



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
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JOHN 5:9-19

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

We were going to look at verses 1-19, but as I started getting into the passage I realized it was too much for a Sunday morning for all of this. So verses 1-8 we're going to look at next week. It's all about moving to the next level in your personal development. Jesus heals somebody, moves him to the next level in his life. He makes three statements to this guy and we're going to learn from those three statements. That's next week. So you're going to want to come and learn about how God can help you change and what that change looks like for you personally. Next week is John 5:1-8.

This week we're going to look at John 5:9-19. So if you have your Bible with you, open it up to John 5:9-19. In this passage there is a culture that's going on. There is a normal that's happening and Jesus doesn't fit into that. So Jesus is persecuted, He's attacked, He's defending Himself in the passage. You're going to see that. In the midst of that, we're going to learn some things about our own culture. Because sometimes we don't fit into the culture as the culture is issuing its decrees and ideas and so on. So we're going to learn some practical applications for our own life.

If you're a young person today, you've got to know this because you're living in a culture and you have to understand how to relate to that culture. It has to make sense and you have to know where you're going or you're going to get sucked in and just swim along with the culture, which can be very dangerous because there's a waterfall over there and people are just going off the waterfall. So you want to know where the culture is and how to make some changes in it.

Well let's look at our passage. I want to read the passage today and then we'll go forward. Will you please stand with me in honor of God's word and let's read this passage from John 5:9-19.

The day on which this took place (that is the healing of the man we'll talk about next week) was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' "

So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?"

The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

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." The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

You may be seated.

Understanding culture is very important because culture is these things that are around us. It's the normal that we experience. Sometimes we don't realize that the normal is changing quite a bit. I'm going to talk about the normal that existed among the Jewish leaders and the Jewish people and Jesus in just a moment. But I want to make sure that the application is clear to our own lives. We want to look at our own selves and we want to look at our own culture, kind of examine that, and look at how the Bible applies to our lives today. That's our objective.

In order to do that, I'm going to have Alyssa share. Now Alyssa is nineteen years old. Alyssa works in New York City in the dance community. She's a dance teacher. And in the arts in New York City she experiences certain things there. I've asked her to share a little bit more about culture and her experience in New York City to kind of set the stage for what we're going to look at today.

Alyssa?

[Alyssa] Hi. So I've been commuting to New York City working in the entertainment world for about two years now since I was a senior in high school. Let me tell you, it has been a whirlwind. I have encountered so many different people from so many different walks of life. Something that I found to be true is that the biblical teachings of the lifestyle that we are taught to live within the church is thrown out the window. Meaning people don't accept Christian, conservative, old-fashioned values anymore. What I mean by that is I've actually been confronted by my boss in the past when they've found out that I go to church and asked why I still believe those fairytales. I've been attacked for wearing a shirt that said 'pray' on it when I didn't specify if I believed in God or anything else. Just the sheer fact of praying bothered someone.

Overall I found out a lot of the people that are so hurt and offended by my faith are actually people that were brought up as Christians themselves, in Christian conservative homes, which is how I was raised. They felt overall that they were judged by the church and that they couldn't really have a voice to think for themselves.

Normal in New York and in the entertainment world is people coming in and telling me that they're not looking for a man or a woman to be in a relationship, they're looking for a relationship period. Meaning it could be an animal, it could be of course a man or a woman, but they're looking at it more as if they're picking out an article of clothing, what fits best for them. I've have had friends of mine come and tell me that they are 80% gay, 20% straight. Now there's nothing wrong with that if that's what they feel, but they deeply, deeply believe that's how they are, that's how they were made, and anyone who says differently is close-minded and attacking them.

I met a young man who started working at my job who his first day was introduced to us as his name was Josiah. The day after that, he came in and told us that his name was Ryan. And then the day after that it was Angela. He changes his personalities based on what he's feeling that day.

There are countless stories and countless examples that I could give you, but overall it boils down to the fact that you can't come at people you meet like that in an attacking, close-minded setting. You will very quickly earn yourself the reputation of being close-minded, evil, anti-homosexual, fascist, anything else if you feel differently. I've watched friends of mine get blackballed. They haven't been cast in jobs because they think the way I do. They are Christians, they are conservative, and they have a certain mindset. They have old-fashioned moral values. I, however, never really hid my faith. Friends of mine I have met have kind of kept it a secret. The rare people that I find that are Christians and feel the way that I do have kind of been hidden in the dark and actually called me or texted me or pulled me aside and been like, "Hey, I just want you to know that I feel the same way that you do. I just have such a fear that I will be outcast from the group." I have lost friends over my opinions and my beliefs.

It's definitely a struggle being a teenager in New York City. People belittle you constantly for your age and your outlook on life. But the best thing you can do is just love them overall and just listen. I feel like in today's society everybody is more ready to answer and respond than to listen. We have to remember at the end of the day is that the people that feel this way, everyone has a story that they feel the way that they feel. They're not bad people at all. They're not evil. There's nothing wrong with them. They just are lost and they need love and they need Jesus, you know.

So thank you. That's all.

[Scott] That's great. Thank you.

Okay. I know that some of you have experienced the normal around your life that's challenging and is trying to figure out how to share. Alyssa, thank you so much for taking time and being vulnerable and sharing that with us.

Well let's go to our passage.

I want you to see that the challenge, the normal had to do with the Sabbath day for them. Notice it says that this took place on the Sabbath day and notice what they said to the man who carried his mat. "*It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.*" In reality, the law didn't forbid them to carry their mat. These are made up laws, human laws that they used to define

Sabbath in a particular way. So Sabbath got defined in a way that was not really biblical, it was not according to God's word, but they created all these rules and definitions around the word Sabbath. So now they are trying to protect it.

In any culture there are people who protect the culture. Cultural protectors. You can see in our story today that cultural protectors are the Jewish leaders. We're going to see they don't represent the whole of the population; they are just the protectors. They are going to be people who are responding to the gospel as there are today.

The cultural protectors in our society are people like judges that protect culture. There are politicians that try to influence the culture. There are entertainers. Anybody with a voice tries to influence the culture. Certainly Christians are trying to influence the culture today. The question is, what is normal? Because the culture is really made up of ideas.

Whenever you start studying culture, you see this Chinese proverb pop up. The proverb goes something like this: If you want to learn about water, you don't ask a fish. Why? Because the fish is immersed in the water and can't really describe it. He just lives there all the time. But as Christians we need to be able to look at the water, we need to look at the culture, and we need to question it. I would suggest we always need to question the culture, even the Christian culture. We question the culture to ask the question, is this biblical? Is this right?

Now culture isn't necessarily something that's bad. There are a lot of good things that come from honoring the Sabbath day. There are a lot of good things that come from our culture today. An example of something that's good in our culture is the whole emphasis on eating well, eating healthy. Eating less sugar and processed food and organic sections now in the grocery store. All of that is a good statement from our culture. So I'm not suggesting that all culture is bad. I'm just saying we've got to question the culture because the culture is made up of ideas and some of the ideas are good and some are not good.

Let me give you an example of a bad idea in our culture and that is this idea of consumer debt. You use credit cards regularly. And how many people is it normal to have a balance carrying on their credit card. That's why in the Christian community we're very eager to teach people how to have financial freedom, not to carry balances on their credit card. Because it's a bad idea in the culture. We have to evaluate the culture ourselves. We have to understand the good and the bad in the culture and we have to understand what is right in the midst of that.

What is right? The idea of what is right is a challenge. I'm going to look at it this way. In fact I'm going to share with you several ideas or three principles that we need to understand about culture.

The first one: Just because it's normal doesn't make it right. We got to wrestle with that. Because young people, at school you're going to hear all kinds of things, ideas that are taught by your teachers. Just because your teachers say them, just because the school is emphasizing it doesn't make it right. You've got to ask the question, is it right? Just because it's normal doesn't make it right. But what is right?

So let's take this idea of a compass. If you take a compass and hold the compass out here, that compass has a little magnet inside that connects with the earth's magnetic field and points it in a direction so you can line up the compass and you know where true north is. There's a real north. I would suggest that there is real truth. Not just truth because you believe it. But we believe in truth because it's the truth. There is one way to get to heaven, there is one truth, and God describes that. And the fact that He exists, He puts it in His word and we follow Him. So there's this truth that exists. It is real. It is the truth that's out there. It is the north that the compass points to.

In our culture today, you have to understand what happens though. People take the culture. You know you can take a compass and you can mess with it. You can hold a magnet next to the compass and it will do strange things. I would suggest that today in our culture the typical way that people determine what's right and wrong is that the culture is pointing inside of them. That whatever I feel is going to determine what's right and I need to be true to myself. So there is a danger that is embedded in that new need to question, I would suggest.

We question the culture because outside of us is this biblical worldview. This worldview is like the glasses that you put on to help you see and understand what's going on around you. It's a worldview. So there's this biblical worldview that comes from the scriptures. It's all the principles from the Bible that come together and describe how this takes place. And when we see that, it does something for us. So the second principle I want you to understand about the culture.

Let me pause. I want to go back to this verse. So let's come back to my second principle in just a moment. Let's go back to our passage. Jesus is trying to teach them about the Sabbath. There's a conflict in the culture there about the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders are protecting the Sabbath idea that they've defined.

Again Jesus in Mark 2 is also talking about the Sabbath. He's saying these words: "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" What they'd done is they turned the Sabbath into the boss. It was controlling them and it wasn't fulfilling its design that God had created for them. So the Sabbath has taken on this different meaning for them because of the culture that was defined a different way and it was not the way God had designed. So Jesus is taking them back to God's design, to that compass.

When I looked at those words and I was thinking about how the Sabbath had been controlling for them, I thought about another aspect of our own culture and that is technology, which of course is a good thing. Technology is great. We can find information out, we can find all kinds of things. But you have to realize on the edge of every cultural movement or idea is evil or bad things. And that is certainly true with technology. You can find bad things in your technology that would be counterproductive for your life. So on the edge of every cultural idea, you have to understand there is the potential for evil.

But I'm just thinking about technology and myself. I'm thinking that sometimes the technology has become my master and not my slave. That I have to get up in the morning and do some technology stuff. Or before I go to bed I have to do this and have a conversation with someone

and I'm checking my text messages. In those kinds of things, the technology has become my maser.

Jesus is trying to communicate something about the Sabbath. Don't let the Sabbath be your master. It is your servant. It is designed for you. Just by way of application, not by interpretation from the passage, I would suggest that is an aspect of our culture that we need to guard against. We need to set limits. We need to set a different kind of rhythm in our lives.

I would suggest the rhythm in our lives is dominated by our culture in this area of technology. There is a rhythm that we do with our phones or our computers. And there's a different rhythm. We can use technology. It's not bad. It's just we have to be careful of it controlling us. Jesus wanted to make that clear about the Sabbath.

He's going to have some more things for us to understand, but now let me get to that second principle about culture that I think is helpful. A Christian worldview demonstrates how truth creates purpose. So we have this truth out there and it creates purpose. As Alyssa said, there are some people who grew up in Christianity or grew up in the church or something like that and the message that I think we make a mistake when we communicate is this: We emphasize rules, beliefs, and history, and not the story. Now rules, beliefs, and history are not bad. That's all part of Christianity. But if we emphasize the rules, beliefs, and history, we miss something very important that is the story. Because there's a story in this biblical worldview that when placed over anyone's life produces color, and meaning, and vibrancy in their life. It's the story that's so important. If you understand the story it helps you evaluate the culture.

Let me give you some examples. Let me just look at four parts of the story of Christianity – creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Just those four words form part of the story of our understanding of this biblical worldview. The fact that God created the world, that's pretty significant. If you believe in a biblical worldview, what you believe is that God exists. That He created our world and therefore designed it. He designed things in a particular way.

So when you hear in the culture this statement: "We need marriage quality," that statement being made is when you say "we need marriage equality" is that people, whatever they feel they are or want to be with is that they can be that. And that's marriage equality. But the problem is the definition of marriage is not clear. So marriage equality is a loaded term, a loaded statement because you're not defining marriage. But if you understand creation and that God designed marriage, you go back to the Bible and start by seeing that God made us in His image. Male and female, He created us in His image. And then He talks about marriage and one man, one woman relationship. And so now we have a definition of marriage that starts to form our ability to evaluate the culture and what is right when it comes to these kinds of things.

See, a biblical worldview establishes a story and creation is part of that story. Now because you're in the image of God, you might say, "Okay great. I can just look inside and I can be true to myself," is the idea that is often communicated in our culture.

But you have to go on with the story. Because the story isn't just about creation. Something else very significant happened and that is what we call the fall or sin corrupted things in our lives and

actually corrupts us. We are not, according to a biblical worldview, the story, we are not basically good people. We are not neutral people. We are not a blank slate. There is a bent inside all of us, a brokenness, a selfishness. So we can't really rely on a compass that's pointing to ourselves because we can't rely on the message that ourselves is communicating. There must be a message outside of ourselves that communicates this idea. So the brokenness that we experience causes people to look for solutions in their lives that are trying to obtain wholeness.

Now wholeness is important. I think it's a very worthy and admirable goal to find wholeness. But people find wholeness in all kinds of different ways. Some people try to find wholeness in affluence because that's part of our culture that says if you have money then you'll feel whole, you'll have what you want. But we know that you don't have that. Affluence doesn't provide that wholeness. What the culture defines beauty for example, with celebrities or fame, causing many young women then to dress in ways that attract the wrong kind of guy or to starve themselves or purge themselves. Why? Because of a definition of beauty within the culture.

We have to use this biblical worldview to evaluate the ideas of the culture or we're going to find ourselves having problems. We can't just say look inside myself and find out what I want to be today. Okay? It doesn't work that way. Because there's something deeper going on in our brokenness. It is not reliable. Because of sin in our world, that internal compass need to be tied to something outside of us, and that brings us to this idea of redemption.

In the story we have creation, fall, redemption. So if someone is trying to find fulfillment in their life in cultural kind of terms, that is they're trying to find their fame or their admiration or their power, their wealth, or their sexual identity or something in a way that is missing this wholeness of God, the redemption of God, of Jesus Christ that comes in and provides that, then they won't find what they're looking for. There's this story of creation, fall, redemption, restoration because what God is doing is He's restoring us, He's building us. Once we accept Him as our Lord and Savior, we're looking outside to something else. He's forming something inside of us that likely is going to be different than what the culture might be saying about wholeness, relevance, or success. This restoration is something that God does in our world and He restores the brokenness in people. There's this story and knowing how truth creates this purpose is very important because there's a biblical worldview that's out there. That biblical worldview is very important because it goes over the top of anyone's life and produces this meaning.

There are people who reject the worldview. I'll tell you why they reject it. Because they look at the Christian worldview or the biblical worldview and they see Christians they don't like or who are weird. They say, "I don't want to be like that." Or they say, "I grew up in a church and I didn't like what happened in that church that I grew up in." Or for some reason they're looking at some aspect of history where Christians did bad things. And so "I don't want to be a Christian." They're missing what we're talking about. I'm not talking about history, I'm not talking about weird people, I'm not talking about the church necessarily. I'm talking about a biblical worldview that rises above all that creates a story. And that story goes over the top of each one of our hearts and we have to make that decision.

One of the reasons people don't choose this worldview is because it means they would have to change. They would have to give up certain things. They would have to align themselves with this understanding of who God is.

I want you to know that a Christian worldview is not just about abstaining from sex until you get married. In fact the whole story of a Christian worldview isn't so much about rules, although rules are important and guidelines like that are good. It's about a story of something really big. Sex is big. It's designed to be part of a marriage to bring intimacy.

Another Alyssa, from the College of New Jersey, was telling me there are Christians today who are really questioning this party atmosphere at the college. Because in the party atmosphere there's this kind of free sex, sexual freedom that they want to enjoy, but it sets the stage for sexual abuse. People feel hurt, they feel mistreated, they feel alone. They're in broken relationships because sex has become something that's just casual and not valuable. I just want you to know in the story God created, sex is a big thing. It's really valuable. It's designed to be something great. And when kept inside of its boundaries, great things happen. It's a beautiful thing that God designed.

You know I want to point out in the story there were the Jewish leaders who were protectors of the culture. They were the ones who were being aggressive. There are certain groups of people within the culture today who are aggressive, but they don't represent everyone. There are people waiting and hurting and broken and they're just waiting for the story to be told so they can say, "Yes, that's what I need in my life." Young people are looking for meaning in their lives. They want their life to count for something. The greatest way that can happen is when the story comes over their lives and they say, "Yes, I have found my true identity in Christ. I know what that looks like and I know how to implement. This isn't about my parents' faith, this isn't about how I was raised, this isn't about the church that I see down the street, or the man with the repent sign on the corner. This is about something that's going on inside of me."

So notice the Jewish leaders begin to persecute him. The Jewish leaders name is mentioned three times in here, the Jewish leaders, because they are the ones who are the protectors of the culture. Don't confuse the protectors of the culture for the whole culture because not everyone believes those things. There's a lot of people in our culture who are seeing things going on and maybe even participating in them. But there's an emptiness. They're kind of going along with all of the other fish. Swimming along in this water that's going over the waterfall. There's a lot of people that are saying I want something different.

So I want to share one more principle about this idea of the culture, which Alyssa alluded to in her description, is that the culture war requires both conviction and sacrifice. For Jesus the problem was that He was being attacked and in this attack He was being persecuted. Likely that will happen to you.

In fact Jesus Himself predicts that when He says these words to us. He says in John 15 – *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his*

master. ' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. " Jesus is predicting something very important.

We have to help our young people understand that. If you're going to take your Bible to school or you're going to talk about Christianity, you're likely to be ridiculed that it's old-fashioned, that's it's antiquated, that it's not something for today. What I want to suggest today is this biblical worldview transposes any culture. It's a worldview you can place over anybody's heart that is relevant for today. It's something that helps us live for today and know how to respond in today's world. But it's going to be challenging.

When we send our young people out to school, notice they are embedded in our culture through the entertainment industry through what's being said in the school system. Are they prepared to hear the answers, the truth that they need to hear so that they don't just buy into all the things, the ideas that are being assumed. Not just shared, but being assumed.

You see, in our culture we're persecuted, not only if you don't agree, but if you don't embrace what's being said. If a man says that he is a woman, it's not enough to agree with him or to say with him, "Okay, I see that you think you're a woman." You have to embrace that idea and you have to in your mind believe that he's a woman. That whole idea is a part of the culture and it has turned tolerance...which is a good thing. We need to tolerate each other. But that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about affirmation. You can't just tolerate something. You have to affirm it.

One of the things we have to remember and recognize is that because we are all broken, we must have this sense of compassion for people. We can't come in and judge people and attack them and put them down because of their brokenness. There must be an approach that we have that we're loving people. We're compassionate. We have the truth in one hand, but we're doing it in a way that has this sense of compassion. We ourselves are trying to evaluate the culture, not just buy into every idea. We're questioning the ideas that are out there. We don't want to be sucked in ourselves into the culture, but we're holding out a banner, a standard that says here's what's right. We want to do that in a loving way. We want to do that with compassion with people in order to help them recognize that God is a loving God. That God does care, but God is also truth. That the love and the truth must go together. That love doesn't just mean we just let everybody do whatever they want because they're heading over a waterfall and we're going to rescue them. We're going to help them understand what the truth is all about.

Well I think the last three verses of this passage are so fun and encouraging. Jesus' response, notice in verse 17 – *in his defense*. So Jesus is on the defensive and He's responding. Notice what He says because the words that He says help us know how to respond in our culture. He says in verse 17 – *In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. Jesus gave them this answer (these are Jesus' words): "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.*

Jesus Himself is saying there's an outside, there's a compass I'm looking at. I'm looking at what the Father is doing. So now in your world, in your life you can ask yourself the question, what is God doing here? What is the Father doing? Well look at that person who's sad over here about a loss that they've experienced. I can go over there and listen to them. I can care for them. That person has experienced a high in their life. Maybe God is doing something there. We don't know. But what we're doing is we want to work where God is working because that's when the healing takes place. That's when this worldview, this story interposed over a person's life develops a vibrancy and excitement that's there. It's something outside of us. So I would just challenge you to work where the Father is working.

I want to make one more statement about these principles. Because I don't want you to get stuck on Christianity being a list of rules. It certainly has convictions and guidelines for us and we do adhere to a certain list of rules, so nothing wrong with that. But that's not the primary message of Christianity. We want our kids to hear this message. What is your salvation for?

We need more Christian fashion designers who are going to help us understand what beauty really is. We need more Christian movie producers to provide for us wholesome entertainment. We need more Christian business men and women who are going to exercise their business in a way that's ethical that can demonstrate examples of what it means to be a Christian. We need more Christian politicians. I know those words don't seem to go together, but we need Christian politicians who can make decisions for us on a political level. We need more Christian judges who are going to help us make decisions on the judicial level. We need more Christians who are going to engage the culture is what we need.

I want to challenge you that your Christianity is much bigger than a list of rules or beliefs or history. Your Christianity empowers you with something and you want to ask the question, what is your salvation for? And that will take you to a whole new dimension, a whole new way of thinking about your faith, a whole new purpose and meaning in life that God can do something amazing in.

Stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we know that if we understand you fully that it opens up new ways to understand ourselves. So Lord I just pray that you'd motivate us to study your word more and open your Bible that you've given to us more so that we can have a stronger worldview. I pray that you'd motivate us to be in church more, make church a priority in our lives so that we can be together and experience community together. I just pray that you'd teach us what it means to worship you and to serve you in every area of our lives. Lord, we want to be totally committed to you. Teach us how to live in the culture where the normal is a little bit odd sometimes. Teach us how to relate in that environment and to represent you in the most faithful way. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.