

John 5:1-47 The Work of the Son (part 1)

The story we have of the man who is healed is the occasion for Jesus to teach the most fundamental of truths, namely “WHO” He is, and “WHAT” He came to do. I get this from vv. 17-18 which follows the miracle at the Pool at Bethesda. **“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.”** In these verses we see that the identity of Jesus cannot be separated from his work. In other words, Jesus is saying, *“What God does I do.” “The ways in which God works is also the ways in which I work.”* There is no difference! This is why, in v. 19, Jesus does not deny that He is making himself out to be equal with God. He says, **“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.”** Here we have one of the most clear statements in all of Scripture of the identity of the Son and what kind of work He does. (I cannot fathom what our Mormon and JW friends do with this chapter!) So, in this text (over two weeks) I want to highlight 3 works of the Son: 1) The Son works as the Lord over the Sabbath; 2) The Son works as the giver of life; and 3) The Son works as the great judge.

1. The Son works as Lord over the Sabbath. In vv. 1-17 we have the story of man that has been “lame” for 38 years. (app. on God’s timing) And apparently, year after year, this man is taken (by friends or family?) to the “famous” Pool of Bethesda, a notorious pool of water, probably filled from some kind of intermittent natural spring. And this man and many others believe that when the water is stirred (literally “troubled”) (KJV “angel” “troubled”) the first one in has the chance of being healed. But, this man is obviously never the first one in. And as Jesus is in town for one of the Jewish feasts (probably Passover), he knows EXACTLY where to go. He comes to this man and asks, *“Do you want to be healed?”* “Of course” is his response, *“if you or one of your friends would just put me into the water at the right time.”* So, Jesus bypasses the tradition and says to him, **“Get up, take up your bed and walk.”** AT ONCE the man is healed! He picks up his mat that he sleeps on and walks away. (There must have been lots of commotion as Jesus is separated from the man.) And most importantly for our point, this healing takes place on the Jewish Sabbath day.

Then, the story continues. Some of the Jews say to him, *“It is not lawful for you to walk with your mat/bed on the Sabbath day.”* Question: Why do you think they are so upset with this man? Well, according to certain Jewish “laws” which were added to “guard” the Sabbath day, this man was “working,” he was “breaking” the Sabbath. So, this man tells them that JESUS healed him and then told him to **“take up his bed and walk.”** So, fearing the Jewish leaders, the man shifts the blame to Jesus so he doesn’t get into trouble. This leads them to turn their attention to Jesus and blame Him for causing this man to break the Sabbath. In other words, *“you healed him. You told him to walk with his mat. Therefore you are to blame.”* (This is what Jesus wanted all along.) This brings us to v. 16. Look with me: **“And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus,**

because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.” So, at the least, Jesus was causing this man to break the Sabbath by “working.” AND, by implication (in their minds) Jesus himself is breaking the Sabbath by healing this man and telling him to carry his mat. So, did Jesus break the Sabbath?

It is important to note that Jesus did not break any Sabbath law by doing a good work on that day and telling this man to walk with his mat. And it is interesting that John does not record any argument from Jesus about doing a good “work” on the Sabbath, which was apparent! Instead, he records this story for Jesus to teach us, not about the works of man, but of the work of God! So, back to our truth: The Son works as the Lord of the Sabbath.

With this in mind, let’s think for a moment about the Jewish Sabbath. Where did it come from? Let’s move beyond Mosaic Law for a moment and go back to creation. The Jewish Sabbath came from the creation story way back in Gen. 1 & 2. Let me ask, *“What did God do when he finished with creation on the seventh day?”* Gen. 2:2 says, **“And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.”** God RESTED! What does this mean? Did He take a nap? Did He go for a stroll in heaven? Of course not! To “rest” on the seventh day for God, is to “cease” from his work of creating. So, in this regard God is STILL resting. He is not creating. But, does this mean that God stops working? Of course not! Ps. 121:4 says, **“Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”** OF COURSE God continues to work. How? He upholds creation. This is why the physical universe as we know, exists and continues to exist. This is why we ***“live and move and find our places in this world”*** (Acts 17:26). Brothers and sisters, there is not one molecule in this universe in which God is not “working” to keep and sustain.

And this is not all! God works in history and in the lives of cultures and peoples and nations. And for his chosen people, God **“works all things for their good . . .”** (Rom. 8:28). The Holy Spirit is in the world working to convict of ***“sin, righteousness, and judgment to come”*** (John 16:8). So, OF COURSE God is working! The Sabbath was made for man, not for God. So, what is Jesus teaching here? I love this! He is saying, “You may see me walk around in the flesh and go to the temple and visit with people and heal and teach and even ‘rest’ from my physical labors as a man on the Sabbath . . . All these things in my flesh I am doing. But . . . THIS IS SO IMPORTANT! In this conversation with the Jews, Jesus is saying, I AM ALSO WORKING IN THE SAME WAY GOD IS WORKING. The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day got this; this is why they put him on the cross. You see, they only saw him as a man (which he was). They did not see that He was above the works of man. They did not see that He was the LORD of the Sabbath. They did not see his works in the way I am describing the works of God. From this perspective, this means that Jesus can do whatever He wants to do! Why? Because He is the Lord of the Sabbath . . . as God is the Lord of the Sabbath. And if he wants to graciously heal a man, or to have his disciples pluck grain from the fields for their hunger, HE CAN DO IT! Why? Look again at vv. 19-20: **“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 all that he himself is doing . . .”

The Scriptures are FULL of this truth! (Especially the Gospel of John) But, I think the best description of this truth may be found in Col. 1:15-17: **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”** I also think of Heb. 1:3: **“He 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.”**

Brothers and sisters we must marvel at this truth! I can think of nothing more glorious for you and me as we consider the Son of God, who **“became flesh and dwelt among us”** (John 1:14). As the Father ceased from his work of creation on the 7th day, so the Son ceased from his work of creation on the 7th day. And, as the ONE who created the Sabbath, this makes the Son . . . LORD OF the Sabbath. And as the Father still works in this world, SO the SON works. He is much more than JUST Lord of the Sabbath.

This means that the greatest application we can make is to honor the Son in the same way we honor the Father. We will get this in more detail next week. But look at v. 23-24: **“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.”** Brothers and sisters, this is what we do as Christians! In fact, to believe the Son works in the same way as the Father (EQUALLY) is to believe the Christian Gospel! This is what we are doing today in our prayers our singing our preaching our gathering. As those who believe in the eternal Son with the same authority as the Father we do not come into judgment, but have passed from death to life. At the core of who we are is to believe in the eternal Son of God as He is presented to us in the Scriptures and as He has come down to us in the incarnation! (If you are not a Christian, believe!)

Now, back to our truth again! The Son works as Lord over the Sabbath. Let's think for just a few more minutes about the Sabbath. What does God “resting” on the 7th day point to? God's “rest” looks forward to the Messiah, to the Lord Jesus, who fulfills God's Sabbath rest. And apart from HIM and HIS COMING and the WORK He came to do, there can be no rest for the peoples of this world and even of the creation itself (Rom. 8). You see, because of sin, death and misery and evil and chaos, etc. etc. has entered this world. This has been the case from the Fall of Adam. Let me ask, *“what is the greatest effect of the Fall?”* Is it all the things I just mentioned? Yes . . . these things are certainly our experience. But, the worst of all is to be separated from the presence of God, to be no longer at “rest.” If you read the OT you will see that All God's promises are related to the presence of God being with his people. This is REST! This is why

Jesus says in Matt. 28:18-20 “*All authority has been given to me . . . and I will be with you even to the end of the world.*”

You see, because of sin, we are separated from this “rest.” Because of sin we are separated from God and his rest. And as we will see next week, our text teaches us that those who believe in the Son have eternal life. Those who do not believe in the Son fall into judgment. This means to have the Son is to have LIFE, which is to be with God, (who IS life). This is what the Sabbath is made to do. YES, we must rest (physically from our works). But, this is only a picture of what the Lord Jesus came to do. I think of Matt. 11:27-28 in much the same context: Jesus says: “**All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.**” And then he says, “**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**”

The Sabbath pictures heavenly rest in the presence of God. And so, when we see that Jesus is LORD over the Sabbath as its creator, how much more amazing must it be that Jesus stoops so low to take on flesh. And then what does he do, as the sinless Son of Man he lays down his life on the cross. This was HIS special work! And in so doing, he takes our sin upon himself . . . He takes the wrath of God also . . . for us. Instead of “rest,” and “peace” and the benefits of God’s “presence” that we all enjoy today, He displays the opposite of God’s Sabbath Rest and instead, suffers judgment. This is the CROSS of Christ! Why? That we might have and enjoy the presence of God, his “REST.” Our sins are forgiven! We have peace with God!

And we enjoy this rest, not merely because of the cross, but because of the resurrection. Where does Christ now sit! Heb. 1:3 says, “**After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . .**” This is where Paul says, we are now seated with him. In this way the “rest” of God has begun in the church. And God will continue to build his church until one day it is finished and He returns. We’ve seen nothing yet! And in that day, there will be the great judgment. But there will also be a new heavens and a new earth where we will live forever in his rest . . . in his presence, and then no longer by faith, but by sight!

Can there be anything more glorious than the truth that the Son is Lord over the Sabbath and in his own person and work He leads us into rest through his coming to us!

(I must stop now. Next week, we will move to part 2 of the Work of the Son. And, there will be more applications for us from our story).