

FIND TRUE REST IN JESUS

Mark 2:23-28 | Second Sunday after Pentecost | May 31/June 3, 2018

[Jesus] said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Jesus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In every hotel in Israel there are two sets of elevators: the regular elevators with which we are all familiar, and the *Shabbat* or Sabbath elevators. From sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday you will want to steer clear of the Shabbat elevators. Rabbis have determined that pressing a button to select a specific floor in a hotel and thus completing an electrical circuit is work forbidden under the Sabbath law. For this reason Shabbat elevators run automatically, stopping at each floor for about a minute or so before they move on. As you can imagine, this can make getting to your hotel room on the tenth floor a bit of a challenge.

Does that sound a little ridiculous to you? Well, that's because it is. Sadly, in modern day Israel religious leaders have done the same thing that many did in Jesus' day. They have altered the spirit and purpose of the Sabbath law. They have turned it into an intricate system of complex and often arbitrary rules and regulations that must be slavishly followed in order to gain favor with God. And thus they have turned it from a blessing to a curse.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exodus 20:8). The purpose of this Commandment is to lead us to the true rest found only in Jesus. *Sabbath* means

rest. In Jesus we find (1) rest that frees us from the burden of saving ourselves, and (2) rest that enables us to work joyfully for God's glory.

I. Rest that Frees Us from the Burden of Saving Ourselves

Our text sets the scene for us: **One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.** There's a lot going on here. As Jesus' disciples walked through a farmer's field, some of them picked heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands to remove the chaff, and ate the kernels.

Our first question is: Wasn't this stealing? After all, that field didn't belong to Jesus or his disciples. Actually, it wasn't stealing. In his law (Deut. 23:24-25) God allowed for anyone to pick a few grapes or heads of grain for a quick lunch on the go. You just couldn't fill up your bag with grapes or grab a sickle and start harvesting grain. With this law God encouraged his people to show charity to those in need and hospitality to their neighbors.

But the Pharisees were concerned about something else. **"Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"** What was unlawful about picking a few

heads of grain? Their reasoning went something like this: God forbids work on the Sabbath. Harvesting is work. Jesus' disciples are "harvesting" grain. Therefore, they are working on the Sabbath.

Jesus disagreed. As usual, the Pharisees were picking nits in a pathetic effort to discredit Jesus' ministry. These men had missed the whole point of the Sabbath law and of God's commandments in general. They had twisted them into a way to earn salvation.

Jesus set them straight. He took them back to Scripture. **"Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."**

In the tabernacle there was a table that held 12 loaves of bread representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Each week new loaves were baked and the old loaves were given to the priests – and only the priests – to eat. When David was fleeing for his life from Saul he begged the high priest to give him and his men something to eat. All the priest had was this special bread. He gave five loaves of it to David and his companions and they ate it. God did not strike them down with fire from heaven, nor did the earth open up and swallow them.

With this story Jesus showed that human need overrides religious ritualism. Think

about it. Without this bread David and his men may have starved to death or been caught and killed by Saul. Then David would not have been King. And God's promised Savior would not have descended from him.

Jesus summarized the lesson with these words: **"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."** In other words, God didn't give the Sabbath law as means to merit his favor. It was his gift to mankind, a way to help people focus on true spiritual rest.

How did the Sabbath do that? Every Saturday God wanted his people to take a day off. He wanted them to get some rest. But physical rest wasn't the only point or even the main point. God wanted his people to worship on the Sabbath. He wanted them to hear and read his Word. He wanted them to revel in his promises and rejoiced in his grace. He wanted them to focus on his promise of the Serpent Crusher, the Messiah who would bring rest for their souls.

So what about us? Why don't we worship on Saturday? The Seventh Day Adventists do. In fact, they insist on it. Paul's words that we heard moments ago are very helpful. **Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17).**

Let's say you're sitting on your back patio listening to the Brewers game when you

hear a car door slam in your driveway. No need to get up. All you have to do is watch for the shadow of the person who is coming around back to meet you. That shadow can tell you a lot about the person: tall or short, male or female, carrying something or not, and so on. Once the person comes into view you stop looking at the shadow. The Sabbath law served as this kind of shadow. It pointed forward to Jesus. It told God's people something about him. But once Jesus came the shadow wasn't needed anymore. Therefore, we are no longer required to worship on Saturday.

I've heard it described this way. The Third Commandment has a law shell but a gospel content. The law shell – worship and no work on Saturdays – is no longer in effect. We can worship whenever we choose. It's the gospel that we need to pay attention to. The sad fact of the matter is that often we don't. Luther explained the Third Commandment this way: **We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.**

Maybe you're thinking: *Pastor, the ones who really need to hear that aren't here today. They should be in God's house with us.* True. However, they aren't the only ones who need to be reminded of Luther's words. Our hunger for God's Word, our thirst for the glorious gospel of our Savior often leaves a lot to be desired.

A fighter pilot was shot down over enemy territory. He was able to eject and

survived, but he was trapped behind enemy lines for days before he could be rescued. During those days he was sustained by a love letter from his wife that he carried in his pocket. He read it and re-read it over and over again until it was torn and tattered. That letter kept his spirits up and his hope alive.

We have a love letter from our God, a statement of his unconditional and undying devotion to us: his saving Word. But often we treat that Word like the assembly directions that come with a new piece of furniture – optional at best.

Let me ask you. Where is your Bible? What about your catechism or hymnal, your copy of *Meditations*? Do they sit on the coffee table or nightstand as untouched as pristine as a museum exhibit, or do you regularly read, learn and take them to heart?

What do you feed your family? No doubt you offer delicious and nutritious meals, but do you offer food for their souls? Do you take a few minutes to share a devotion around the supper table, or has your busy schedule squeezed out family time with Jesus?

What about this summer? Will vacation time mean vacation time from Jesus and his Word, or will you seek out a church, or at least plan for family devotional time?

If you think I'm looking down on you, think again. The image I see in the mirror of God's law isn't very appetizing either. I see a preacher who doesn't spend enough time with the Word he preaches, a Word-

despising sinner who desperately needs a Savior.

I have one. And so do you. Jesus extends to us a glorious invitation: "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest**" (Matthew 11:28). No longer are we crushed by the load of our guilt or by the impossible burden of trying to save ourselves. Jesus did it all for us. He never despised preaching and the Word. He fulfilled the Sabbath. He kept the Third Commandment perfectly in our place. And then he walked the long road to the cross where he poured out his precious blood in payment for our sins. Every dusty Bible, every daydream during the sermon, every lost opportunity to hear God's Word and put it into practice – all of it is washed away in the blood of the Lamb.

This is why Jesus calls himself **The Lord of the Sabbath**. He is the King of rest! In him we find true rest for our souls. He has freed us from the burden of trying to save ourselves. He has saved us completely. "**It is finished**" (John 19:30), he said, and his empty tomb proves it.

II. Rest that Enables us to Work Joyfully for God's Glory

Do you realize what this means? Since we are no longer burdened with the impossible task of trying to save ourselves, we can really get to work. We can do the joyful work of thanking our Savior-God. We can serve him not to obtain salvation but to show our gratitude for the forgiveness and eternal life we already possess. Fear and guilt no longer

drive us. Instead we are moved by the good news of a rest-giving Savior. "**Christ's love compels us**" (2 Corinthians 5:14). The pressure is off.

We can obey his commands not to earn a place in heaven, but to thank him for the place in heaven already reserved for us by Jesus. We can show love to our neighbor not to earn God's love, but to express gratitude for the love that he already showed us at his Son's cross and empty tomb. We can come to church not get credit from God for being here, but to thank him that he has already credited Christ's righteousness to our accounts, that we already wear the robes of his holiness, that our sins are forgiven and our eternity is secure.

Shabbat elevators – sad, misguided, useless legalism. We don't need them. We have Jesus to lift us up. He did it all. He lived and died and rose for you and me and all people. Hear his Word. Savor his promises. Find true rest in him. Amen.

S.D.G.