

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon: CLEAR FOCUS

Pastor Sergio Chavez

Disclaimer: This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.

¹ After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³ In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” ⁷ The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” ⁸ Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. ¹⁰ So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” ¹¹ But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” ¹² They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk’?” ¹³ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. ¹⁴ Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶ And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² For the Father judges no one,

but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an 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. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

- John 5:1-29

Transcript:

Our Father, I want to thank you so much for being with us today, Lord. I want to thank you for the breath in our lungs, for the roof over our head, for the clothes on our back, and the food on our tables, Lord. May we be grateful for these things. May we not forget them and others who may not have these things, Lord. May you fill us with your Holy Spirit to give us eyes to see and ears to hear to be able to help those who are in need within our own community, God. I just ask your holy presence to be with us today as we worship and as we dive into your word, Lord. May we hear what you have to say to us. In your beautiful name, amen.

Well, have you ever seen this vehicle? This is the Hummer H1. It was a military vehicle that could handle rough terrain. It could be dropped into hotspots. It was an off-road giant. It had purpose, and it did that purpose really well. In fact, it was so popular that when they retired those H1s, citizens would buy them and make them street legal in order to drive them in everyday life. Someone thought it was a good idea like, "Maybe we should build off of this popularity of these H1s and create a Hummer for the American consumer." So to please the people, they created the Hummer H2. Unfortunately, the H2 was everything that the H1 was not. It was an embarrassment in comparison. It was made to look rugged like its predecessor, but it was all for looks. It was underpowered, it drove terrible, and it was covered in plastic. The H2 was created to please those people who wanted to have the similar experience of the H1, but with the cool factor to be able to just walk into a parking lot or car lot, and buy one, and drive it around town.

But in building the H2, it did neither of these things well. It was not rugged or wasn't powerful like the H1, and it still used as much gas as a tank. It was marketed as a serious off-road vehicle, but it wasn't good at that either, and it was difficult to drive in normal conditions within a city due to its size. The H2 was trying to be something for everyone. It goes to show what a company like Hummer from the H1 that had very clear purpose to trying to do something that was trying to do too much and didn't do it well. So right now, we're wrapping up the sermon series of New Normal, where we get to decide what parts of the old normal we allow back into the new normal that will follow COVID-19, or if you happen to be one of my friends, well, we call it the Rona, or if you have to be with my parents, we call it "El Covi," which can easily be healed with Vicks and 7 Up according to Latino lore. If you are Latinos out there, I

know William you're out there, I know you got a tambo of Vicks somewhere in your house, so keep that nearby.

A while ago, Session came up with these shadow mission statements about BelPres when it's not at its best, and we've been talking about these traits within this sermon series. Some of those traits are BelPres likes to be busy all the time and we prefer maybe events over authentic discipleship, which requires relationships. Sometimes BelPres is difficult to change, and at times, BelPres will take the safety route instead of where Jesus may be calling us into a risky endeavor. Today, I get to talk about people pleasing. Ooh, child. If I am not careful, I just might offend all of y'all today. Not only will this be the last sermon of this series, this might be the last sermon I ever give if I'm not careful. So y'all going to have to pray for me.

From scripture today that we read in John and as we're going to read more John, we're going to find out that Jesus just was not a people pleaser. So first of all, let's define what people pleasing is. Well, it's pretty self-explanatory. It's somebody who tries to please people, but it does go a little deeper than that, and this is within the definition as a people pleaser is a person who has an emotional need to please others often at the expense of his or her own needs or desires.

Now, this sounds very noble to put other people's needs before you, but this can go into an unhealthy cycle where you no longer take care of your own needs because you're constantly trying to please other people, even if you don't agree in those things. In studying this, I found out that I am not a people pleaser because one of the biggest reasons that a person becomes a people pleaser is their fear of conflict, and I am not necessarily afraid of conflict.

Now, in knowing that I'm not afraid of conflict, I do try to not create conflict where it is not necessary. As I said, I try. I am not always successful. Anyone who can vouch for that would be my wife. But as well as growing up an illegal immigrant in the US, I was taught by my parents that we were second class citizens and we had to be careful with what conflicts we got into because if we did ever get in trouble, there was no one coming to help us. As I got older, things would only get worse. I could end up in jail and potentially deported, or get my Green Card taken away, or something like that. So I've always tried to be careful which battles I choose to fight.

If you're a people pleaser, it's understandable. That's a personal trait. There's nothing wrong with you. You're not a bad person just as like another personal trait is if you're not afraid of conflict and you're always heading into conflict. That's something we can deal with on our own. But when it comes to the ecclesia or the church family, that's what ecclesia is, well, that is a problem because the ecclesia has one sole purpose, and that is to follow and please God and not people.

So let's dive back into the scripture. The story we're talking about is found in the book of John. The interesting thing about the book of John is that is not included in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Synoptic Gospels, which usually means that they include these three, include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording. The book of John on the other hand really deals with the divinity of God, and is written quite differently, and only shares maybe a little over a dozen stories within the other three books. If you want to find out which those are, you can go online. You can Google the harmony of the gospels. I think we'll put a link in the comments section of the one that I like, the Life of Christ version.

So let's set this up where we're starting out here in John, in the beginning of John, John 5:1 or John 5. We read about this story of the Pool of Bethesda, and John 5:5 says, "One man was there who had

been an invalid of 38 years," and I did say invalid. Someone pointed out to me it's called "invalid," and I'm saying English is hard. It's spelled exactly the same way, but given the context, you have to pronounce it a different way, so whatever. 38 years, this guy couldn't walk. Then, one day, Jesus rolls by and asked this guy, "Hey, would you like to be healed?" This guy replies to Jesus, says, "Well, I would, but no one will help me because at this pool, they thought there was some miracle juices in this pool, and if you would just get to the pool at a very specific time, then you could be healed."

So this guy was telling Jesus, "I would love to be healed, but no one will carry me to the pool at the proper time." Jesus says, "Look, I'll do you one better. I'll heal you. You're healed. Take up your mat, and go ahead and walk." We read this in John 5:8. This is an account that we hear plenty in the gospel of Jesus. He is just JDWJD, Jesus Does What Jesus Does. He goes around and he heals people. It's a great story, and that really should be the end of it, but it's not because there's a problem. The problem is Jesus did this on a Sabbath.

The Jewish religious leaders get all bent out of shape because of this because, A, first of all, the guy formally known as an invalid is carrying his mat on the Sabbath, which was against the rules that they added to the Sabbath keeping law, which we find back in Exodus 20. They added all these other things. So they're all bent out of shape because he's carrying his mat that he shouldn't be doing. Then, B, some other guy decided to heal him on the Sabbath, which was also against the rules. So there was no Shabbat Shalom on that Sabado.

So eventually, the religious leaders confront this man, and they found out that it's Jesus who healed him. So then, they go and confront Jesus, and Jesus replied to them, we find in John 5:17. He says, "My father is working until now, and I am working." Now, for those who don't understand the culture and don't understand what the religious leaders were after there, this is like a slap in the face that Jesus gives them. Jesus was not a people pleaser. So let's break this down for you.

First of all, this guy was an invalid for 38 years. This guy needed to know my dad. Give him some Vicks and 7 Up, maybe the story would've been different, but either way, couldn't walk for 38 years. So I heard this other pastor say, "So for 38 years, that means he could be healed any day." Jesus could have healed him anytime. He could've come on Friday to heal him. He could've come on Monday to heal him. He could've healed him Tuesday morning, and then went and got some matzah balls for lunch, and went about his day. But he chose, Jesus chose to heal him on Sabbath. Second of all, biscuits didn't even know it was Jesus. He wasn't looking for Jesus. Jesus went up to him and asked him if he want to be healed. So he didn't even know who he was talking to. Jesus chose him. If you go back to John 5:1, we find out that this is during a feast in Jerusalem during a festival. So Jesus knew that there would be more people there than normal.

Now, y'all got to go read it for yourself. John 5:1 through 17. I don't know how you read it, but the way I'm reading it, it sounds like Jesus was picking a fight. He didn't even walk into conflict. He created conflict, and it worked. We read in John 5:18. It says, "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." Ooh, child. If you want to upset some religious leaders, you walk up to them. Say, "Hey, guess what? I am, God." That will definitely rile them up.

Now, if you ever thought in your mind that to be kind means to never face conflict, then I'd have to tell you that is a bit ill-advised. Sometimes we mix up kindness with being nice. Conflict is inevitable and many times necessary. It's how you go about it humbly and with kindness. Remember, kindness is a fruit of the spirit. That's what's important, especially when we're dealing with a church body. When we're

dealing from a Christ follower to Christ follower, we definitely being humble and to be kind is important. We read that in Ephesians 4:15. It says, "Rather speaking the truth in love." Saying what we need to say, but in love. There are times that if you are not willing to step into conflict, it could potentially be very damaging.

Now, as a kid who grew up around domestic violence, I can tell you firsthand that silence due to fear of conflict means that someone will continually be abused, and this is extreme. I know, but the point I'm trying to make here is that to stand up for what God asks of us, the ecclesia to stand up for will most definitely lead you to conflict, especially when it comes to following Jesus. Jesus even says it himself later on in the book of John in 15, 18 through 19. This is Jesus saying to his disciples, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you." So trying to follow Jesus and being a people pleaser is not always going to work out. Our desires to be like Jesus sometimes means the world will not accept you.

Now, my background is in audio engineering, in recording engineering and audio, and what... One of the things we were taught, we were advised that if you're going to be mixing a song or an album for a band is to create your rough mixes without the band in the room. Once you have your rough mix, then invite the band into the room in order to get their feedback because ultimately, you do want to please the client. But if you tend to be a people pleaser, and you have the band in the room, and you're mixing the song, you might get from the vocalist to be like, "Hey, I can't really hear my vocals. Can you please turn them up?" You're like, "Okay, I'll turn them up."

Then, the guitarist will be like, "Wait, now I can't hear my guitars. Can you please turn the guitars up?" You're like, "All right. Let me turn the guitars up." Eventually, the bass might pipe up. He's like, "Wait. Now that you've turned the vocals and the guitars up, I can't hear my bass." You're like, "All right. I'll turn up the guitar or the bass." Eventually, the drummer will be like, "Wait a minute. We can't hear the most important part of the song. Where's the drums? Please turn up the drums." You're like, "All right. I'll turn up the drums." This cycle would continue where they just want to hear their part. Eventually, you just get all the faders at the top, and you just got a mix that doesn't sound good. What we were taught is that you are the expert. You are the one who has experience in doing these things. Use your talent to give them a basis, and then get some feedback from them. The song will turn out better, and it will be better for the band entirely.

So the rest of John as we've read already in 5:19 through 24 is just Jesus continually strong... The strong proclamation of him being the son of God, and he continues on after John 24 in John 25 where he triples down on his proclamation in case they didn't hear him the first two times. I had asked somebody in the comments like, "Is that English proper? Can you hear something first two times or whatever?" I was told yes. You can hear something for the first time twice apparently, and it goes on.

It says, "Truly, truly." This is Jesus saying like, "Uh, did I stutter? Truly, truly, I say to you an 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 for as the Father has life in himself. So he has granted the son also to have life in himself. He has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the son of man. Do not marvel at this for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done good to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." Jesus saying, "Look, you see all these miracles and me comments of God? You don't need to be marveled about that because the day will come when... call out the people out of their tombs when they hear my voice,"

cluding to the second coming. Jesus rolled deep with purpose, and God asked his ecclesia, the church family, to do the same.

Now, there's quite a bit of things of what the purpose of the church is, but I just want to share a few of them with you just as a reminder. First off, the church has a foundation in Christ. First Corinthians 3:10, 11. just as an example. If we don't have a foundation in Christ, we're not a Christian church. We lead people to Christ. That is what the church's call is. Two, evangelism, spreading of the good news. Matthew 28:18 through 20. We heard that at the Great Commission, "Go ye therefore, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." That is part of the job of the church. Our purpose is to spread this good news.

Three, we should commune and life one another up. Hebrews 10:25 or 24 through 25. Not just come to church to hear sermons, not just come to sing. Although those things are good, but to commune with one another, to break bread with one another, to lift one another, to pray over one another, to lift others up that are Christ... same Christ-minded as well. Four, we should care for the marginalized. We should do mercy and justice. James 2:1 through 13 and Amos 5:21 through 24. You hear this within the Bible. The church's job is... It is up to you, the ecclesia, to take care of the orphans, the widow, and the poor. Those who can't stand up for itself. It's your job to do that.

Five, just one of the last ones I want to choose. Again, this is not the entire list, but it's weird to be a house of prayer, Matthew 12:13, because we need to be connected continually with the Holy Spirit. We need to be unceasing in prayer because we're not going to be able to do all these other things really well if we do not have a growing and continued relationship with Christ. We go to prayer first to hear what the Holy Spirit is leading us. So here at BelPres, what are some things we don't want to return post-COVID? What some things we don't want to be part of our new normal?

Well, maybe let's not bring back the busyness. Y'all are busy enough. Maybe when it comes to the church, let's just focus on what God wants us to do. In the new normal, let's live for God instead of other people. Let's build authentic relationships other... people pleasing. Sorry. Let's build authentic relationships so that we can disciple one another more. Now, it's good to write a check for something. That's a good start, but let's take it to the next level. Let's start getting proxy to the issues that we are trying to help and start building the relationship so we can grow empathy. BelPres has done this with Eastside Academy, with Kid REACH, with Jubilee REACH, with Auto Angels, but we need more to be involved with relationship. So one of the things that will... I believe that BelPres is really going to try. Let's get back to the idea of those small groups, not just to read a book, but to build one another up to disciple one another.

Now, the biggest issue with the church that exists to people please is that it no longer pleases God. A secondary effect that may be unnoticed for a church that is strictly a people pleaser is it will mainly please the dominant voices in the community. So in reality, it's not really a people pleaser. It's just a people pleaser to the loudest ones who want their preferences to be done. So if I can get personal, right now, I'm standing here because we did have a bit of an issue of where should we meet, where should we film because we think about these things of sacred spaces that they're in a place. Whether it's you think we should be in a sanctuary, or you think worship should have fog machines and lasers, or you think it should have just electric guitars, or whatever it may be, it's a little theologically inaccurate of a sacred space. There's no sacred space. The Bible is very clear that Jesus lives in you and that wherever you are, that's what makes it a sacred space.

This place is just brick and mortar. That pipe organ is just metal. A guitar amp is just transistors, but it is where you are that makes it sacred. So where you're at, at home or wherever you are at right now, it's sacred because you're there. This building only becomes a sacred space when we fill it. If we go back 30 years or so, this was nothing but a mound of grass over here because the church used to be up on the hill. As a staff, we want you to feel loved and we want you to feel that you belong, but we need to stay focused on leading you, the church ecclesia, to Christ.

Maybe there are some things we need to reevaluate here at BelPres. What do you really want the staff to be doing? Spending their energy and their resources in order to please people or in order to please God? Sometimes those decisions may go against preferences that we all have, but I think we can come together as like-minded Christians to say discipling people and leading them to Christ is the most important thing to do. I will give up some of my preferences in order to do that.

So I want to give an example of a group of people who did this, who... They went to please God and not please people, and they didn't win any popularity points for it. We have to go back to the 18th century coming out of the great awakening, and that is of some Quakers, a protestant group and some evangelicals who spoke out against slavery in the US. As they spoke, they used their platform. They used their pulpit. They used their voice in order to speak up against slavery, and it didn't win them any popularity contest. One of these Quakers, Benjamin Lay, who said he was a Quaker who advocated and sympathized with the lowly and despised, and denounced slavery as the greatest sin against God's will. It's these early Christians that helped spark the abolitionists or the anti-slavery movement. It is because of them that we led to freeing slaves and abolishing slavery in this country. We have to thank them for not being people pleasers, but for pleasing God. Now, eventually, they stopped, and I would say that maybe they were forgotten a bit in history because they didn't have that voice anymore. Even I had to be reminded of what the Quakers had done and what came out of the Great Awakening.

So, for you, BelPres, we don't have to wait until we get back into this building to start doing this. You can do this now. I would say get on your knees and pray for the Holy Spirit to lead you. Maybe there are some conversations at work that you've been dodging maybe or at home with family members about Jesus that you've been shying away from. Pray to the Holy Spirit to give you the words or give you the strength or the courage to speak up. We don't need to be back in the building to understand. We need to treat each other fairly.

I know I'm so happy that the school year is done. We've been trying to distance learn our kids at home, my three kids, and I have not been the best father during this time. All the pressure and all the stress. Now, it's a time, maybe now that that's aside, to get back to loving my kids as the way God asked me to. Maybe you're ducking opportunities or whatever it may be. Let's get our knees and let's ask God what he wants us to do. If you've been wondering about this whole racial reconciliation thing that's in the news, in these protests, and you don't know really where to start and where is God calling you, well, BelPres is giving you some opportunities on our website. We'll put it in the comments section of where is a good place to start and what God is doing.

Personally, I don't really want to be associated with a group of people or a church organization that solely lives to please people. I want to live, and I want to lay down my life for a group of people who are there to please God. In pleasing God, we may not be popular. But my belief is that God died for my sins, regardless of the things that I have done in my life, and if I follow God and if I lead people to Christ, even though it may not be popular, that is how we become a church that is a light on the hill. That is how we become people who are salt of the earth because I believe that God and Christ is the answer to so many things in life that we simply are either denying, rejecting, or not paying attention to. That's not

going to win me popularity contests in many circles, but God died for me. So I want to honor him and I want to follow him. So I ask you, BelPres. It's time to get on our knees. It's time to pray. It's time to ask where God is leading us. Bow your heads with me.

Father in heaven, I want to thank you so much for your pursuant love for us, Lord, for never giving up on us, God. No matter how many stakes we made, no matter... Not stakes, but mistakes, how many mistakes we make, no matter what our background is, Lord, we can always come to you and repent of our sins, and you just... We get to experience your mercy, which leads to your grace, Lord. This is available to us all the time, God, so we ask. We don't want to just please people or please ourselves, but we want to please you. Lead this church, lead these people to do the things that you want to be done in this community, God. You are a great and wonderful God, Lord. We want to see you. We want to see you again, and we want to see what work you have for us. In your beautiful and glorious name, amen.

Discussion Questions: Please Read John 5:1-29

1. In story of John 5:1-16 who was seeking who? Does this strike as strange at all?
2. Later in John 5:14 Jesus tells the man something, what is it? What are your thoughts on this?
3. From John 5:18 on it is very clear what Jesus' was proclaiming, why did this anger the Jews so much? Hint read Mark 14:60-64
4. At the end in John 5:28-29, what do you believe Jesus is referring to?