

John (Part 9)

God the Father and Jesus Christ Work Ceaselessly to Relieve Burdens

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 18-Nov-86; Sermon #BS-JO09

We are going to pick it up in verse 27, because we covered some of that a little more rapidly the last time.

John 4:27 And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?"

Remember that I mentioned to you the last time that what He was doing was really revolutionary for His day because of the prejudices of the Jews—their prejudices toward the Samaritans, which were based on a long history of antagonism. It was also revolutionary because of Jewish men's really prejudiced ideas about women. Here was Jesus, talking to a Samaritan who was also a woman!

What I think is kind of interesting in light of this is not just the fact that He was doing this, but also the response of the disciples. John takes pains to point out that nobody even questioned what Jesus was doing. What it shows is that they were beginning to understand that what He did was right—no matter what the situation was they were coming to respect that what He did was the right thing to do. They were getting to the place where they were accepting what He did without antagonistic questioning. They might eventually have questions, but their minds and their approach and their attitude toward what He was doing was more submissive and less "Jewish."

That is the way, of course, that we eventually have to become, where we accept what Christ says and what Christ does, in the right sense, without questioning. Christ would certainly want us to ask questions for clarification. He would certainly want us to understand the whys of things. But He certainly would not want us to come at Him with an attitude of antagonism in our question. That is really what is intended here. They were not at the point any longer where they were antagonistically questioning what He was doing and why He was doing it.

In John 4:28, the interesting thing is that again John picks up on something that seems to be quite small. That is, that this woman left her water pot there. It shows that she left in a hurry. We learn a little bit later that what she wanted to do was get back to town to tell everybody about this Man who told her all about herself. Her reaction was, of

course, enthusiastic.

Another thing that we might see here is this: (if we can read this into it) that she left knowing full well that she was going to come back. It was not like she was out of her mind and just left in a dither, but rather that she left her water pot there in a hurry, and she intended to come back. That indicates that she went into the town with the intention of telling everybody about Him and bringing the people back with her.

In a sense, if you can understand this, she became an evangelist. She went out and told the people about this man—she really did not know who He was—and she spread the word. She brought back with her the whole town.

Then in John 4:30, the people responded. It says that they went out of the city and came to Him. In the meantime, His disciples asked Him to eat.

Jesus responded in a way that you ought to begin to recognize is typical of Him. He says something that does not seem to have anything to do with what the question was at the beginning. But He is leading them into a way of discovering something for themselves rather than just telling them flat out what He wanted to teach them.

This has application to you and me in that it helps us to understand that God is not often going to tell us directly about Himself, what His purpose is, what His purpose for us is, but rather He is going to lead us in such a way that we have to dig for things. We have to think on things, meditate on it, and come to conclusions. In that way we discover things for ourselves. You learn much better if you have to work at something and discover it for yourself than if it is just given to you on a silver platter.

Not only that, if we have to put effort into finding truth, we are more appreciative of it as well. It becomes more valuable to us than if somebody just gives us something. Something that is not earned is generally not respected. So God teaches us in a way that we have a part in coming to understand the teaching that He has for us.

So we see here that He gave this mysterious reply, and then He came back with something else when they responded again—"Well, what does He have to eat?"—with "My food [that which energizes Me; that which gives Me strength and health and vitality] is to do the will of God." (John 4:34)

Perhaps we could explore that just a bit. They left Him when He was very tired, and went into town. When they came back, He was all keyed up. You have experienced those things. I have experienced those things as well. When you are approaching a job,

feeling kind of down—in our case, what we do is kind of mope around, trying to avoid what we feel is going to be a tiring, enervating, discouraging, depressing responsibility, carrying out a work that we do not like to do.

Maybe you ladies do not like to iron. Maybe it is the washing. Maybe it is the dishes. Maybe you men do not like to wash the car, or cut the lawn. Maybe it is the job you do every day, the one you get paid for—I do not know. But very frequently, if you really throw yourself into something that is somewhat disagreeable, or you do not want to really face, your attitude changes once you begin to get involved, and you begin to actually enjoy it—you become energized by something that previously seemed to be something that you did not want to do.

That is what He is talking about here. He forgot about His tiredness because He had lost Himself in doing the will of God. That is a very good principle for you and me.

In verse 35, He carries it a little farther. This is part of what was energizing Him:

John 4:35 Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'?

I mentioned to you last time that He was actually quoting a proverb. He says, "Don't you have a saying, 'There are four months until harvest'?" What the saying applied to was that there was generally four months between the sowing of the seed and the reaping of the harvest. So over a 120-day period—for four months—a person could say, "This is going to come to fruition, and we will have something to show for our work." Here, He was saying, "Look, here is the time when we sowed the seed, and we are already beginning to get a harvest." He was viewing the people coming out of the town. These were the fruits of the teaching that He had made to the woman. She got up, left her waterpot, went into town, preached about Him—I do not know whether you could call it preaching in the classical sense, but she went around town and noised it about that there was an unusual personality out there, and she managed to convince an awful lot of people.

Someone—I cannot remember who it was right now—came up with a thought after the Bible study last week that I think is good to interject here: everybody in town knew that she was an immoral woman. Her reputation was not good. Yet when she came back from the well, apparently she was so changed in her attitude—her attitude before might have been really cool. She was worldly. She was sophisticated. She was not somebody who could get excited about things because she had been there and back again. You

were not going to get *her* excited.

But when she went into town, they could see there was something about her worth noticing, and worth following her out of town about. So she went in and did her thing.

Let us make another application here. Remember I told you last week that in one sense I feel that this woman represents the whole world. The representation is, I think, more specific than that. That is, she could represent the church. The church is shown in Scripture as a woman, and when we come out of the world we are immoral in the sense that we have committed many sins, and all of us have been committing spiritual fornication with the world. Then we have a confrontation with Christ. Remember He initiated the conversation—the communication—between the two of them. He led her in such a way until finally, in a burst within her own mind, she had what we would call a spiritual experience.

She began to see herself in relation to God—"I perceive that you are a prophet"—because He suddenly revealed to her that He knew a great deal more about her than she ever thought. She saw her evilness, and she began to repent. What is the responsibility of the church? The responsibility of the church is to go out, then—away from—and preach the word and bring people to Christ. See the analogy?

There are all kinds of comparisons that can be made here. I do not think that there is one that is exactly the right one. But that is a lesson—a parallel—that can be drawn from that. That is what the church is supposed to do. It is supposed to go out to the world with the message of Christ, which is the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and lead people, as it were, to Christ.

Christ is seeing the fruits of this labor, and He comes up with something else. That is, there are going to be times when we will be enjoying the benefits of other people's labors. We will reap a harvest that we did not sow—we did not cast the seed. All of us are in the church as a result of the labors of those who went before us. We begin to reap, then, the work of those who are before us, and then, you see, we begin to sow, along with the rest of the body, and then others begin to reap what we have sown. There is always going to be that play going on.

He points out that there were going to be times when we would sow and others would reap. Indeed, that occurred to them. The first experience was that on the day of Pentecost, they reaped what Christ had sowed. Then they went out and began sowing, and others reaped what they sowed because they became martyrs for the cause and did not live to see all that harvested from their labors. So this process is always going

on. We find in verse 39 that:

John 4:39-42 Many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own word. Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

No man can respond—repent, be converted—for someone else. A person may be an instrument to *lead* a person to the truth, but that is as far as it can go. We can be used as an example by the actions of our life. There may even be times we may verbally communicate things to people that will actually turn things in their mind. But in any case, it eventually becomes the other person's decision. We cannot decide for them. That is what occurred here.

I think it is interesting because there is no indication that any of them were ever converted. These were Samaritans. They were Gentiles, and in the New Testament church at the beginning there were no Gentiles. So they believed, but they were not converted. That is something that you are going to see frequently in the book of John. There is a difference between believing and being converted that is made very clear. Jesus said (through Peter), "Repent you, therefore, and be converted." A person has to believe to repent. A person has to believe to be converted. But a person can believe in God—they can actually believe that the gospel is true (what it is); they can also believe that a person ought to keep the Sabbath; they can believe that a person ought to tithe; they can believe an awful lot of things about God—and never be converted.

That is apparently what happened here. A really vivid example is going to come along in John 8, where the Jews who believed on Him wanted to kill Him by the end of the chapter! That is hardly being converted. But they believed.

That is something for us to think about deeply—just churn it over in our mind—actually, in a sense, examining ourselves as to the extent of our belief. Of course, James defines this very clearly, and he shows that a belief—a faith—that is alive will produce works, but a faith—a belief—that is dead (that does not mean the person is dead; all it means is he has an intellectual agreement with) will not produce works. The works, of course, begin in the keeping of the commandments, but they branch out from there and become sacrificial acts of love for God in all aspects of life.

John 4:43-45 Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.

There appears to be here a contradiction. When this phrase, this saying, that "a prophet has no honor in his own country" (or "in his own house") appears in the other three accounts of His life, it appears in an entirely different context. The context in which it appears in the other three is first of all in Galilee, and secondly it is antagonistic. It appears in an antagonistic context.

Here, the Galileans received Him, and what He said is, "A prophet has no honor in his own country." Galilee was obviously His own country. Yet it says in the next verse that the Galileans received Him, so He must have had honor there.

What is the answer to this? I do not think that anybody knows for sure exactly what the answer is, but I will advance one thing to you. If you go back to John 4:1, it says:

John 4:1-3 Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.

He left Judea in order to put the cork in the bottle. He left Judea because things were beginning to build in Judea much quicker than He wanted them to build. That is, antagonism was building against Him. The scribes and the Pharisees were already beginning to question, and feel threatened by, Him. Remember they sent Nicodemus by night—or Nicodemus came by night. Nicodemus was a representative of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a ruling body of the Jews, and already they knew that He was a prophet come from God.

They were afraid that He was going to stir up a revolution against the Romans. If He succeeded, then they would be out of office. If He did not succeed, they would have to show themselves on the side of the Romans if they wanted to continue in office, otherwise the Romans would take them out of their office. They stood to lose any way if Jesus was involved. So He wanted to get out of there because things were moving very rapidly—that is, things that were going to produce His crucifixion. So He got out of there.

It says in John 1:11 that He came to His own, and His own received Him not. If we wanted to be very precise about that, "His own" could be translated "His own home." Jesus was a Jew, and the place of the Messiah was not Galilee, but it was Jerusalem. That was the real home—the capital city. The home of the Messiah is Jerusalem, regardless of where He was born and regardless of where He was brought up.

I think that because of the context in which this appears, beginning all the way back in John 4:1, showing why Jesus departed so hastily from Judea, is that the application of John 4:44 is that "his own country" is not to be thought of as Galilee, but as Jerusalem—Judea.

Later on, of course, that same thing could be said in Galilee. When He began to preach, certain rose up against Him, and they tried to throw Him down the hillside and kill Him.

So He left Judea. He then left Samaria, and He went to Galilee. When He said this, He was referring to Judea—or more specifically Jerusalem—and not to Galilee. So there was quite a response in Galilee at the beginning of His ministry. They were all excited, it says here, because they had seen or heard things that were done at Jerusalem at the Feast.

John 4:46-54 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!" Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household. This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

Remember at the beginning I said that there were eight signs that He did. This was the second. The first was the turning of the water into wine. Remember I told you at the time

that John specifically uses the word for "signs" rather than the Greek word for "miracles," because a sign informs. A sign directs. A sign advertises. A sign points, and gives direction. It gives insight into things, and this healing was a sign.

In an overall sense, all of these signs were revealing to people how God will react in certain situations—to show very clearly what His will is. It is His will to heal. But there is a condition. It is His will to heal those who trust Him—and that the nobleman did. He trusted Him.

Let us go back over that and look at it a little more closely. Perhaps it is good, first of all, to mention that this was no commoner who came to Christ. They have rightly translated the word "nobleman." This word can actually be used for someone who was a petty king—or, as we might say, a governor under a king. He was a very high official in the Roman government. He may have been a Jew. It does not say at this point, but he probably was a Jew. But he was very high in the Roman government. If Herod was still king, then he would have been a governor under Herod. He was a man of quite high position.

Jesus' statement in verse 48 is a good one to consider. "Jesus said to him, 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.'" It seems as though there is irritation here. At whom was the irritation, or the anger—whatever it happened to be; they were pretty strong words—directed? Was it directed to the man? Or was it directed to the crowd of people?

The word "people" in my Bible is in italics, which means that it was added in order to give a little bit clearer sense. The translators of the New King James apparently believed that it was directed at the people, which is certainly a possibility. What that means is that He was gauging the crowd's attitude—that He was looking at them, looking at the looks in their eyes, maybe what the buzzing excitement was all about—and He came to the conclusion that all they were thinking of was to get a thrill, to gape at something unusual, maybe to say, "I was there when it happened." It was so much vanity.

If it was directed at the man, which it could have been, it could indicate that Christ was making this statement to gauge the man's attitude. There is a very big lesson here with regard to healing or, I might say, with regard to any gift, any promise, that God says that He will give to us. But the context here is in regard to healing.

Let us first look at the man's response, because it appears the man took it as something that was directed at him. This is why I mentioned the fact that this was no commoner

that came, but he was a man of a great deal of authority—not the highest authority in the land, but he was a man of a great deal of authority. He could have responded and said, "Who are you, talking to me like this, commoner? You are only a carpenter!" But he did not. He did not get indignant. His response showed that despite his high position he was a man of humility.

We have to ask, "Why?" Well, there might have been a reason. Maybe he was not always as humble as he was at this point. But at least at this point, there was humility, and again there is a lesson here: the reason he was so humble was that he really, deeply desired something that he somehow knew Christ could give him. You know how you will humble yourself before someone who is able to give you something—if you really want that thing badly enough, you will humble yourself to do almost anything. If you want the thing badly enough, you will crawl to get that from the person who has it. That is the way we are.

I want you to apply this principle to God and to healing. Do you really want healing enough that you are willing to submit to anything to get it? I mean, submit to anything that has to do with His will to get it. That is a question that we need to ask. Christ found out by asking this question that this healing was not a passing fancy with the man. It was not a wish that he came to Christ to have fulfilled, but it was a deep desire to have someone that he loved very much be put into good health again. Incidentally—this is just an aside—in one sense it was not even something that he wanted for himself, but rather it was something that he wanted for someone else who was hurting. He was hurting because the other person was hurting—that is, his son. His reaction was very interesting.

The next thing: he *could* have said, "Look—I am the big man around here. I insist that You come with me. I want You to come to my house and do some hocus-pocus." This man really had faith—just amazing. Somehow he understood that Christ did not even have to go to his house—did not have to go there and even lay hands on the boy; did not have to anoint him with oil. That man really had faith.

Another thing (that just covered his humility): a second characteristic which the nobleman had, which is I think really exemplary, is that he refused to get discouraged when it seemed as though a roadblock was thrown in front of him. Jesus' initial response to his request was to ask a question that could have been very stinging. He could have given up. But he showed very quickly to Christ that he was in earnest. He was not too proud to accept a rebuke in response to a sincere and deeply-desired question. His faith was very real. Jesus saw that, and He was moved to action.

The next thing that proves his faith was real was that he turned and went home with only Christ's word as assurance. There was nothing to look at. There was nothing to feel, nothing to hear, nothing to smell, nothing to taste—just Christ's word. It is interesting to look at it from Christ's point of view, too. He did not give the man a prescription to go to the doctor. He did not assign him a regimen of taking so many vitamins and minerals every day. He did not put him on a fast. He did not say, "I want you to go on a diet." He just said, "I will do it."

I think the conclusion of this must be that all along the route this man was intense in his desire to have what he knew Christ would do. The overall thing is that Christ gave a sign that He will heal those who believe—those who trust, He will heal.

There was an additional bonus here, and that is that not only the man, but also his *whole house* believed. This man was a Jew, and there is a possibility that this man was among the 120. That would have been quite difficult for a man of his position to be in—a nobleman in the court of the king, and he was converted. It is an interesting thing to think about: a converted man in the court of a tyrant. How would *you* respond to something like that? That would be a very interesting situation to balance.

John 5:1-9 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

In verse 1, there might be some question as to what Feast this was, but if you put John 5, 6, and 7 together, it is most likely that this Feast was one that was in the fall. I believe it is in chapter 6 there is a Passover, and then in chapter 7 there is a Feast of Tabernacles when He said, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." If the time sequence here is in order—and there is no reason to believe it is not—it would tend to

point to this being a fall feast that is before the Passover in chapter 6 and the Feast of Tabernacles in chapter 7. It could have been the Feast of Trumpets. It could have been the Feast of Tabernacles. I once heard Dr. Hoeh say that he felt that it was Trumpets. That would fit in, anyway, at least with the fall festivals. I do not know whether it was or not. Maybe he had more information available to him than I do.

In some manuscripts, part of verse 3 and all of verse 4 are not there. Mostly the parts that are missing are the parts that have to do with waiting for the moving of the water. I do not know at this point if there is enough authority anywhere to decide whether those verses should be in or out. Apparently the translators of both the King James and the New King James felt that there was sufficient authority that they should be in there.

If there is sufficient authority for them to be in there, I think then that an explanation needs to be made about this angel coming down and stirring the water. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate any such like thing. That is not the way God works. It would tend to indicate something similar to people going to Lourdes and dipping their bodies in the water, or getting some "holy water" out of there, or "holy water" out of the Jordan River and saving it for special occasions and anointing themselves with it. In other words, a belief or idea—a superstition—that had grown up amongst the people and was held to be correct (that is, to have healing powers).

It is obvious that from time to time the water was stirred. The legends had it that an angel did it. It happened without anybody appearing to do it. But there is probably a physical explanation, and that is that it was something similar to the geysers in Yellowstone National Park, only in the case it was not steam—it was not hot minerals—but rather a spring that percolated from time to time. Apparently it got dammed up, and then a surge of water would come through and it would percolate up through where the well was. It was a fairly deep pool of water that was fed by a spring—a spring that appears to not be running all the time, but a spring that occasionally got dammed up and then a big rush of water would come in and cause it to bubble up. The Jews then would all run and jump into the thing to be the first one in there.

You know God does not heal like that. God heals by the forgiveness of sin, by the execution of the power of His Holy Spirit. God said that He would heal all the way back in Exodus 15:25-26. It has always been done, to the best of my knowledge, through His chosen servants; that is, the prophets in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, the ministry. What one had to do was go to the prophet. You can see that time and time again. Somebody would go to Elijah, or somebody would go to Elisha, or somebody would go to Isaiah and ask them to pray, and he would do it and the person would be

healed. That is why I say that I feel very strongly that this was a *superstition* that grew up among the Jews.

That introduces another interesting thing here: Jesus made no comment about this man's views. He did not put His hands on His hips and say, "Don't you know any better than that? Don't you know that that is superstition?" He did not move to destroy the man's faith in what he believed, but immediately began teaching him, offering him, a better way.

In the previous healing in chapter 4, the man came to Christ with the request to be healed. In this case, Jesus initiates the action. It is an interesting question. He said to the man, "Do you want to be made whole?" It seems like a dumb question, does it not? Of course he wanted to be made whole! But Jesus does not ask dumb questions.

This is interesting. Think about this fellow: 38 years he had been like this. After being paralyzed all those years, think about what his mind would have been like. What do you think his attitude would be like—his attitude toward life? After all of the disappointments and discouragements that he had had; after all of he had gone through—he was a man like everyone else. He had hopes. He had dreams. There were times in his life when he wanted to be successful. He had all kinds of time to grow bitter and envious of other people. What kind of motivation do you think a man like that would have to be successful?

Perhaps in his heart of hearts he was really content to be the way he was, because, after all, someone had to provide for him and take care of him, and a welfare mentality could very easily be in his mind. Was this a man who had any get-up-and-go? Was this a man who, if Jesus healed him, would have the mental capacity and drive to pick up life and make a success of it?

Brethren, I have known of people who have had miraculous healings—and then left the church. Apparently they counted the healing as nothing.

It was not dumb at all for Jesus to say, "Do you want to be made whole? Do you really want to be made whole? Do you realize that if I heal you, you are going to have to get up and work?" If Jesus healed him, he would then have to shoulder the burdens of living, of earning a living, maybe supporting a family. He would not have anyone feeling sorry for him anymore.

Ask yourself that question. Do you really want to be healed, or is it just a wishful desire to simply be better than you are—to be a little bit better off, to be a little more

comfortable. The way God works, with blessings come responsibility. If God heals you, He expects you to make good use of that healing in glorifying Him. Is it possible that in the heart of your heart, if God heals you, that you are really afraid of the costs that are going to come on you, of the responsibilities that you are now going to have to bear? It is a possibility.

Is your heart really in it, or do you just want something to consume on your own lusts, just to be better off—just to get rid of the pain? It is natural to want to get rid of the pain, and that is certainly a desire that would be normal and natural—to get rid of the discomfort. But maybe we better examine the other things as well and recognize that with more understanding, with the blessing, comes the responsibility of bearing the burdens of a healthy body.

He found out very quickly that this man was not vague about his desire. Jesus perceived that the man really did want to get up and bear the responsibilities of life—that he was no basket case, despite the fact that he had been like that for 38 years. This man's mind was still alive and alert and active, and this man wanted to be a family man, a working man. He wanted to get up and do things. Of course, Jesus responded to that intense desire immediately.

The next thing we have to consider here is this: the way that Jesus healed him was to give him a command. He said, "Rise, take up your bed, and walk." The man could have said, "Man, I have been trying that for 38 years—and it has not worked yet! What a dumb thing to tell me." **Christ gave him something that was impossible to do**—unless he really believed.

Do you get discouraged because you get anointed, and it seems as though what you are afflicted with has impossibilities spelled all over it? If this man had looked at the physical circumstances, if this man said, "I have no legs; my knees have been paralyzed in this position for this many years. Man, that is impossible," it would have been impossible. But he did not look at the around and the about. He was not living, at least at this point, by sight. So he **did** the impossible.

Let us examine this, again, a little bit closer. This healing occurred as a result of a cooperative effort between God and the man—God, in the person of Christ, and a man of faith. The elements were these: he shows by his reaction that there was intensity of desire to accomplish this. His faith was intense. It was not intellectual belief. It was not platonic. He was not just saying, "Yeah, I believe that." He was not just, "Cool, man." In his heart of hearts, he really believed it. There was an intense desire there.

The second thing was that there was determination to carry through on the command. If he had not, by his mind, set his **will** to respond to that command, nothing would have happened. But because that man **commanded** his muscles and his bones to begin to move, God responded with the power of His Spirit. If it had been just the man's will, nothing would have happened. But it was the cooperative effort that did it.

The reason I went through this in such detail is because this is how to overcome—a very short plan for success: Intensity of desire—a faith—that was based on believing in Christ and His Word. It was not a passing fancy. He set his will for a determined effort to carry out His command, and then God backed him up with the power of His Spirit.

Hang on to that phrase—"and that day was the Sabbath"—because that really becomes a major part of the next section:

John 5:10-18 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

I think that most of us would look at the Jews with our faces—our heads, our eyebrows—somewhat askance because they should have rejoiced that a man who had been like this for 38 years was suddenly healed and able to be a contributing member of the society. But instead they *accused*—accused Him of breaking the Sabbath.

The Jews had 39 different classifications of work that they used in interpreting whether or not what was done on the Sabbath was breaking the Sabbath. One of these was "burden bearing." It had some Scriptural basis:

Jeremiah 17:19-25 Thus the Lord said to me: "Go and stand in the gate of

John (Part 9) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the children of the people, by which the kings of Judah come in and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; and say to them, 'Hear the word of the Lord, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. Thus says the Lord: "Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction. "And it shall be, if you heed Me carefully," says the Lord, "to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work in it, then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, accompanied by the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever."

Jeremiah 17:27 "But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."

Go back a little further to the book of Nehemiah. Even though Nehemiah appears before Jeremiah in the order of the books, it is actually later chronologically.

Nehemiah 13:15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions.

If you connect this with Jeremiah 17, you will understand that the bearing of the burdens on the Sabbath that God complained about in Jeremiah 17 did not have to do with the ordinary bearing of something, but rather it had to do with bearing the burdens that had to do with business transactions.

Nehemiah 13:16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

This would equate, in a way, to us purchasing common, ordinary, mundane foods—that is, doing the ordinary shopping—on the Sabbath day.

Nehemiah 13:17-18 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

God gave the warning through Jeremiah. That was roughly sometime around the 600s BC—probably somewhat before that: 610, 620 BC. When the Babylonians came, the first wave of their army went through Judea in 604. There was another one I believe in 592-594, and then again in 586-585 they came again, and this time they captured Jerusalem and they burned the Temple.

In Nehemiah, which took place within about 100 years, the Jews had come back from their captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah, and here they were getting involved in the same thing that Nehemiah said took them into their captivity. They were again conducting business on the Sabbath day. You read in Ezekiel, who lived at the same time as Jeremiah, that the reasons the children of Israel went into captivity were two, primarily: idolatry and Sabbath-breaking. Basically what they were doing was breaking the first four commandments and dishonoring God in an effort to do their own thing.

So in Nehemiah, he is showing them that they are getting involved in the same thing. During this period of time, the people under Ezra and Nehemiah began a program of education and strict government to try to enforce the law of God—trying to make it impossible for people to sin. It is likely that Ezra and Nehemiah began things, but those generations that came along later went far beyond what Ezra and Nehemiah ever intended. This grew out into the Pharisees and the Sadducees, but primarily the Pharisees, who were the strictest sect of the Jews.

In an effort to keep people from sinning, and thus keeping the Jews from going into captivity once again, they came up with all kinds of regulations. As I mentioned before, for the Sabbath alone they had 39 classifications of what was work. Furthermore, these 39 classifications were divided into about 1500 regulations on how to keep the Sabbath.

What we are concerned about here in John 5 is the burden-bearing. Incidentally, a Jew, on the Sabbath, would be bearing a burden (according to their law) if he carried a

sewing needle in his clothes. It did not have to be in his hand—just if it were pinned to his clothing, that was considered "work." The reasoning was that a needle was an instrument of labor—you are not supposed to work on the Sabbath, so why even carry the needle? The idea was that if you carried that needle that showed the intent of your heart—that you were carrying it just in case you had to do some work on the Sabbath.

They even argued about whether it was lawful for a person who only had one leg—his other leg was supported by a wooden leg, but since it was not really attached to the body that was bearing a burden on the Sabbath day—to have his wooden leg on. It even goes further than that. They argued over whether or not a person could have a false tooth in on the Sabbath day, because it was not a natural part of the body (like the artificial leg), and since it was false, it really did not belong in there, and so it was "bearing a burden" on the Sabbath day.

These things are humorous to us, but these people were sincerely desirous. Their intent was good and evil at the same time—it had terrible results. But their desire was to try to keep the law. But it shows what happens when people, not led by the Spirit of God, allow their minds to reason on that side of the proper keeping of the commandments. So they went *way* into the ditch on the right—and that was wrong.

This man who was healed was not trying to accuse Jesus of something that was evil. He was really just trying to explain, "A wonderful thing just happened to me!" He was not trying to get Jesus in hot water at all.

Let us pick this up in verse 16, because Jesus begins His defense—and it is really interesting. This was something that I discovered today. At least it came to my mind today. I may have thought of it before, but it exploded on my mind today, and I think it is very interesting.

John 5:16-17 For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them. . .

It could actually be translated, "He defended Himself by saying." That is why I said that He began to make His defense.

John 5:17 . . . "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

Let us change the wording there a bit. This is not wrong—just another way of saying it. The Greek supports this in every way. "My Father never ceases working." I just changed that to give you a little different approach. That is all. If He has been working until now, He is always working. "My Father never ceases work, and I am always at work."

Now, wait a minute. This is His defense for keeping the Sabbath? The command says, "In it, you shall do no work." But His defense is, "My Father never ceases working, and neither do I." Very interesting.

This is His defense when they accuse Him of working on the Sabbath. Are you allowed to work on the Sabbath? We are sons of God. His defense is, "I never stop working."

Let us drop that for just a minute and go off on a little bit different angle. Almost everybody that I run into in the church has a complaint. It is a common complaint for us, and that is that our lives seem to be so busy, there is so much to do, that we never have enough time to do anything. There is so much to do that we never have time to do the things we want to do. In other words, we are always having to prioritize, and the things that are higher priorities are the things that are considered to be "work." The lower priorities, which are things that are more pleasurable, are the things that we always have to shove aside. (I am using "always" here in a loose sense.)

Everybody in the Work—everybody who has their heart in the Work—is always very busy. Did you ever wonder why? Why are people who are involved in the Work always so busy? It seems as though they never have time to turn around. It seems as though they are always having to make a decision about what to do and what not to do. There is a reason: God never stops working.

Let us explain that a little further. What is God doing with you and me? He is reproducing Himself in us. It says in I John 3 that the time is going to come when we are going to see Him as He is because we are like Him. We will not only be God, and be like Him in that sense, but we will be His character image as well—even as Christ is the character image of the Father.

God never ceases working. If we are going to be like Him, we too will never cease working. Does that make you sad? You have to think about that a while. You see, by nature we would rather play. We would rather be entertained. Solomon shows us in the book of Ecclesiastes that is nothing but vanity. It is useless. He even goes so far as to tell you that laughter is useless. He goes so far as to tell you that a day of mourning is better than a day of laughter. That does not mean that God is sad. He is just applying values to things. If we can laugh, God can laugh.

But let us get back to this thing about working. Jesus, who was the spitting image of His Father, said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." He said, "I am *always* at work." God recognizes of course that we are physical, and that we need a rest. We cannot always be at work, or we would burn ourselves out. He *can* always be at work, because work to Him is different from what work is to you and me. Work to Him would appear to be, to you and me, effortless as well as ceaseless. If we were able to view Him with our eyes, we would always see Him at work—managing, governing, operating, being involved with His creation, with His work.

He never stops, never gets tired, night and day He goes, goes, goes, goes, goes, and on the Sabbath He does exactly the same thing He does the other six days of the week. How can He get away with it and not break the Sabbath? I will solve that for you in a little bit too, because that is what is being decided here. Jesus is the same—He is a human being—but He is the spitting image of God, and He said, "I never stop working."

What is the work of God? God is love. That means that everything that flows out from Him is done for the well-being of others—for the well-being of His creation. That is why He can work without breaking, as it were, His law—because every act of His is an act of love.

Jesus demonstrated an act of love that the Jews disagreed with, and thought that it was wrong from Him to do, but He is showing that on the Sabbath day it is alright for a person to do the works of God. Jesus was *always* doing the works of God. We have not gotten to that place yet, where we are always doing the works of God. That is why God tells us in the commandment not to work. That is why it says in Isaiah 58 that on the Sabbath day, do not say your own words, or do not think your own thoughts, but it would be alright on the Sabbath day for you and me to do a great deal of work *doing* the works of God. It is not the expending of energy that God is concerned about, but rather what you are doing and *why* you are doing it.

To me, that is exciting, because it begins to make specific definition of what is right to do on the Sabbath. I do not care how much energy is expended, if you are doing the work of God on the Sabbath it is alright with God. That is why Jesus said, "Look at the priests. They work all day on the Sabbath, and they are blameless—because they are doing the work of God."

You see, all we have to do is to begin to find practical applications of that to do on the Sabbath. Jesus said that on the Sabbath it is good to pull an ox out of the pit. How many oxen have you run into in the pit? You have never run into one yet.

Incidentally, it does not say in the Greek "an ox in the ditch." An ox is not so dumb as to fall in the ditch. An ox would never fall in the ditch. An ox is one of the most sure-footed animals around. But it does say, "an ox in the pit." "The pit," incidentally, was a cistern, and the cisterns were usually covered, and the ox might stumble into the cistern because it could not discern the difference between the solid ground and the top of the cistern, and so they would fall in every once in a while. They do not fall into ditches. But even in Judea, how often would an ox fall into a pit? Almost never. Maybe once in a lifetime it would happen. Now, if a 2,000-pound ox fell in a pit, do you not think that it would take a great deal of effort to get that ox out of the pit? I mean, they would call the big tow truck with the winches and everything else to get that thing out. It would be a time-consuming and energy-devouring operation.

In like manner, if you find yourself involved on the Sabbath day in what is a real act of mercy—you know, when somebody is in a difficult situation—God does not care how much work you have to do. It is the mercy that is important.

What about ordinary shopping? Is that doing the work of God? Absolutely not. That ought to be taken care of—including things like putting the gas in your automobile. That is ordinary shopping. If you have to stop for gas on the Sabbath day, it ought to be because something that was unavoidable occurred on the other days that made it absolutely impossible for you to avoid buying it on the Sabbath. That is what He sent Judah into captivity for. They were buying and selling ordinary things on the Sabbath day. That is not the work of God. You begin to give definition to what is right to do on the Sabbath.

A lot of times people get together on the Sabbath and they decide what they are going to do after the Sabbath is over. Brethren, that is breaking the Sabbath. That is not doing the work of God. Everybody gets together—"Hey, let's go out to such-and-such a restaurant. After the Sabbath is over, we will have a good time." Where does that fit in to the work of God? That planning should have been done on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, so that when Sabbath rolls around you do not have to speak your own words.

On the other hand, if on the Sabbath day you happen to come across a family that maybe has not had a good meal in a good while, or they have been unable to go out because their money situation is really tight, and it would really be relieving a burden for you to take them out on the Sabbath day to a restaurant and have a little meal together and fellowship together, that begins to change the complexion. You are relieving somebody's burden. In a sense, you are pulling an ox out of a pit. You are encouraging

this person. "Hey, somebody loves me. Somebody is interested in me. Somebody is concerned about me." Do that kind of thing for a widow or a widower who does not have a family anymore, and you get to share that family experience with them. Now you are relieving somebody's burden. It is a real act of love. It is not a party that you have thrown together on the Sabbath day.

That is why God never ceases working—because He is *always* doing good, seven days a week. So on the Sabbath He does not have to stop because He *is* love, and His works just continue right on through it.

When He said this, they knew immediately that He was equating Himself with God. That was the only conclusion they could reach. He said, "I am always at work." They understood that God's work for the benefit of His creation never stops. They understood that.

John 5:18 Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath [He did not break the Sabbath. He broke *their traditions* about the Sabbath.], but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

I want to go back and pick something up.

John 5:14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

This makes it very clear that sin results in sickness. It is also obvious that this man contributed to his problem. There is a case coming up later in John 9 where the person is blind through no fault of his own. In fact, Jesus made it clear that nobody sinned in that case. But in this case, it shows here that the person's sin resulted in sickness.

In Galatians 5, Paul made a statement that applies in principle here:

Galatians 5:13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty. . .

Liberty is the freedom to make choices, and part of the instruction that we are receiving in this particular case is that sickness is the result of sin which means that we have made the wrong choices. Previously, we have made these choices largely in ignorance.

John (Part 9) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

We have done it because it is the way Mom and Dad raised us up. It is things that we learned from the world, and we have just accepted these things that have come to us, and we have been ignorant of much of the truth regarding the cause of sickness.

What we have to be careful of is we have to make every effort we possibly can to avoid sinning that will bring on sickness. That is what the rest of this verse is about.

Galatians 5:13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Or, as I think the King James says, "as an occasion for the flesh"—the things of the mind that will tend to produce sickness and break down the strength and resistance of the body. With this liberty comes responsibility. We do not want to get to the place where we are taking lightly the sacrifice of Christ in getting anointed without making effort to clean up our act. With that very clear instruction from Jesus Christ—that sickness is a result of sin—He expects us then to avoid sickness by changing the things that would tend to make us sick.

We will stop right there, and pick it up in verse 19 the next time.