

4. Verse 17 captures Jesus' response to the Jews who confronted Him with breaking the Sabbath. His response, in turn, only heightened their indignation, for He claimed His actions constituted His faithfulness to His Father. From the Jews' vantage point, Jesus was adding blasphemy to His Sabbath-breaking, and a most grievous blasphemy at that: It wasn't just that He was making Himself equal with God; He was effectively accusing the Law-Giver of violating His own law. For Jesus was asserting, not that His own actions accorded with God's work and were pleasing to Him, but that His actions were *themselves* God's actions. To see Him at work was to see His Father at work. If there were any doubt that He was actually making such an outrageous claim, John's further elaboration dispels it. Jesus had come to do His Father's work, and that work notably consisted in two key components: *judgment* and *renewal* – life out of death (5:19-30).

To those unfamiliar with the scriptural salvation history, it might seem that Jesus was merely drawing upon two helpful examples to support His claims concerning His actions: That is, God is Judge and Life-Giver (a truth the Jews staunchly affirmed), but He has chosen to endow His Son with that authority and entrust Him with that work. This is true so far as it goes, but it misses the larger point Jesus was making – the point which would not have been lost upon His hearers: *By making these assertions about judgment and life out of death, Jesus was claiming that the Day of Yahweh had come.* In turn, this assertion implied two things concerning Himself: He was both *Yahweh returned to Zion* and the *Messiah* through whom Yahweh had promised to accomplish His theophanic work.

- a. The Day of Yahweh is a central theme in the Old Testament scriptures. It is employed in various contexts in relation to various historical circumstances, but it always embodies the same fundamental features: *It involves Yahweh intervening in the world for the sake of judgment and deliverance culminating in renewal and restoration.* The Lord directs His judgment against human unrighteousness, so that it comes upon the covenant people of Israel as well as the nations. But because His retribution has a purgative and restorative purpose, the cleansing and renewal which result from it also extend beyond Israel to the nations (cf. Isaiah 13:1-14:7; Ezekiel 13, 30; Joel 1-4; Amos 5; Obadiah; Zephaniah 1-3; Malachi 4).

The prophets often related this theophanic work (this “day”) to Yahweh's exilic judgment upon Israel and Judah and the nations implicated in it. In that sense, the Day of Yahweh pertained to punishment, desolation, exile and captivity on the one hand and liberation, cleansing, ingathering and restoration on the other. Moreover, the mechanism for accomplishing the latter restorative work was Yahweh's retribution against and destruction of the enslaving and oppressing powers. And most importantly, while the Day of Yahweh had historical referents in the exile and captivity of Israel and Judah, it had its ultimate referent in a future theophanic work of judgment and renewal with cosmic proportions: The climactic manifestation of Yahweh's “day” would see the judgment and conquest of the creational curse and, with it, the liberation (in foundational expression) of the creation from its exile and bondage. In that day Yahweh would become King over all the earth and establish His everlasting kingdom toward the end that the knowledge of Him would at last cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

- b. This is the framework for understanding Jesus' answer to His objectors and how they would have heard and processed His claims. From the time of the fall, God's promise of restoration was the promise of life out of death. Adam and Eve's sin had brought the curse of death – alienation, disintegration and destruction – upon the human race, and so also the creation over which man presided as image-son. Thus God's pledge of a conquering Seed was His oath to overthrow death, hence Adam's designation of Eve as the "mother of all the living" (Genesis 3:1-20). From that point forward, the principle of life out of death was woven into the fabric of the salvation history as its central thesis and promised outcome. So this principle was fundamental to the imagery of the Day of the Lord: Yahweh's retributive intervention would achieve its great and glorious triumph in life's victory over death (Isaiah 24-27; Ezekiel 37; Hosea 11-14; etc.).

Israel's religious leaders knew the scriptural story and were awaiting Yahweh's redemptive intervention; now, here was this man, Jesus of Nazareth, taking up this story and binding it to Himself. Accused of breaking the Sabbath, Jesus insisted that this healing was Yahweh's work; through Him, Israel's God had restored vital wholeness to this man's unresponsive body. But this work was only a shadow and pointer; His Father had sent Him, not to heal men's mortal bodies, but to enliven Adam's race. He'd come as Eve's seed – the Son of Man – to fulfill Yahweh's ancient pledge to bring life out of death (5:19-21).

- c. The Jews understood exactly what Jesus was saying: His Father – Israel's God – had sent Him to accomplish the theophanic work of judgment and renewal promised by the prophets and so establish His kingdom. Jesus' work amounted to Yahweh fulfilling His promise to intervene, judge, liberate, purge and restore. And this claim carried with it an equally clear implication – one which Jesus' pious hearers would have found especially disconcerting: *Rightly discerning the faithfulness of their God and honoring Him in it required that they discern Jesus' person and work and honor Him.* Israel had always honored Yahweh, the one Creator-God – as Judge and Life-Giver with respect to all men; Jesus was here claiming that Yahweh was now exercising these roles in Him (5:22-23). Honoring Israel's covenant Lord and Father now meant honoring His Son.

Given what Jesus was actually claiming about Himself, the charge that He was making Himself equal with God takes on greater significance than is typically recognized. More than merely making a claim to divinity in some abstract sense, Jesus was asserting that He was Israel's covenant God returned to Zion to fulfill His promises concerning Israel and the nations. This means that Jesus' statements about His authority and power to judge and impart life must be understood in *eschatological terms* as Yahweh doing in Jesus what He pledged to do when He at last came into the world to judge His enemies, liberate and regather His captive people, raise up David's fallen tabernacle and establish His everlasting kingdom. This was the work of the prophesied "Day of Yahweh" and Jesus' claims indicated that that day had come. Surely these Jews were aware that Jesus had been proclaiming the inbreaking of the kingdom; now they understood why.

- d. Jesus explained His Sabbath healing in terms of His authority and power respecting judgment and life (5:20-22, 26-27). Viewed through the lens of the eschatological Day of Yahweh, this healing pointed toward the greater healing He'd been sent to accomplish – a healing associated with the twin works of divine judgment and the impartation of life. As noted, the prophetic scriptures indicated that this judgment would fall on the covenant household as well as the nations, but that its goal was purgation, not destruction. Yahweh had pledged to come and judge the world in its unrighteousness, but for the sake of its deliverance and renewal; His judgment would serve His aim of bringing life out of death. Thus Jesus' assertion to Nicodemus: God had not sent Him into the world to condemn it, but with the intent that the world would be saved through Him (3:17).

Judgment had its goal in life, but not precisely as the Jews expected. With the exception of the Sadducees, Israel's leaders and rabbis believed in the resurrection of the dead and they taught this doctrine to the people. At the time of Jesus' birth, Daniel 12:1-2 was a favorite passage among the rabbis and they interpreted it as promising a general resurrection at the end of the age. Importantly, they understood resurrection as *bodily* resurrection, not as a spiritual metaphor or some form of disembodied existence after death. There wasn't a consensus concerning the nature and process of this resurrection, but all of the rabbis agreed that it was to be a physical, bodily resurrection. Yahweh was going to resurrect multitudes at the end of the age (in context, the "many" of Israel); some unto everlasting life; the others to the reproach of everlasting abhorrence.

Jesus was drawing upon this familiar Jewish eschatology, but with a startling twist: The great end-of-the-age resurrection announced to Daniel was to have multiple facets and phases, centered in Him as Israel's Messiah (5:24-29).

- First, the Messiah was to be raised, not at the end of the age along with all of the righteous as the Jews presumed, but independently and in the middle of history. His "end of times" resurrection was actually a *fullness* of the times phenomenon: the climactic end of the present creational order leading into the new creational order having its basis and substance in His resurrection life. (Jesus hadn't yet revealed this truth, but soon would.)
- But secondly, Jesus' resurrection life was going to embrace the creation (specifically, the human race), not in one all-encompassing event as Daniel's prophecy seemed to indicate, but in two stages. This is the subject of the present passage and John's first glance at what is a fundamental New Testament truth – a truth that is central to Paul's understanding of the Christ event and its eschatological significance.

Jesus insisted to the Jews that His Father had sent Him with the authority, power and mandate to judge and give life to the dead. Judgment and life were His *works*, but they also had reference to *Himself*: Both were tied to His person and role as Yahweh's messianic Servant-Redeemer.

Jesus summarized this truth in verse 24 and then went on to explain how it was to play out in the experience of men (vv. 25-29). With respect to His summary statement, Jesus highlighted two critical issues, both of which are key themes in John's gospel: First, Jesus' words were His Father's words, so that hearing Him in truth amounts to believing the Father who sent Him; secondly, the one who so hears and believes has passed out of condemnation and death into life. Embracing Jesus in authentic faith as the Messiah promised in the Scriptures is believing and obeying the One who sent Him; such ones are the "righteous" who partake in the eternal life promised in Daniel's prophecy. But this participation is realized in two stages: one associated with an hour that *now is* (from Jesus' vantage point) (5:25) and the other with an hour that was *yet to come* (5:28). Moreover, the first "hour" pertains only to those who are raised to life, whereas the latter "hour" pertains to all the dead and a resurrection unto condemnation as well as unto life.

Viewed in context – and especially within the larger New Testament treatment of the eschatological life which is bound up in Messiah, it is clear that Jesus was speaking about the two aspects of life out of death: the enlivening of the inner man and the resurrection of the body. The former occurs in connection with faith as a work of the Spirit and so applies solely to believers; the latter bodily resurrection has two functions: On the one hand, it *completes* the renewal of believers and their participation in Jesus' resurrection; on the other, it serves the full condemnation, body and spirit, of those who have refused Christ and His life.

Jesus had healed a man's body on the Sabbath, but as presaging the greater healing He'd come to accomplish. His Father – the God of Israel – had sent Him to heal the world of its disease, disfiguration and dysfunction and deliver the cursed creation to find its sabbath rest in Him. So far from breaking Yahweh's Sabbath, Jesus was fulfilling it in His person and work as Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8) unto the end that the whole creation would enter God's rest in Him. In Him, the creational shalomic rest shattered by the fall was at last being restored in everlasting perfection (cf. Isaiah 65-66; Hosea 2; Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 3, 9:9-10 with Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 3:1-4:11).

And as death was the hallmark of the creation's loss of its intended peace and rest, so the recovery of peace and rest depended upon the renewal of life. *Shabbat*, *shalom* and *life* characterize the creation when it conforms to its Creator's design and intent, and these three realities have obtained their true substance in the One who is man *in truth*. In and through Him, they then become the property of the whole creation. This is just another way of expressing Paul's assertion that the creation is to be "summed up in Christ."

Jesus has the authority and power to give life to the world because the Father has given Him to have life in Himself (5:26). But He gives this life as a work of *judgment* (5:27) – not judgment as condemnation per se, but wise discernment and appropriate action which vindicates the true and good (cf. 5:30). Here, the emphasis is on judgment as remedial and restorative. And God has given Jesus this authority to judge because it is proper to Him as *Son of Man*: He is the son of Adam, Abraham and David, set forth in the Scriptures as the man through whom God would accomplish His purpose for the world.