Make a Right Judgment

John 7:1-24

Key Verse:7:24 “Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.”

Jesus said in John 6:27, “*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures eternal life…*” In this verse Jesus taught us that a man is both body and soul, so we must not neglect the work for our salvation and for salvation of the world. But physically we are too busy and too tired to be concerned about our soul and work for God’s will. Jesus continued in 6:63, “*The Spirit gives life and flesh counts for nothing*…” All our efforts and achievements on this earth will perish, spoil, and fade away. But our labor for the Lord and for his kingdom will not disappear, but last forever. This is the reason why Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 to his disciples who worried about what to eat and what to wear, “*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”* Jesus is the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to him will never go hungry and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty. Those who believe in Jesus that he died for our sins and rose again from the dead will be saved and have crossed over from death to life. Amen!

In today’s passage Jesus defends his ministry from the accusations of the Jewish leaders. In his defense Jesus teaches us how to live a life which pleases God and follows his will. Especially he teaches us how to make a right judgment as Christians.

First, my time is not yet here. (1-13) Look at verses 1-5. “***After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him. But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, Jesus’ brothers said to him, “Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.” For even his own brothers did not believe in him.***” Jesus healed a man who had been invalid for 38 years. Jesus fed five thousand with five loaves and two fish. The more the popularity of Jesus rose, the more his safety was in danger. Jesus stayed in Galilee for a while because it was not the right time for him to visit Jerusalem. But his brothers who didn’t have faith in Jesus urged him to go to Jerusalem to gain more popularity through his miracles. They wanted some benefit and glory through Jesus as family members.

How did Jesus answer them? Jesus said in verses 6-9. “***Therefore Jesus told them, “My time is not yet here; for you any time will do. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that it works as evil. You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come.” After he had said this he stayed in Galilee.***” In John’s gospel Jesus mentioned a few times about his time or his hour. In John 2:4 Jesus said to Mary, “*My hour has not yet come*.” And in John 17:1 Jesus said, “…*Father, the hour has come*…” In these verses the hour which Jesus mentions was the hour of his suffering and crucifixion. In Greek ‘hour’ is *hora.*  But the time Jesus mentioned in John 7:6-7 is *kairos* in Greek, which is different from *hora*. This indicates that the time Jesus mentioned here is not the hour for his crucifixion, but the time for visit Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacle. It was around 6 months away from the Passover when Jesus would be crucified. Jesus did not want to visit Jerusalem with his brothers who sought for human glory through him. So he stayed in Galilee. **However, after his brothers had left for the festival, he went also, not publicly, but in secret**. (10)

Here we learn that Jesus did not seek his personal glory, but lived for the glory of God. He did not follow his will, but the Father’s will. It was not easy for him to deny his brother’s request. As his brothers said, there is no public figure who acts in secret. Politicians and celebrities do their best to show themselves to the world at the maximum degree. It could be a good opportunity for Jesus to gain more disciples if he performs miracles in Jerusalem. It was the crowded Festival of Tabernacle. But Jesus did not seek his personal glory. Instead, he followed God’s will. It is not easy for us to deny our will in order to obey God’s will. We like recognition and praise from others. If we don’t get proper recognition and praise, we get upset and become emotionally unstable. Jesus knew how to be self-controlled to fulfill God’s will. He knew how to sacrifice his personal glory for the glory of God.

Look at verses 11-13. “***Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, “Where is he?” Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, “He is a good man.” Others replied, “No, he deceives the people.”But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders***.” People s’ opinion about Jesus was divided. Some talked about Jesus positively while others did it negatively. Whether people said about him good or bad, Jesus was not swayed by their opinions. He lived before God the Father. His desire was to please God, not please himself or people. We are sensitive to other’s opinions about ourselves. Some may say good things about us while others may say bad things about us. Whether they say good or bad, we must live before God as Jesus did. We seek God’s praise and his recognition rather than people’s praise and popularity. These days there are many people who end their lives in tragedy when their sins are exposed in public. They can’t bear the humiliation and shame when they are criticized in public. This is wrong! We must repent of our sins and receive the forgiveness of sin. When our sins are exposed in public, it is the time for us to be forgiven and to start new life in Christ. The title of our Easter Conference is the fruit of repentance. We’ll study how to confess our sins and be forgiven for new life with Christ. We don’t have to hesitate in confessing our sins. We don’t have to seek other’s opinions. We all stand before God and become honest to be forgiven. We will experience true freedom and real joy which comes from the forgiveness of sin. Amen.

Second, make a right judgment (14-24) The Festival of Tabernacle was one of the three major festivals along with the Festival of Unleavened Bread and the Festival of Weeks. The Festival of Tabernacle was a joyous festival because there were special events related to the festival such as the water-drawing rite and lamp-lighting rite. During the festival the Jews built makeshift structures of light branches and leaves to live in for a week. Some built it on their flat roofs or in their open courtyard. They remembered God and gave thanks to him who had been with their ancestors for 40 years in the desert. According to Moses’ law every male in Israel had to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival.

***Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews there were amazed and asked, “How did this man get such learning without having been taught?”*** (14,15) During the festival people were allowed to teach in the temple courts. People were amazed by Jesus’ teaching because it had authority and power. They wondered how Jesus who came from Galilee had such wisdom and knowledge. How did Jesus answer them? Look at verses 16-18. “***Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Whoever speaks on their own do so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him***.” Jesus said that his teaching came from God the Father. He also told them that those who do the will of God know that his teaching came from God the Father and that he seeks the glory of God, not his personal glory. Those who seek their personal glory do not speak truth because they had the wrong motivation in their teachings. But Jesus taught the truth because he sought only the glory of God.

What is the will of God which Jesus mentioned here? According John 6:38-40, the will of God is to save those whom God sent. In a word the will of God is to love God and to save his people. Those who love God and save his people understand where Jesus’ teachings came from, what he taught, and how they had to respond to his teaching. In the same way those who love God and teach God’s words know how to please God and how to fulfill the will of God. Their goal and life purpose is to please God and to glorify his name. Because they live for God and before God, they are not swayed by people’s opinion and persecution. They live by faith, not by sight. They are men of truth. Those who please God and obey his will are good workers in God’s kingdom. They are always positive and active in doing the work of God. They give thanks to God in all circumstances because they believe that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. They become spiritually strong and awake, and their foundation is solid because their hope is in the kingdom of God, not on this earth. I pray that we all may become men and women of truth who do the will of God; love God and save his people.

In verses 19-24 Jesus defends his ministry from the accusation of the Jewish leaders. Jesus healed a paralytic who had been invalid for 38 years on the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders accused Jesus saying that Jesus had violated the Sabbath law by healing the man on the Sabbath. How did Jesus defend himself and reveal their spiritual ignorance? Look at verse 19. ***“Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?”*** At first Jesus counter-accused the Jewish leaders because they violated Moses’ law by trying to kill Jesus. The sixth Commandment says, “*You shall not murder*.” (Ex 20:13) Yet the Jewish leaders tried to kill Jesus. The Jewish leaders spoke cursed words to Jesus because they were evil. In Matthew 12:22-37 Jesus rebuked the Pharisees who had criticized the work of Jesus by saying that Jesus had healed a blind and mute man by the power of demons. Jesus said to them, “*You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned*.” (Mt 12:34-37) Jesus rebuked the evil intention of the Jewish leaders who had accused him.

In verses 21-24 Jesus pointed out their serious violation of the law besides of their attempt to kill Jesus. The Jewish leaders violated the spirit of the law, which is love. Look at verses 21-23. “***Jesus said to them, “I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man’s whole body on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly***.” Circumcision is an operation as the sign of the covenant of God’s people by removing a part of flesh from a newborn baby boy. The Jews circumcised their baby boys on the eighth day even though it was on the Sabbath. They thought that circumcision on the Sabbath was permitted because they thought that they fulfilled their duties as their parents. According to their logic, Jesus’ healing the sick on the Sabbath should be permitted because he did the will of God. He fulfilled his duty as the Messiah. This is the same token as the priests in the temple worked in on the Sabbath, but he did not violate the Sabbath law. If their circumcision on the Sabbath was not a violation of the law, how could Jesus’ healing the man on the Sabbath be the violation of the Sabbath law?

Then Jesus made a final statement. “*Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly (make a right judgment*).” The Jews accused Jesus of being a law breaker according to their superficial criteria. They did not read Jesus’ inner intention and compassion on the invalid man. What they missed in their accusation was the ignorance of God’s will and the spirit of the law which is love. God’s will is to save sinners and the spirit of the law is love. Jesus fulfilled God’s will and satisfied the spirit of the law by healing the sick on the Sabbath. What was Jesus’ answer when he was asked about the greatest commandment? He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mk 12:29-31) Loving and saving is the fulfillment God’s law and his will.

It is not easy for us to make a right judgment. This is because we are not perfect and our criteria of judgment are self-centered. Without understanding the motivation and purpose behind others’ words and actions, our partial and self-centered judgment brings conflict and division. People judge others by mere outward appearances and visible outcome. But God looks at our hearts and judges our motivation and purpose. Jesus healed the invalid man out of his compassion. He wanted to give him new life by healing the man. But the Jewish leaders saw the healing with the view of their legalistic criteria, not knowing Jesus’ compassion for one lost soul. We must pray that God may help us to make the right judgment in all things. Instead of finding sawdust in other’s eyes, we must see the plank in our own eyes first. Instead of criticizing others we must examine ourselves to see if we deserve to judge others or not. Instead of rejecting others’ opinions, we must do our best to understand their situation and motivation behind their opinion.

In order to make a right judgment we must be led by the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit provides us with wisdom and understanding so that we can judge correctly and do the will of God. I pray that we may stop judging others by mere appearances, but make right judgments by the help of the Holy Spirit. Let us repent of our sins and be forgiven. Let us receive Jesus who died for our sins and obey his command; to love one another. Thank you Jesus for your death on the cross and resurrection from the dead! Help us to come to you and love you and do your will. Amen.