

Always working

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Let us turn to **John 7: 19-24**

John 7: 19-24

- 19 "Did not Moses give you the Law, and *yet* none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"
- 20 The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?"
- 21 Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel.
- 22 "For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on *the* Sabbath you circumcise a man.
- 23 If a man receives circumcision on *the* Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on *the* Sabbath?"
- 24 "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Today, I want to concentrate on considering with you the life of the Lord Jesus with regard to the principle of righteousness and how we on our part, if we want to identify with the Lord Jesus, we must learn the principle of judging with righteous judgment. What would this lead to? If we learn to judge with righteous judgment, what would we discover? How would we live our lives? What would we understand?

To look at this, it is helpful for us to consider the background of this incident, and as far as I can tell, **John 5** helps us to appreciate the context in which the Jews became angry with the Lord Jesus.

John 5: 15-19

- 15 The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.
16 For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.
17 But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."
18 For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.
19 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless *it is* something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

If the Jews had learnt to judge with righteous judgment, they would have appreciated this principle that the Lord Jesus said: "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working."

Why did the Lord Jesus say that in response to the Jews accusing Him of breaking the Sabbath?

We are told that the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. They were angry with Him for working on the Sabbath. He was healing a man on the Sabbath: He was working; He should be resting. According to their understanding of the Law, no one should be working on the Sabbath. So, to work on the Sabbath is a violation of the Law, a breaking of the Sabbath.

The Lord Jesus' answer is very interesting and very helpful.

This helps us to appreciate: Ultimately, God is looking at the heart, the meaning of things. And the Lord Jesus said, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." So He is explaining that His working in this situation was exactly what the Father was doing.

If God Himself were working in this situation, how can it be that He was breaking the Sabbath? The Sabbath was God's commandment. God cannot be breaking His own Law.

The Lord Jesus was trying to help the people understand that He was, in reality, keeping the Sabbath. It was in accordance with God's ways. This is the right way of keeping the Sabbath.

But most of the time, people do it the opposite way. They keep the Sabbath in the wrong sense, in the wrong manner, in the wrong way. They think that they are obeying God but in reality, they are disobeying Him.

The Lord Jesus went on to explain that whatever He did, He was doing because the Father was doing it. He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless *it is* something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner." So He was moving in perfect fellowship with God the Father and all these things that He did were meant to help us understand the true meaning of God's commandments and what God intends.

So what is it that God intends? Why did the Lord Jesus say, "My Father is working until now"? What is He working at?

The Jews were looking at the act, the outward act of healing, and that was work and to them, that was breaking the Sabbath.

But when God commanded the Jews to rest on the Sabbath, what was He saying? The meaning is quite clear in the context. God wants man to have a rest: every seven days to have a day to rest from his physical labours - that is to say, he should have a rest from his routine, daily responsibilities and duties connected to our physical life on earth, so that there will be time for the body to rest and therefore, to be refreshed. And this principle was meant to be applied not just to the people but also to the animals. The animals also were to rest. Even the land was to rest, so that they could be regenerated in terms of the nutrients in the soil and they could function better.

So that was the physical aspect. But in terms of the principle of the Sabbath, something more important was there. And that was that God wanted the people not just to rest from their physical labours, but to use that time to concentrate on the moral and spiritual, to use the day to emphasize, to concentrate on what is of eternal value, that is, to give greater attention to God, His commandments, to understand more of God's ways, to ponder over who He is, what He has commanded, and how we are to live our lives for Him. This was actually a very major reason, more important than the physical.

But the Jews were concentrating just on the physical acts of doing or not doing. They neglected what was the truly important - and what was that? The truly important was the quality of their heart: to develop that kind of devotion to God, the appreciation of the moral and spiritual, and to learn to care for one another in the right spirit. That was what was primary and what God was interested in.

So when we spend time away from our routine responsibilities at work, it is not just for us to rest and rest and rest and do nothing. It is meant for us to spend the time, yes to have physical rest, but also to focus, to concentrate upon the moral, the spiritual, in order that we may grow well, our character may be developed and we may love God as we should.

Our love for God - it is very difficult to nurture a deep quality of love for God. We need time to concentrate on these issues, to ponder over, to choose to respond, to listen to Him. And the important thing is to understand that in this area of concentrating on our moral and spiritual development, our devotion to God, our love for other people, there is no rest. We are not to take a rest from this. God wants us to continue working in this direction throughout our lives, each moment, every day. It is very important for us to understand this.

Although God rested after His creation, He never rested when it comes to His concern for the well-being of the universe. When it comes to His care and His love for the people, He never rested. God always loved, God always cared. He was always ready to do what was good, right, proper, important. And if we want to follow Him, we want to worship Him then it is important for us to learn this. We want to be like Him, so we must never take a rest from this aspect of our lives.

And that was what the Lord Jesus did. He healed the people every day of the week and He carried on, caring for them, loving them on the Sabbath. He never rested as far as this love for the people was concerned. But the Jews were angry with Him: "You should not be working on the Sabbath."

The sad thing is that for many people and even Christians who understand, who love the Lord, we do not sufficiently appreciate how important it is to nurture this continuous fellowship with God, this focus and concentration on the development of that quality of our being. We often want to take a rest.

Think of it. When you have worked hard in your spiritual life, when you have spent time to read the Scriptures, to pray, to listen to messages, to ponder, to seek God; after some time, you may feel you have done quite well or you feel very tired, you feel very difficult, you want to take a rest. And what does that mean?

When you take a rest from this path, it means you follow the path of self-life, you follow the path of the world; you follow what the evil one will offer you. Whenever we take a rest from this spiritual path of commitment to God, of walking with Him, walking by the Spirit, we will walk in the flesh; and it is very easy to walk in the flesh.

So if we want to deal with our weaknesses fully and thoroughly, we cannot take a rest. If we want to develop our faith in God, then we must concentrate on the quality of that faith: How much do we love Him? How prepared are we to continue in spite of circumstances and difficulties? There must be that focus, determination, perseverance.

Yes, God understands the path is very difficult and He has made every provision for our needs. But it requires our response in order to benefit from all that God has provided. Yes, God is prepared to help us, to forgive us when we fail, but we cannot slacken in terms of this commitment, this direction, this determination to work at it.

Bear in mind that as far as we are told, Satan also does not rest when it comes to wanting to achieve the glory of his kingdom, to achieve his ambitions. He does not rest. He is all the time like a roaring lion, prowling about, seeking someone to devour, someone to kill, to damage, to destroy. He does not rest. Once you rest and take steps no longer to focus on God, to keep close to Him, the evil one will be very effective in dealing with your life.

So it is a dangerous path. We are living in a dangerous world. We have to face it; it is like that. We cannot slacken.

We cannot take it easy. We cannot say, "I want it easy, more pleasant." But if we are prepared to follow the Lord, if we are prepared to obey Him, yes, God in His grace will give us times when it is easier, when it is more pleasant, when the pressure is not so great. He may give to us, so that we can go through it more readily.

But we cannot demand that, because God in His wisdom knows what is best for us. There are times when He needs to deal with us and we need to go through a period of difficulty in order to be transformed.

If we do not submit to that, then we will break and we will not be able to develop that quality.

So sometimes, we may think, "Yes, every morning, I spend my quiet time, I concentrate on spiritual things. Sundays, I come for gathering of worship; I may also come for prayer meeting, bible study. I have done my part. I will take a break on the other days. I can go out and enjoy the things of the world, talk to my friends and go out as I wish, and have a break. I will come back again next morning to spend the quiet time, come again for a time of worship to concentrate on spiritual things."

Will we develop well if we approach it this way? The answer has to be: No. It cannot be possible. Our devotion to God, our concentration on what is good and meaningful has to be all the time: in our heart – the desire, the commitment.

Of course, in reality, we may very easily fail, we may forget, we may be distracted, but the important thing is: Do you want to live like that? Or will you give yourself an excuse?

If you are prepared to live for the Lord and then you falter, yes, God is understanding; He can forgive you. You can come back; you can go on.

But if you are not prepared to work at it and you want to excuse yourself, then you will degenerate. That is the path. It will happen that way because it is not possible to develop quality unless we are committed to it. There is no other way.

But God has made all the provision for us. He is prepared to help us on condition that we come to Him and we look to Him, we trust Him; and He will help us.

So let us then, as we ponder over who the Lord Jesus is and what He has done for us, let us learn from Him.

Throughout His life on earth, from beginning to end, the Lord Jesus never took a rest from this whole commitment to God, this whole direction of life. He came with a mission and that mission was in His heart throughout His life. He never forgot that. He was never distracted from it. Whatever He did, He was conscious He was coming to die on the cross for the sins of mankind. He was conscious that every moment of His life, He must be an example to the people around Him, He must express the glory of God to the people. He did not take a rest from this.

If we are His disciples, let us learn from Him, ask Him to help us to develop that kind of spirit, that kind of focus and direction and intensity, to be what we ought to be.

So let us ask the Lord to help us to ponder over these issues in our lives, to ask Him to help us to understand ourselves, so that if there are areas we have gone astray, we can ask Him to guide us, to help us and to be corrected, to be restored in fellowship, and to grow stronger. God is patient, He is kind. He will help us if we want to.

Let us ponder over what the Lord Jesus has done for us and express our gratitude to Him by the way we live our lives each day.