

Still At Work
John 5:15-21

As we have studied through these first few chapters of this Book of John, time after time we have encountered passages of scripture that have declared who the Lord Jesus truly is, that He is the Son of God.

But we need always to understand that He is not only the Son of God, He is God Almighty Himself. And no, our meager minds are not able to fully comprehend such high and lofty matters, but it is nonetheless true. He, the Lord Jesus, is One with the Father and One with the Holy Spirit within the Trinity. And in His Oneness with them He truly is God Almighty.

And yes, He (the Lord Jesus) is the Maker and Creator of everything that we call Heaven and Earth.

For clarity, let me say that again. Everything that was created, Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, created it all. Those words are clearly given to us in John chapter 1. Listen!

² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:2-3)

And also, these words given in Colossians chapter 1,

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15-17)

This was and is Jesus folks! He did it all!

And now here in the passage that we will study today, we find that He, the Lord Jesus, is “still at work”, “still at work”, and that is an amazing and significant truth for us to remember.

But the religious leaders that we read about here were offended that He would be at work on this day, the sabbath, believing that by being at work, He would be violating the Laws that God had put into place, laws that declared that “six

days you shall work, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, you shall rest and do no work”.

And yes, it's true, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit had created those “Laws”, the “Commandments”, especially the fourth commandment. And that commandment clearly tells us to,

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the 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. (Exodus 20:8-11)

And yes, the religious leaders were adamant about keeping the Laws of God. And the keeping of the Sabbath was especially important to them.

But had they have known who the Lord Jesus really was, that He was “Lord of the Sabbath”, they would have known that it was only the “Lord of the Sabbath” who had the privilege of defining what was actually meant by the word “work”. And that the “works” that He and God the Father were continuing to do was not of the kind that was prohibited by the Law.

And yes, the Lord Jesus had much “work” that still needed to be done, but for our study today, may we just speak about a few of those “works”. First, He needed to be about preaching the “gospel”, the saving truths of God. And He did that with most every word that came forth from His mouth.

But secondly, and not well understood, the Lord Jesus needed to be meticulously at work holding all of the functions of the natural life of this earth together and sustaining their existence and work.

Few people then and even now pause to realize that the Lord Jesus was not only the creator of all that existed, He is also the “sustainer”, the one who keeps it all running and functioning during all of the moments of the day.

In the Book of Hebrews chapter 1, we are told that He, the Lord Jesus,

³ . . . is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. (Hebrews 1:3)

This word “upholds” means that the Lord Jesus “carries”, “sustains”, and keeps every function of this earth running on a moment by moment basis.

And also, those words in verse 17 of Colossians chapter 1 that we just read,
¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
(Colossians 1:17)

Oh dear friends, Jesus did not just create this “little blue ball” and spin it into space and say to it, “you be careful out there”.

Most people, probably even most devoted Christians believe such as that, that God created the earth with all of its systems in place, its climate, its ecological systems, its animals, its people with all their personalities and ways of life, all such things and then stepped back to let all the matters of the earth run by their own efforts.

No, no, not at all. God is still intimately involved in every matter of life that takes place, from the behaviors of mankind to the very air that we breathe, holding it all in perfect condition to meet our needs each moment of each day. And yes, that includes even the weather patterns and climate changes.

Folks, the simple truth is, the work that God rested from on the seventh day was the work of His creation. He did not cease His work of holding His creation together and sustaining its daily functions. Our God must maintain our world's daily functions else it would surely collapse.

So then, yes it is just as we are told here, God the Father is still at work and so is the Lord Jesus. He is still at work.

Let's pause for a moment and read this passage that we have been studying and then talk about why this matter of Jesus being “at work” is so important, both to God and to these religious leaders.

Recall that here in this passage, the Lord Jesus had just healed a man by the pool of Bethesda, a man who had been crippled for 38 years. And now here beginning in verse 13 of John chapter 5 we pick up with the reading,

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. (John 5:13-21)

These Jewish leaders were so blindly controlled by their commitment to every jot and tittle of the law that they could not see that the goodness of the healing of this man was far more in keeping with the loving nature of God than just the need to maintain the status quo of the law.

But folks, as I observe the behaviors and the failures of these religious leaders, I am also reminded of some of the failures that I myself am often susceptible to. And it involves a verse of scripture that I have often pondered in these studies. It's the words of Proverbs 3:5-6. Listen to those words again and let's think about them. Verse 5,

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

And listen also to these next words, verses 7 and 8.

⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes;

fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

⁸ It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones. (Proverbs 3:7-8)

I do fear that just as I often fail when I try my best to “think through” a matter, and I go to the wrong extent, so have these religious leaders. And to make matters worse, these religious leaders were only following long- established Jewish laws and traditions.

They have “leaned to their own understanding”. They have not allowed the One who wrote these scriptures, God’s Holy Spirit, to rightly interpret these words for them.

Oh dear friends, when God’s Holy Spirit gave us these words of scripture, these commandments, He never intended for us to interpret many of them as we so often do.

I don’t know when the word “opinion” came into our vocabulary, or into the vocabulary of the Jews, but its presence is surely evident as we read these words of scripture.

I can almost hear the conversations of those Scribes and Pharisees as they would study those words of the Old Testament saying, “well, in my opinion God meant “thus and so” when He wrote those commandments. And if some of the most powerful members of their order spoke their opinion, it would become the official interpretation and would stand as absolute truth.

But folks, much is the same in some of today’s church denominations. That is why we have such diverse beliefs within our Christian community. Some preachers have given their opinions on matters. And because many within their congregations liked those opinions, new churches and new denominations have been born.

In our current day, there are strong opinions being voiced regarding such things as the ordination of homosexual pastors, elders and deacons, and because of those strong opinions, the Methodist denomination has severely split and almost crumbled beyond repair.

And much the same has taken place over past years within at least one of the Presbyterian denominations.

And even as recent as within the past few weeks, our Baptist friends have been suffering some strong upheaval within the churches, having to do with the ordination of women as deacons and preachers, disputes all around us with people putting forth their "opinions" as to what the scriptures intend in all those matters. "Opinions" and more "Opinions"!

And most likely, the "Opinions" of some of those strongest voices will become the "laws" that those churches will live by.

With all of this being said, let's return to our scripture passage for today and talk some more about these religious leaders as they voiced their "opinions" on this matter about Jesus being wrong as He instructed the man He had just healed to "take up his pallet and walk", accusing Jesus of violating the fourth commandment.

And please note carefully and understand another thing that Jesus was doing within this circumstance.

Here, Jesus was declaring to these religious leaders that He was not violating the Sabbath, but to the contrary, that He was actually "Lord of the Sabbath". And that as "Lord of the Sabbath" both He and His Father could do "works of mercy and of necessity" and that their works were perfectly in agreement with the Commandments.

Jesus made that understanding clear when He said in Mark chapter 2, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

And you'll also recall that when Jesus' disciples were criticized for plucking grain on the Sabbath, He reminded the religious leaders that the Sabbath laws were not intended to prevent legitimate human need.

And in Mark chapter 3, Jesus asked, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?"

And now here with the healing of this man at the Pool of Bethesda, it was an act of mercy and grace and was in perfect agreement with God's intent within the commandments.

Oh dear friends, The Pharisees had taken a good commandment and had turned it into something completely contrary to God's loving and merciful character.

And may I say again that it is the nature of an unredeemed soul, a heart and mind that does not have the blessed Holy Spirit residing within it, to take the simplicity of God's word and to complicate it with man's "logical" thinking. Just as those precious words of Proverbs chapter 3 warn, we must not "lean to our own understanding".

May I also add a personal thought, one that you may or may not want to accept . . . because these religious leaders turned a very obvious act of mercy and grace into something that was wrong and sinful, I personally can see the influence of satan in their behavior.

And no, satan is not mentioned here, so please take that comment as my own addition to this discussion, but it sure seems likely.

Folks again, our Lord's advent on the earth was for many reasons and this one that we are talking about here involving the proper understanding of the fourth commandment is an excellent example of what He was to be about as He walked about this earth.

You will note as you read these scriptures that Jesus was continually explaining and clarifying what was truly intended by the scriptures that had been given in the Old Testament.

You will recall such things that Jesus spoke about like there in Matthew chapter 5 where He said,

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. (Matthew 5:21-22)

And also,

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

And Jesus gave these kinds of clarifying explanations over and over again as He traveled through the villages and countrysides of His beloved Israel.

Again, when the minds of men try to explain the truths and the wisdom of God, we can often go astray of His true intent for His words. We absolutely must have the presence of the Holy Spirit within our heart, our soul, our mind before we can ever hope to rightly interpret God's intent within His words.

And may I add one more very important truth that seems most always to be involved in acts of mercy such as these by our Lord Jesus.

Jesus was not just interested in bringing relief to the wearied bodies of people like this man who had been crippled for 38 years. He was far more interested in bringing "rest for their wearied souls". Recall the words that He spoke to the man when He later found Him in the temple. There Jesus said, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."

Here within these words, yes Jesus is admonishing the man to have better behavior. But beyond that, His words are an encouragement for the man to go further and surrender His whole heart and be saved.

And that is always the ultimate desire of our Lord, not to just heal a person's body, but to also heal their soul. He said in Matthew 18, that "It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire."

Now before we finish our time of study about how our Lord is "still at work", may we consider one of the most pleasant and joy filled works that He accomplishes within His people? And within these words that we'll read we'll see how His always still being "at work" is such a wonderful blessing to us.

In John chapter 15, our Lord speaks at length about how we, His "Bride" must abide within Him and how we must invite His Spirit to intimately abide within us, within our hearts and our souls.

And How, by His abiding presence within us, He not only brings guidance for our behaviors, He also brings sweet comfort and blessings to our souls.

Listen as I read some of those words given in John chapter 15, beginning in verse 4. Here our Lord tells us to,

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another. (John 15:4-17)

This dear Christian is our Lord Jesus "still at work" within your and my soul, bringing us the greatest blessings we could ever imagine, filling us with the eternal joys of His presence.

And all we have to do is "Abide in Him" and He will never cease to be "at work" in us.

Pray with me.