

The Fourth Commandment (Part 2)

How To Keep The Sabbath

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There is no doubt that nowhere in the pages of the Bible is the Sabbath annulled by commandment or by example of the Father, the Son, or by the apostles. Even if one looks at the most controversial and difficult of Paul's statements, for example, it was never a question to anyone to whom these things had been revealed as to which day we are to keep. In the New Testament, the controversy was always how to keep it.

Again, remember that the first four Commandments deal with our relationship with God; and, therefore [they] describe (in four different ways) the ways that we can commit idolatry. Idolatry is the major sin of mankind, and it seems to be in the mix of virtually every sin. Remember that the First Commandment deals with *what* we worship, and we are to worship the Creator.

The Second Commandment deals with *how* we worship, and that worship is to be in spirit and in truth. There are to be no physical aids — works of art, statues, pictures (or anything like that), icons that we have lying around the house, or hanging up on a wall. None of that is to be involved in our worship of God.

The Third Commandment has to do with the quality of *our personal witness* of everything that the name of God implies — because, when we are baptized, we are baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, GOD actually becomes our spiritual Family name. We now bear it and are responsible then for upholding its integrity.

The Fourth Commandment was given to better *enable us to worship* the one true God — by *providing us with time* to worship Him; to fellowship with Him; and to better understand Him, and ourselves, and our place in the purpose that He is working out. How to use that time then becomes of paramount importance to all of those who are converted.

Of all of the sermons in this series on the Sabbath, I feel that this one is the most important because there are those who teach that, in His ministry, Christ dealt a death blow to the Commandment requiring us to keep the Sabbath. And the apostles supposedly, according to this teaching, merely confirmed this in their writings. In addition, there are those who say that He did not annul it; but they have liberalized it to such an extent in their teaching, and in keeping it, that it turns out that it is hardly different from the way the world keeps Sunday.

So this sermon — after a bit of groundwork at the beginning — is going to concern itself with Christ's attitude towards the Sabbath. And we are going to see that, far from annulling it, He magnified it; and in so doing, He gives us the foundation for judging the value of our own Sabbath activity.

Let's begin this sermon in one of the scriptures that we used last week — in Ezekiel 20, where God says:

Ezekiel 20:10-12 Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, "which, if a man does, he shall live by them." Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths [plural], to be a sign [showing by implication that it includes not only the weekly Sabbath but also the holy days as well.] between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

It is very clear to see that a major purpose of the Sabbath — apart from it being a sign — is so that we might know God. Eternal life! Remember what Jesus said in John 17: 3. "*Eternal life is to know God.*" If we are going to know God, the Sabbath must be kept. The implication is very clear. It ties the two of them together. Without *knowing God*, there is no *eternal life*. The Sabbath, then, is a necessary fixture in having eternal life.

Ezekiel 20:18-20 But I said to their children in the wilderness, "Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. For I am the LORD your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God."

Keeping the Sabbath identifies the true God to us. I think that we will see, as we go along, that it is not merely the fact that one observes the day; but rather [it is] *observing the day* combined with *how it is observed*. People can surely set it aside, as the Jews did, and not keep it right. Did they know God? No, they didn't. It is obvious that they didn't know God because, when God came in the flesh, they rejected Him. They didn't "know" Him. They were keeping the Sabbath though. So the instruction here is that it not merely be a matter of just observing the day, but HOW the day is observed — that enables one to know God.

Ezekiel 20:21 Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, and were not careful to observe My judgments, "which, if a man does, he shall live by them;" but they profaned My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the wilderness.

Ezekiel 20:24 Because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their father's idols.

That's kind of a concluding statement as to why they were taken into captivity. I think there are two possibilities regarding Israel's Sabbath breaking. (1) Israel completely rejected God's Sabbath for another day. That possibility is there because you will see in some context that the

My/their or Mine/yours contrast is made. That is, *My* Sabbath as opposed to *your* Sabbath. I'm sure that you can think of a few verses where that occurs. The first chapter of Isaiah comes to mind. (2) The other alternative is that they polluted by careless, self-centered observance what they did have of God's Sabbath.

I think that the probability is that they did both. That some people completely rejected the Sabbath, while others carelessly observed it. But I want you to understand that — whether it was either/or, or whether it was both of them — they went into captivity.

When one looks at secular history, and even biblical history, and society around us — how to keep this day is kind of a mixed bag. On the surface, what one sees in the New Testament is *arigorous legalism* from the Pharisees or *asceticism* from the Gentiles. Today, we might call that an extreme "rightism" or perhaps a reactionary conservatism.

But in today's world we are pretty much confronted with the other side of the coin. We don't even begin to know how to keep the Sabbath because, from our earliest days, the emphasis in our culture has been on a day that cannot be kept holy — because it was never made holy! I'm talking about Sunday.

The cycle of *six workdays* and *one day of rest and worship* is a legacy of the Bible. But in fairly recent history, society has undergone a radical transformation because of scientific, industrial, and technological achievements. There is more leisure time because of a shorter workweek. And yet businesses make every effort to utilize time to the maximum, to maximize production by programming work shifts so that the weekly cycle is really no more than a blur.

In 1952, when I went to work in the steel mill, our shop was on a 21-turn schedule. That means twenty-one eight-hour turns in a seven-day week. Every bit of time was used up during that week. There was no time! And men were scheduled to fill every minute of time during the week. They had to do that because the production aspects of the mill were working as much as they possibly could.

Now, that was typical. Virtually every business in the United States — and, indeed, all around the world — does that, because they want to make the best use of time that they possibly can to increase and keep their business going. We have come to the place where we think that *time totally belongs to us*, and it is to be used as we good and well please.

That, in turn, makes a person very aware (conscious) of the free time that he does have. And what does almost every individual do? Almost everybody does the same thing that a business does. Every bit of time in a person's life is booked up, or scheduled, by the individual — because they want to get the most out of life. Isn't that what we are taught in these United States?

Even among those who are reasonably religious, the result of that has been that Sunday has become the *hour* of worship. Those of you who are older can probably remember that, in your community, Sunday was set aside very seriously; and people did not work. They spent the day, usually, at home. Maybe the most secular thing that they allowed themselves to do might have been to read the Sunday newspaper. Maybe they didn't even listen to the radio on that day because, to them, the day was holy.

But, in my lifetime and in the lifetime of many of you who are listening to me, the Sunday

worship — which used to be kept somewhat like God expects us to keep the Sabbath — has now become (even among the religious folks) the *hour* of worship, rather than the day of worship. So people go to church for that one hour. Then maybe they return home. Or maybe they go to a Sunday brunch or a restaurant somewhere. But they spend the rest of the time on that day either making money or seeking their own pleasure.

All the while, the real Sabbath is ridiculed or ignored. That's the kind of situation that confronts us when we begin trying to keep the Sabbath, or even amongst those who are continuing to keep it because they have kept it as a way of life for a number of years. When we look in the Bible, we find that God does not give us many specifics as to HOW to keep it. But God does give us quite a number of *broad principles*, and He expects us to extrapolate from those principles in *applying them*.

Now, here is a question. Answer this for yourself. Where does one find the most instruction in the Bible regarding keeping the Sabbath? We almost automatically associate the keeping of the Sabbath with the Old Testament. However, most of the instruction regarding HOW to keep the day is in the New Testament. I mean, it is overwhelming! By comparison, there is almost nothing in the Old Testament about how to keep it. I really find that intriguing, because modern day Christianity wants to associate themselves only with the New Testament; and yet it is the New Testament, we are going to find, that the keeping of Sunday is condemned.

Despite the fact that we are going to spend most of the time in the New Testament, we are going to begin in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 42 — because there is a principle that is important to understanding why things are written in the New Testament about the Sabbath. (Isaiah 42:21 ought to be a memory scripture. It's easy to remember, because 21 is one half of 42.)

Isaiah 42:21 The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will exalt [magnify] the law and make it honorable.

This is a most important scripture for understanding Christ's ministry. A major part of the purpose of His ministry is to magnify the law. The Sermon on the Mount is the focal point of Jesus doing this. It is there — in the Sermon on the Mount — that we learn that anger, and hate, is the spirit of murder. He is *magnifying* the Sixth Commandment. [We learn there] that lust is the spirit of adultery. He is magnifying, *clarifying*, and drawing something in closer and in sharper detail so that we can understand and see its application. Lust is the spirit of adultery.

Now, we are going to see that Jesus *deliberately* and *frequently* focused His attention on the Sabbath, but NOT in the Sermon on the Mount. It is too big of a subject to be contained there. We are going to find place after place where He magnified the keeping of the Sabbath. So He did what He did in order to teach the intent of the Sabbath.

Jesus did things right! So it is to Him (as to how He kept the Sabbath) that we must look for the examples of these *principles* that I mentioned just a little while ago. In order to use the Sabbath time properly, one must first understand its purpose. Do you understand what the purpose of the Sabbath is? I think that most of us do understand, at least, part of it. But I hope that, as

we go through this, we will begin to see more clearly and more specifically what Jesus said — by what He did, by His example, by what He spoke about on that day — and what He sees the purpose of the Sabbath being.

Luke 4:16-19 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom [His habit] was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty [preach deliverance] to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim [preach] the acceptable year of the LORD."

This is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry — His inaugural address. I don't know whether you ever stop to think about it; but it is pointedly pointed out here, and attention is drawn to it, that Jesus *began* His ministry on a Sabbath. I don't know whether you realize it; but once I tell you this, you are going to recognize that it is true — His ministry *ended* on a preparation day. That is, Passover.

So He completed the cycle (you might say); and His ministry ended on the Passover — a preparation day; and He was resurrected on a Sabbath. *Major things* happened to Christ on the Sabbath. We are going to find that *major things* occurred in the history of Israel on the Sabbath as well. And those things all draw attention to one supreme purpose for the Sabbath. You'll begin to see it, as this goes along.

Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 and one verse out of Isaiah 58 (verse 7). "The acceptable year" is not a time when God is acceptable to us, but when God — in His sovereign mercy — moves to make men acceptable to Him. In other words, it is an appointed extension of His grace, of His calling of men, to make them acceptable to Him. It is a time when He moves to deliver people.

More specifically, "an acceptable year" is referring to two Old Testament institutions — which these people would have undoubtedly recognized. He is referring here specifically either (1) to the seventh year land Sabbath or (2) to the Jubilee year — one or the other. If it was the sabbatical year, think about the purpose of the sabbatical year. It was given to give the land rest. That is, to relieve it of the responsibility of growing food. The land was to lie fallow and to produce food voluntarily for the poor, for the dispossessed, and for animals. Also in the seventh year, slaves were freed and debts were remitted.

An additional thing occurred in the Jubilee year; and that is, the restoration of property to the original owners. They may have lost it many, many years before that. But they were, then, relieved of the burden of their indebtedness. And the ability and power, therefore, to earn money once again (because all wealth comes out of the land) was given back to the original owners, so that they could be free of the burden that they very likely put upon themselves.

Here we can begin to see, in what is Christ's inaugural address, that He is stating His mission; and, in each case, it involves *setting at liberty*. Let's look at that again.

Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.

Remember that I have told you in the past that the word *poor* does not necessarily mean that somebody is in absolute, abject poverty. It can mean only that the people are weak. They are powerless. And so, here, He is going to free them from poverty, or weakness. If we look at this in a spiritual sense, it applies to every one of us. We all have been *spiritually powerless*.

Luke 4:18-19 He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted [There we have the freedom from discouragement.], to proclaim liberty [preach deliverance] to the captives [meaning, to break the bondage of Satan and the world] and the recovery of sight to the blind [meaning, to illuminate the mind to life's purpose], to set at liberty those who are oppressed [downtrodden]; to proclaim [preach] the acceptable year of the LORD.

Luke 4:21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Christ is clearly identifying His mission with redemption, and He is tying it to *the liberating intent* of the Sabbath, or Sabbaths — both weekly and annual.

Genesis 2:3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

God did this to no other day! The Sabbath is a day that is blessed. A blessing is clearly shown in the Bible to be something given, or conferred, in order to bring one into a fuller and more abundant life. The blessing may be monetary. But it elevates the person's life. The blessing may be something that is spiritual — such as forgiveness of sin, or illumination of the mind of truth. But the person then begins to be liberated, and the life begins to become filled with the right things.

A blessing is something conferred in order to bring one to a fuller and more abundant life. We begin to see what God did on the Sabbath — He *blessed* it! We begin to see the purpose of that blessing. The purpose of the Sabbath is to bring a person — all persons eventually — to a more abundant and fuller life. To liberate them (us) from whatever it is that holds us in bondage. The Sabbath is *the day of liberation* — of liberty, of freedom.

Genesis 1:22 And God blessed them...

What is He blessing here? He's blessing what He just created—the living creatures, animals. In verse 28, He blesses man. And then in Genesis 2:3 is the capstone of His blessings in the

Creation week. It expresses God's blessing of His whole Creation; and by blessing *a recurring period of time*, God promises to be man's Benefactor through the whole course of human history. It's an invocation — to you and to me — of God's *favor*. And, as we continue along here, we will see that it's primary intention is that God will be our spiritual Benefactor.

Now, it also includes the physical as well. The two cannot be separated here, because we are physical. That's why He told us to rest. It is *a blessing* — to you physically and to me physically — to be able to rest on the Sabbath. Our health is increased because we do it. We don't get as sick as often as we used to. And when we do get sick, we don't get sick as badly as we used to. Because we are resting on the Sabbath day, our body is freed from much of what would normally come upon us. If we don't keep it, we don't get that blessing.

But that still is not its primary intention. Its primary intention has to do with that which is spiritual. Brethren, Jesus is clearly tying His ministry to the Sabbath concepts of *blessing, deliverance, liberty, and redemption*. That's His mission — to bring those things to mankind.

Let's go to Exodus 20, where the Commandments are stated — just to review these quickly.

Exodus 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage [slavery]."

Exodus 2:11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

We have been taken out of the house of bondage. And as we can see here (although we'll see it a little bit clearer when we go to the next verse), the Sabbath is enjoined on God's people for two basic reasons. The one here is to remind us that He is Creator. The other, we are going to see, is that it is enjoined to remind us that, at one time, we were slaves. (We'll get to that in just a minute.)

Now, remember this. I started in Ezekiel 20 for a psychological reason — a point of remembrance. I am sure that chapter is in there to show you and me that, when God's people do not keep the Sabbath, they lose their liberty. When God's people don't keep the Sabbath, they go into captivity. And for you and me, that means back to the captivity of Satan, and the world, and sin. I hope I am coming through and making this clear. The Sabbath is given by God to keep His people *free*! It is THE DAY to keep His people from going back into their bondage.

God has specifically used the Sabbath throughout Israel's history as the day in which He emphasizes this. That is, its tie to deliverance, liberty, and the keeping of His people free. On that day, He has pointedly performed *acts of liberation* for His people. For example, on what day did the children of Israel leave Egypt — the house of bondage? They left on an annual Sabbath—the first Day of Unleavened Bread. On which day did they completely break free of their captors? It was on the following Sabbath — the seventh Day of Unleavened Bread. They went through the Red Sea, were baptized, and went out into the wilderness; and now they were

politically free.

On which day did God give His law? On the day of Pentecost — another Sabbath — which "*if a man will keep, he will live in it.*" On which day did Israel go into the Land? They went into the Land on a Sabbath day. On which day did the walls of Jericho come down? They came down on a Sabbath, and Israel made their first important conquest in the Land.

Do you get the point? This is all through the Old Testament. God did that in order to focus our minds on what the Sabbath is for. It is THE DAY that He has blessed for the purpose of *liberation*. It is THE DAY that He has blessed in order to continue the *liberty* of His people. And Jesus emphasized this in His ministry. He wanted to drive this home by means of how He used the Sabbath, so that we could see how He wants us to use the Sabbath to the greatest benefit.

Deuteronomy 5:12-13, 15 Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. [And then He says, in verse 14, not to do any work in it; and in verse 15 is a significant change between Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.] And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand [He delivered them, made them free.] and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Isn't that plain? The Sabbath is clearly stated, in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, to have *two major purposes*. The Sabbath is to remind us that God is Creator — and we look back on Him creating. But it is also designed in such a way (in Deuteronomy 5) to show us that the Sabbath is the day that He has given to us to keep us free. That is, to remind us that we were slaves at one time. And so we remember our slavery.

Remembering God as Creator is good; but that doesn't always help us in our immediate concerns, because it is something that happened in the dim past. But every Sabbath we are also reminded that God is our redeeming Liberator, and that we keep the Sabbath because we are free — and because we want to remain free. Those who don't keep the Sabbath don't retain their liberty.

Again, nations establish memorials for specific reasons. So, here in the United States we have a Presidents Day. We have Martin Luther King Day. We have Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Armistice Day, and probably many others as well. Now, why? Why do we have these days? Our nation's leaders want us to be periodically reminded of our heritage. They want us to remember why we have what we have, and why we should hold on to these things, and why we should strengthen what we have.

Now, God's Sabbath — His memorial — is so important to His purpose that He has it recur every week! Not once a year, but *every week!* It is a constant reminder of our spiritual heritage from Him, of our original release from sin, and a reorientation in the right direction in any area

that we might have turned aside.

There is a word that we need to have defined for us at this time, and it is the word redemption. I have resolved to put together a sermon on this; and we will have one before the Days of Unleavened Bread, or during the Days of Unleavened Bread — God willing. But I need to define it for you now. There are several words in the Hebrew and Greek that are translated into this one English word. So I am just going to give you an overview of what these words generally mean.

Of the two words that are most frequently used, the one has the sense of *buying something back that has been voluntarily given up*—as one would redeem a piece of property from a Pawn Shop. We usually voluntarily take something to a Pawn Shop, because we feel we need a shot of cash or whatever; and the man gives us some money. Later on, when we feel somewhat prospered, we go back and redeem it. But we gave the thing up voluntarily.

The other one has the sense of *paying a ransom price, of purchasing something, or meeting a payment price for something that has been forcibly taken away*. So the two have essential differences, but they are both translated into the same English word. One is voluntarily given up and then bought back. The other is forcibly taken away and then bought back.

What is important for us to understand is that, in the biblical sense, redemption is NOT a one-time occurrence — but a whole series of redemptions, or deliverances, by God that do not end until we are delivered from this body that we have (of sin and death) at the resurrection. In other words, redemptions are going to continually occur until we are resurrected — born again into the Family of God. So it is important in understanding redemption in this sense. That makes the liberation quality of the Sabbath so important. It doesn't happen once. It happens many, many times — that God delivers us.

Again, in Jesus' inaugural address, He was tying His work of being man's Benefactor through redemption — the freeing of man from bondage to Satan, the world, and our nature — as the beginning of the fulfillment of God's redemptive function for the Sabbath. So, in Luke 4:16, He was beginning to magnify the Sabbath law. I want you to notice this. At the very beginning of His mission on earth, the very first law that He begins to make clear is THE SABBATH!

Does that remind you of anything? Does that remind you of anything that happened in the Exodus? What was the first law that the God of the Old Testament revealed to the children of Israel? It was THE SABBATH! Does that give you any indication that He's going to do away with it? Not in the least! In one sense, because of its position, it is the law in the Ten Commandments around which all the others revolve. And yet mankind seems to think of it as being "the least" of the Ten Commandments, but anybody who breaks it consistently is going to lose his liberty.

Until the time of Christ, the Sabbath had not really been used for the purpose that He was beginning to reveal. Christ was *magnifying and establishing God's original intent* for the Sabbath — just as He did in Matthew 5-7 for the other Commandments. By identifying Himself with the Sabbath, He was actually affirming His "Messiahship."

How, then, did Christ view the Sabbath? Did He actually uphold it? There are some who say that

His acts on the Sabbath were intentionally provocative, designed to show that it is no longer binding. So, was He genuinely observing the Sabbath, or deliberately breaking it?

We are going to see that Christ did a lot of things on the Sabbath. It is very evident that, as His ministry progressed towards its end, the things that He did on the Sabbath became more and more bold, open, clear. At the beginning, I think that He "low-keyed" what He did on the Sabbath. Being wise far beyond men, He knew that there would be an explosive reaction coming back at Him. But Luke 4 is His announcement of *how He is going to use the Sabbath*.

And then — right within the chapter, right on the very same day (still a Sabbath) — His announcement is followed by two healings that clearly reveal God's intended use for Sabbath time. Let's look at them.

Luke 4:31 Then He came down to Capernaum...

This was right after they almost threw Him off the brow of the hill. That was the kind of reaction they had to what He said there in the synagogue.

Luke 4:31 ...a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths.

Well, that's obvious. He continued right on doing what He was doing at the beginning there. He was teaching on the Sabbath. That was one way that He uses the Sabbath.

Luke 4:32-39 And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Do You come to destroy us? I know who You are — the Holy One of God!" But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region. Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them.

What Jesus did here is signal an attack against the forces of evil. He began a *holy war* to free mankind from Satan and sin. The demon knew it! That's why it reacted the way that it did. It went into a snit. If we would put what the demon said into modern colloquial terms, it snapped out at Jesus, "*Why are You interfering here?*" That's basically what it said. And Jesus came right back, with authority, "*Shut your mouth! And come out of him.*"

The demon wasn't about to give up easily. It probably was a pretty strong demon. But it, of course, did obey its Master and came out; but not without trashing the man around for a good bit, until finally it did come out. But the man was not hurt.

So the first shot that was fired in this "war" was a spiritual healing. Jesus liberated a man from a demon *on the Sabbath day*. His first public act that was part of His ministry! He might have done some other things before, but this was the first public act that was part of His ministry — to cast out a demon. Does that tell you something? And what day did He do it on? The day of liberation — the Sabbath!

So [this was] the first shot in the holy war for control of the earth, for the right to rule over it after He had defeated their master (Satan). He was going to show that the demons weren't going to fare any better than their master, Satan. Then He casts out the demon; and order and peace is restored to the congregation, because the man was causing trouble there.

The second thing He did, then, was a physical healing that resulted in *service to others*. And so this unfortunate woman, who was bound by a disease, is relieved of her disease by Jesus Christ. Then she rose and immediately served everybody else. That ought to give us a clue — those of us who are healed — as to what we are supposed to do with our healing. We are to rise and serve.

Although we are going to add a great deal more here — there, in a nutshell, are *major principles* by which our Sabbath activities can be judged. The Sabbath is for redemption, liberty, joy, peace, and service that comes through fellowship and instruction that reorients our devotion to the right direction.

Now, start asking yourself questions. What do *my activities* have to do with salvation (which is deliverance, which is redemption)? Does what we are talking about — and thinking about — begin to fit within these perimeters? Not everything that is certainly allowable on the Sabbath will fit exactly into these perimeters. There are other things that we will see that it will fit, making things we do and say clearly lawful. But, again, I'll remind you that God does not give a lot of specifics. But He does give *us broad principles* by which we can judge.

Let's turn to Matthew 12, and we will look at another episode that took place on the Sabbath day.

Matthew 12:9-10 Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. [Again, this was a Sabbath day.] And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" — [Now, look at the reason.] that they might accuse Him.

Now, who was doing the provocation — Christ, or them?

Matthew 12:11-12 Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Or how much more value then is a man

than sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

There's a broad principle there. *It is lawful to do "good" on the Sabbath.*

Matthew 12:13-14 Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

Now let's go to Mark 3, which is Mark's account of the same circumstance.

Mark 3:1-5 And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward." Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent. And when He had looked at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

There is an obvious difference and the contrast is so clear between *Christ* on the Sabbath and *the Pharisees*. They weren't there to worship God. They weren't there asking these questions out of loving concern. They were there as accusing authorities, who wanted to judge Christ by *their regulations*.

It's good to remember the historical context of this. There was, at that time, a circumstance that had been going on for a number of years (and really was not to conclude for another one or two hundred years, or something like that), in which the Jews were compiling a *code of regulations* by which they hoped to make it virtually impossible for a person to sin.

I have a book in my library, called *The Code of Jewish Laws* — which is a compilation of these laws. This book is over two inches thick, small print, and there is one regulation after another in which men (with all kinds of zeal, misdirected and misguided) tried to give people advice as to how they could keep the law of God.

It turned out that eventually there were 1,521 regulations regarding the keeping of the Sabbath. These people did it in sincerity — a misdirected zeal. This was getting under way at the time of Christ. But what happened was that they turned the observance of the day into a *legalistic ritual* rather than a loving service towards God and towards fellow man.

Now, think about the context here. Think about *the actions* and *the words* that you have read so far — in Matthew 12 and in Luke 3. Is Christ doing away with the Sabbath observance, or is He restoring it to its original, divine, value and function? Remember the principle that is given in Matthew 19:8. The reference is to divorce and remarriage, and Jesus said, "But from the

beginning it was not so." So it is here. He is showing God's original intent for the Sabbath.

He isn't saying, "*You don't have to worry about breaking it.*" He's not saying, "*I'm going to do away with this day in the future anyway, so it doesn't matter what we do.*" Instead, by what He says and does, He focuses their attention on the action that He makes. And the action He makes is what? To relieve somebody of a burden, to deliver him from a withered hand. Do you see what the Sabbath is for? It is a day of *redemption*. It is a day of *deliverance*. It is a day of *freedom*. It is a day of *healing*. It is a day to *do kind acts*. It is a day to *help your fellow man* in some way. It is a day to *relieve them of some burden*, as much as lies within us.

To add emphasis to this, it is good to recognize that Jesus' healing here was not done to a man whose life was in danger. He had a chronic problem. His hand had been withered for how long? We don't know. It apparently was not something that was done just before that. Rather, it was a chronic problem; and it easily could have waited until the next day. Jesus could have said, "*Come back tomorrow.*" But instead He purposely showed what the Sabbath was for. It was for healing. Physical [healing] or spiritual [healing] — it doesn't matter. It is a day of healing.

This man was chronically ill; and, brethren, that is the way that we are spiritually. We are chronically ill! You might remember Jeremiah 17:9-10, where it says that the heart is *incurably sick*. "Who can know it?" he says. And so the Sabbath, then, is a day given to free us from the chronic problems of human nature.

By Jesus' example — His reaction, His words — it becomes very clear that God not only intends that "good" be done but *to fail to do it [good] when the opportunity presents itself* implies "evil" and "killing." Why do you think that He was angry? He was ANGRY because they were failing at doing something to relieve this man of his burden. Instead, they were using him as something to provoke Jesus into what they would think of as sinning — so that they might accuse Him. So what He is saying here (without saying it directly) is that the person who is not concerned for the physical and spiritual salvation of others on the Sabbath is automatically involved in destructive efforts and attitudes.

We are here, brethren, on the Sabbath to *prepare to be used for the salvation of others*. We are not in the position yet that Christ was. He was able. Because of His closeness to God, because of the fact that He was God in the flesh, because He had the Spirit of God without measure — He was able to do things (like healings) that we are unable to do. But the principle is there!

There are things — when the opportunity presents itself — that we can do on the Sabbath. They are within our power *to relieve somebody's burden*. It may only be the giving of encouragement to somebody. Maybe writing them a letter, to encourage and help them. Giving them a telephone call to let them know that you care and that you are thinking about them. Do you begin to see? You are relieving somebody's burden—even so that they might know that somebody out there is thinking about them. It's a little thing, but it is within our power to do things like that and to help them along the way.

Again, remember Deuteronomy 5 — that the Sabbath was made *to show compassion towards the weak and the defenseless*. What does it say there? It says that you are to give others, who are under your authority, that day to rest. You relieve them of the burden of work. That is —

your manservant, your maidservant, and even your animals. They too are to be given the opportunity to have a burden relieved from them. They are physical. If they are worked constantly, they are going to wear out quicker. And so it is wise, isn't it? It is to our benefit even to give them the relief that they need.

Exodus 23:12 Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and [Here are the two weakest people in society.] the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.

The New Testament shows that there are two types of Sabbath keepers. The epitome, of course, was Christ — who was always looking for ways *to save life, to relieve burdens*. And then there were the Pharisees who used Sabbath time looking for faults, even going to the extent of thinking of methods of killing and accusing. Brethren, we need to be concerned for people's potential. That honors God! *Redemption, the new creation, love of neighbor* — that is the essence of the Sabbath.

Luke 13:10-17 Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, [Now look at these words carefully.] "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound — think of it — for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

We've advanced through time a little bit, from what was done in Luke 4. This time, we find that Jesus didn't wait for somebody to ask any questions. He just went out and did what needed to be done. This episode shows God's purpose for the Sabbath very clearly. Jesus said, "You are loosed." What happens when people are in bondage? Can you think of somebody who is tied up? Their hands are tied at the wrists, and so are their legs at the ankles. And so when you are *loosed*, you are what? You are *made free*. The lesson is so clear. This woman was in bondage to an infirmity. She was in bondage to something that Satan had inflicted upon her.

On the other hand, there were the Pharisees. And, to them, what was the Sabbath for? The

Sabbath, to them, was rules to obey. That is — their rules, their traditions. And so to the man here (to the ruler of the synagogue) the Sabbath was unfit for loosing somebody from their pain, from their infirmity.

After Jesus said that, He came right back in His reply — calling the man a hypocrite, in verse 15. "Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose [untie, free] his ox or donkey from the stall?" And then in verse 16, "So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound — think of it — for eighteen years, b̄oosed [freed, delivered, redeemed] from this bond on the Sabbath?"

Do you see how clear it is? Once you begin to see *what Jesus did* and *what Jesus talked about* on the Sabbath, it begins to become so clear that He was magnifying its use. The Sabbath is the day of liberation. The Sabbath is the day God blessed — so that we can remain free, and no longer be brought into bondage. (Incidentally, those verbs that are translated "loose" are the Greek word that means "to free." It's just that they chose to translate them in that way.)

So again, does Jesus say, "*Oh, it doesn't matter*"? "*We're going to do away with the Sabbath anyway. I'm trying to make this very clear.*" No, He doesn't do anything like that. Instead, what He argues for is a right, merciful evaluation of a person who is under a heavy burden — and then using the Sabbath in that way. He is arguing for true values in the use of God's Sabbath.

The next illustration that I was going to use was in a comparison between John 5:1-18 and John 9:1-41. These are parallel. They are different occasions, but they are so similar in Jesus' use of it. The next time that I speak we are going to begin there, and we are going to put those two together. He continues to show that the Sabbath is a day to be freed — and a day to keep us free.