

IF ANYONE CHOOSES TO DO GOD'S WILL...

John 7:1-24

Key Verse 7:17

If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

First, "The right time for me has not yet come" (1-9). There were two main mission fields: Judea in south and Galilee in north, and between them was Samaria. Jesus traveled a lot, serving these two main mission fields diligently. Once he came to Jerusalem, he stayed there for a while and served God's work powerfully. Then, when persecution arose, he withdrew to Galilee and served the Galilean ministry. So far, in John chapter 6, we studied about his Galilean ministry – feeding the five thousand people with five loaves of barley bread and two fish, and his miracle of walking on the water, and his teaching about the bread of life. He purposely stayed away from Judea for a while because the Jews in Jerusalem were waiting to take his life. Look at verses 2 through 5. When the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles 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.

According to the Jewish calendar, the Feast of Tabernacles rested on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, which was equivalent to September or October in our time. This year 2018, the Feast of Tabernacles rests on Sep. 24-30. It was one of the three main feasts, in which all the Israelites throughout the world should appear before the Lord in Jerusalem. The word, "tabernacle" means, simply, "tent." God commanded them to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, saying, "Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." (Lev 23:42,43) They were slaves in Egypt for a long time, but God delivered them from the grip of Pharaoh, and set them free as children of God; after Exodus, as God's people, they lived in booths, I mean, tents, not in houses in Egypt any more. They lived in booths, and that distinguished the Israel people from the people of the world. Those who live in booths show that they are pilgrims, travelers. In the booths where all kinds of mundane things did not exist, the Israel people had a chance to think about God's salvation grace and renew their hearts' love for Him. Since the Feast was right after harvesting the crops of the land in the fall season, it was the most joyful feast in Israel, similar to Thanksgiving Day in America. The Jewish historian Josephus said that the Feast of Tabernacles was the most solemn and great Feast. Children must have been really excited as they built booths with branches and decorated them – to them, it was simply a sleep over! Mothers were busy to prepare foods, and

fathers were also busy to build booths with their children. As God commanded, "Rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days," everyone rejoiced.

Now Jesus' brothers – James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (Mt 13:55) - advised him to go to Jerusalem and perform miracles in front of all those people there so that he would quickly gain great fame. Jesus worked hard, teaching and preaching day and night, forming his own group with disciples and living with them and performing many miracles. Jesus was serving the work of God wholeheartedly. But his brothers thought that Jesus was doing all these because he had some hidden motive; they thought that Jesus wanted to be a public figure like celebrities or politicians. Even though they lived together with Jesus, they didn't know why he was doing all these, and what he pursued and what he wanted; they even didn't know who he was.

What was Jesus' reply? Look at verses 6 through 9. Let's read these verses together:

⁶Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. ⁸You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." ⁹Having said this, he stayed in Galilee.

Jesus says, "The right time for me has not yet come." "My time," Jesus' time is one very important theme in John's gospel. Jesus' time refers to the time when he can reveal the glory of God effectively. When is your time? Maybe, when we win the California Lotto, or get a dream job at Google or Apple, or marrying a dream spouse, we say, "Now is my time." But Jesus' time is when he can reveal the glory of God. This shows us Jesus' complete dedication to God very well. His first prayer topic was "Hallowed be God's name." His second prayer topic was "God's kingdom come." And his third prayer topic was, "God's will be done." He pursued God's glory; he lived for it and eventually, died for it. Again, when is your time? I pray that we all may be able to say, "My time is when God's glory can be revealed very well."

Jesus said of his brothers, "For you any time is right." Their purpose was to please themselves; they lived for themselves. Then, whenever they wanted, it was their time. Whenever they wanted to sleep, it was their time; whenever they wanted to eat, it was their time. At that time, they were like Esau, Jacob's brother, who married whomever he wanted, and ate whenever he wanted – he was a source of grief to his parents. But when Jesus wanted to reveal the glory of God, when he wanted to please God, he did not do whatever or whenever he wanted. Instead, he waited for the right chance to come, when everything was well prepared for him to work and reveal the glory of God. Jesus was a free man, having the right and freedom to do whatever he wanted, but he used his freedom and power to reveal the glory of God. When he wanted to reveal the

glory of God, he denied his desires and waited for God's time to come. When he tried to please God, he was misunderstood by his brothers and hated by the world. But, he did not care because what he wanted was to please God.

In verse 7, Jesus said to his brothers, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil." The world could not hate Jesus' brothers, because whatever the world suggested desirable, they welcomed it and pursued it. When the world suggested fame and popularity, they welcomed it and pursued it; when the world suggested that money was something desirable, they welcomed it and pursued it. The world and the brothers shared the same value system, same perspectives, same hopes, same desires, and same lifestyles. Simply, the world and the brothers were in the same team. So, the world could not hate them, but loved them. But when the world suggested Jesus that money, or fame or popularity was something valuable, he testified that it was evil to tempt people with such things. He did not love them, or value them; instead, he simply testified that what the world did, how the world tempted people with such things, was evil. As a result, the world hated him.

In the book, titled "Pilgrim's Progress" written by Pastor John Bunyan, the Pilgrims, named, Christian and his friend Faithful came to the city, called, "Vanity Fair." People in this city were struggling hard to sell their products even at a hot bargain price. Their hot selling products were "husbands, wives, pleasures, fame, titles, positions, money, lies, adultery, prostitution, drunkenness, etc., and so forth." As soon as the pilgrims, Christian and Faithful came into the city, all the merchants brought their goods and offered them deals that could not be turned down. But the pilgrims blocked their ears and shouted, "Let my eyes turn from these vain things." The pilgrims did not cheapen themselves. They were not sold even at the offer of all the best goods in the city. They were following the example of their Master. They said in the book, "The city invited him with a most irresistible temptation. But, our Lord didn't accept it. He didn't lose his honor, nor did he lay down one red cent!!" Then, the people in the city were upset, seized them and tried to kill both of them. Then, as a result, Faithful suffered martyrdom in that city.

If we are like the brothers of Jesus, loving the things of this world, sharing the same value system, hope and desires with the world, the world cannot hate us. If we pursue what the world offers, such as husbands or wives – marriage dreams, fame or honor, or luxury and convenience, or pleasures, or just a happy family life, the world will welcome us; people around us such as our parents and siblings, our relatives and friends, will cheer us on to go and run harder for a greater success in the world. We will be loved by the world. But we will neither be able to follow Jesus, nor be loved by God. Jesus testified that tempting people to pursue those things instead of God is evil; pursuing such things is evil. If we are like Jesus that instead of giving into such offers and desires of the world, we testify that what it does is evil, we will be hated by

the world - our parents, even Christian parents will not understand us, our siblings will hate us, and many people at work or at school say that we are strange. We will be hated by the world. There are only two ways of life - either we are loved by the world by loving what it offers, or we are loved by God by testifying that what the world does is evil. What is your choice?

Second, "If anyone chooses to do God's will,..." (10-24). Apparently, Jesus' brothers left for Jerusalem for the Feast, but Jesus stayed in Galilee. But later, as he waited, God's time came that Jesus also went up to Jerusalem secretly. Verses 10 through 13 show us the oppressive atmosphere in Jerusalem very well. Now, Jerusalem was so crowded with people who were coming to keep the Feast of Tabernacles from the entire world. The people's whole concern was about Jesus, but no one could say anything publicly about him for the fear of the Jews. The authorities were watching for Jesus, to kill him. It was not easy for Jesus to do the work of God in such oppressive environment. But around the middle of the Feast, when the authorities concluded that Jesus would not appear in that Feast, Jesus showed himself up in the temple courts publicly and began to teach. Before the authorities noticed what he was doing, a large audience was formed around him due to his teaching. And the religious leaders could not do anything at random since the majority of the people were listening his teaching attentively. Jesus indeed was wise and brave. But that was just the beginning of his spiritual battle.

What was the Jews' response to his teaching? Verse 15 shows that they were indeed amazed at his teaching. But instead of accepting him as God's messenger, they said, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" Jesus didn't go to the Pharisee school; he didn't receive training to be a teacher of the law either; he had no graduation certificate from the Jerusalem seminary school. We are also familiar with this kind of response. After studying the Bible with us, many students are so amazed at our divine understanding of God's word. So, they wonder: Where did you get such understanding of the Bible? Some students ask us, "Please, tell me the books you read so that I can read them and have such knowledge."

What was Jesus' response? Look at verses 16 and 17. Let's read these verses together:

¹⁶Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. ¹⁷If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."

"My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." Jesus' teaching was from God. It did not mean that Jesus said exactly what God had dictated him word by word - Jesus used his own language, understanding and expressions. But what he taught was completely in line with the word of God in the Bible, showing God's will and purpose, revealing God's plan and desire.

Jesus loved God and enjoyed fellowship with God; thus, he knew God's person - how loving, compassionate, and patient God was. With this, when he came to the Bible, he could see what God was really talking about - what God wanted, and what people should do and how they must repent and obey God absolutely. So, he served God's will by preaching God's message diligently. Indeed, Jesus' teaching was not his own, but it came from God - the origin of Jesus' teaching, or the origin of Jesus' understanding, value system and life's purpose, was from God. His message was from God. When people wondered about the origin of his teaching, as the one sent by God, Jesus positively defended that his teaching was not his own, but it was from God. This way, he upheld the authenticity of his teaching as God's words. Since it was from God, it was absolute, and they must obey it whether they liked it or not.

As we serve God's work, we too come to have the same kind of challenge. Some people, when what we teach is not what they want to hear, belittle it, saying, "It is your own interpretation." When our teaching is our own, then, it does not mean anything. It is just one's own understanding or interpretation - nothing but suggestion. But we do not teach our own theology, or our own ideas, but we just show them what God says in the Bible. When we reveal what God says in each Bible study, then, it is no longer our own teaching, but the word of God, which people must accept and obey. That's why, in serving God's work, we don't struggle to read many commentaries and suggest seemingly the best ones to our students; we don't struggle to check out the latest ideas online either. Instead, we wrestle with the word of God, meditating on it deeply and writing a deep testimony so that we can grasp God's message buried in each passage. Jesus said to them, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." How Jesus wished that they might accept his teaching!

Jesus says, "17If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." Here, Jesus shows us how we can tell whether someone's teaching is from God or that person speaks on his own. When you reveal God's message buried in each passage, and if any person says, "It is your own interpretation," then, in Jesus' eyes that person says so because he has no heart's decision to do God's will. But there are people who want to do God's work, but do not know what and how and thereby, waiting for God's guidance. When God's word is revealed to them through our Bible studies, these people recognize that God is reaching to them and showing them what He wants them to do. After Bible study, they are overjoyed, calling their mom, saying, "Mom, guess what? I had the most wonderful Bible study ever." Or after Bible study, so touched that God was reaching to them, or so convicted that they have not lived for God really, they cry and cry for many days until the next Bible study. These people joyfully accept God's words and dedicate themselves to God's work - they are blessed people. As servants of God, if you have revealed to people what God is talking about in each passage, then it is up to them whether they respond to God's word or not. Those who have a heart's decision to do God's will rejoice, seeing

and accepting God's will for them. But those who have no heart's desire to dedicate themselves to God, but just want to enjoy Christian culture, or those who just want to have a free ticket to heaven make excuses. And God will judge each person according to what he or she has done: To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. (Rm 2:7-8) According to what you pursue, God will judge you.

"If anyone chooses to do God's will,..." With this statement, Jesus encourages us to make our heart's determination utmost clear today, to obey and do God's will. When our hearts are not determined, then we are like a ship tossed back and forth by all kinds of winds and waves; as the situation changes, our hearts are in constant turmoil, and fear, anxiety, and worry fills our hearts – such a person does not know where he or she is going; such people cannot expect to get anything good from God. We remember David's song of praise to God in Psalm 57. "My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples." He wrote this psalm while he had fled from Saul into a cave. While his enemy was looking for his life, while he was holding his breath in the dark cave, he meditated on God's love for him, and made his heart's determination utmost clear that he would sing and praise the Lord even if he would die. He was happy; his heart was blossoming with the joy of God. Everything became clear – he knew what he should do, that was to love God and praise God. In that situation, he made his heart's determination clear to praise God, and he would not change any more no matter what situation he might be in. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will not remain in confusion any longer; he will not be wondering any longer, saying, "What shall I do?" Instead, he comes to see everything clearly; he comes to have complete confidence in God's love and good will for him. He hears God's instruction and sees God's guidance all the time. He is a blessed man. "If anyone chooses to do God's will," he is a blessed man.

Look at verse 18. Let's read this verse together:

He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.

If anyone works for himself, then, even preaching God's words, or saying good words is not good; even saying, "God loves you," is not good – simply, that person is using God's name, God's words for his own purpose; so, whatever he does, whatever he says is wrong. We must not live for ourselves. But if we live for God, then, whatever we do and whatever we say is right; there is nothing false about us. Maybe, we rebuke people, using even some foul language,

saying, "You brood of vipers." Maybe, we comfort people, showing long patience. In all these, we are men and women of truth, nothing false about us. This was actually Jesus' defense statement about himself as God's servant, as the one who lived and spoke for the honor of God who sent him. We all want to be men and women of truth, nothing false about us - such are children of God; such are servants of God. Then, we must speak and live for God alone as God's servants. Today, we need to check out whether we live for ourselves or for God. Do I speak on my own, or do I speak for the honor of God who sent me?

After saying these, Jesus exposed their murderous motives and anger. It seemed that the Jews were God-loving and law-keeping outwardly, but actually, their hearts were filled with murderous desires and anger. At that time, they were not keeping the laws at all, despite their law-keeping life.

Look at verse 20. When the Jews heard Jesus' words that exposed their murderous desire, they responded by using a foul language, saying, "You are demon-possessed. Who is trying to kill you?" The conflict between Jesus and the Jews became sharper than ever. The beginning of this conflict between Jesus and the Jews was the healing of the invalid man for 38 year on the Sabbath. Because Jesus healed the invalid on the Sabbath, the Jews condemned him as a law breaker. Jesus was very popular; so many people followed him, and then, Jesus violated their Sabbath law - his influence was great, and the Jews felt threatened; it seemed that Jesus was going to destroy their tradition. So, they hated him and wanted to kill him. That's the result of the betrayal of the former invalid man. Verses 21 through 24 are Jesus' defense statements about their accusations. Jesus never said that it was okay to violate the Sabbath law, but now he showed them that his case of healing the invalid on the Sabbath was okay. According to the Bible, man should not work on the Sabbath, but there was an exception. Circumcision is a minor surgery. Such a surgery should not be done on the Sabbath. But in order to keep Moses' law about circumcision, if the day of circumcision for a boy happened to fall on the Sabbath, they performed the surgery even though it was the Sabbath, and it was not considered as violation. Jesus' point is this: In order to clean a part of the body, this surgery was done on the Sabbath, and it was not regarded as violating the Sabbath law. Then, what about healing the whole man on the Sabbath, not even through performing a surgery, but through just saying the words, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk"? The Jews should not have accused Jesus as a law-breaker. Nevertheless, they did so continuously because Jesus testified that what they were doing was evil.

One Word: If Anyone Chooses To Do God's Will...