial resources are not the most important ones. We can limit what God does in us by assuming what is possible and what is not possible. But God who created everything out of nothing can do anything with anyone and any small amount. That is what we call as a miracle.

The contribution of a small boy. The disciples could have given something when Jesus asked but they did not give anything at all but the boy gave the little that he had which made all the difference. If we offer nothing to God, he will have nothing to use but he can take what little we have and turn it into something great. In performing miracles, Jesus usually preferred to work through people. Here he took what a young child offered and used it to accomplish one of the most spectacular miracles recorded in the gospels. Age is no barrier to Christ.

There is a lesson in the leftovers. God gives in abundance. He takes what we can offer him in time, ability or resources and He multiplies its effectiveness beyond our expectations. If we take the first step in making ourselves available to God, he will show us how greatly we can be used to advance the work of his kingdom

1. ***Compassionate eyes and charitable hearts:*** Our Lord is caring, kind and compassionate in meeting the most basic human need, hunger, with generosity and compassion. Although studies show that the world today produces enough food to provide every human being on the planet with 3,600 calories a day, still we find growing hunger, poverty and homelessness even in a rich country like U.S.A. It is due to lack of political will on the part of the leaders towards the poor, unequal economic system, greed and selfishness of individuals and groups who neglect their fellow human beings as brothers and sisters. Therefore we should have eyes of compassion and hearts of charity.
2. ***I - Thou Relationship:*** Seeing the naked girl on the street, hungry shivering in the cold, someone asked God, "Why don't you do something? God said, "I made you". We are made to help each other and to serve our brethren. In the face of human problems, It is too easy to blame God, too easy to blame governments, too easy to see these things as other people's problems. They are also our problems. As Christians we need to commit ourselves to share what we have with others, and to work with God in communicating his compassion to all. That is what the early Christians did, generously sharing what they had with the needy (Acts 2)
3. **The attitudes of Philip and Andrew:** we need to uplift people who are in miseries. What we offer through Jesus will have a life-giving effect in those who receive it. What we really need is a Christian attitude. We see two attitudes in the Gospel story: that of

Philip and that of Andrew (John 6:7-9). Philip said, in effect: "The situation is hopeless; nothing can be done." But Andrew's attitude was: "I'll see what I can do; and I will trust Jesus to do the rest." Let us have Andrew's attitude.

4. **Our little is much for God.** When St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta started her mission for the slum people in India, she only had twenty cents in her pocket. When she died forty-nine years later, God had turned those original twenty cents into eighty schools, three hundred mobile dispensaries, seventy leprosy clinics, thirty homes for the dying, thirty homes for abandoned children and forty thousand volunteers from all over the world to help her. We can begin our own humble efforts at "sharing" right in our parish by participating in the works of charity done by organizations like the St. Vincent DePaul Society, the Knights of Columbus and so many other volunteer groups. We may say, "I do not have enough money or talent to make any difference". But we need to remember that the small boy in the story had only five barley loaves and two dried fish. The Bible guarantees that every believer has at least one gift from the Holy Spirit. This is our one "tiny fish". Perhaps our "fish" is not money, but a talent or an ability that God has given us. We all have something. If we have never trusted God with our time, or our talent, or our treasure, this is the time to start. Better late than never.
5. **Last minute questions:** We can perform wonders in our own time and place by committing ourselves to share, to work with God in communicating his compassion to the poor, hungry and needy people. At the end of our life, Jesus will ask us surely these questions: "Did you give me something to eat when I was hungry? Did you give something to drink when I was thirsty? Did you receive me when I was a stranger? And what is going to be our response?"

VIII. **Jesus walks on Water:** when Jesus came to the disciples during a storm, walking on the water three and half a miles from shore, he told them not to be afraid. We often face spiritual and emotional storms and feel tossed about like a small boat on a big lake. In spite of terrifying circumstances, if we trust our lives to Christ for his safe keeping, he will give us peace in any storm. The disciples were terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

IX. **Selfish followers of Jesus:** In 5:26-27 Jesus criticized the people who followed him only for the physical and temporal benefits and not for the satisfying of their spiritual hunger. Many people use religion to gain prestige, comfort and even political votes. Those are self centered motives. True believers follow Jesus simply because they know he has the truth and his way is the the way to live.

X. **What was Manna? Manna literally means 'what is it?'**

During the forty years between the time the Israelites left Egypt and entered the Promised Land, they faced harsh conditions, including a scarcity of food. To alleviate this problem, God miraculously provided the Israelites with "bread from heaven," called "manna." The manna appeared each morning, and the Israelites were given specific instructions on

gathering it (see Exodus chapter 16). What was manna? Interestingly, the Israelites asked the very same question: “When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, ‘What is it?’ For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat’” (Exodus 16:15). The Hebrew word translated “manna” literally means “what is it?”

How did Manna look like? All we are told is that “it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (Exodus 16:31). Numbers 11:7 states that manna’s appearance was like “bdellium” or “resin.” Psalms 78:24 refers to manna as “grain from heaven,” and the next verse calls it “bread of angels.” So, manna seems to have been literal bread that God caused to miraculously appear each morning during the Israelites’ wilderness wanderings. The miracle of manna ceased shortly after the Israelites entered the Promised Land (Joshua 5:12). Far more important than manna’s physical qualities is what manna foreshadowed.

Manna is Jesus: Manna is a type, or foreshadowing, of Jesus. After Jesus miraculously fed the 5,000, they wanted Him to “give us this bread always” (John 6:34). Jesus tried to get their attention off of physical bread and onto the true “bread of life.” “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. . . . I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:32-35). Sadly, the people could not get their minds off of physical bread long enough to understand the spiritual truth Jesus was declaring (John 6:36-59). They were more concerned with the condition of their stomachs than the condition of their souls. Just as God provided manna to the Israelites to save them from starvation, He has provided Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls. The literal manna temporarily saved the Israelites from physical death. The spiritual manna saves us from eternal death. “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die” (John 6:49-50).