

The Fourth Commandment (Part 3)

Why Did the World Change the Sabbath?

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 12-Feb-94; Sermon #114

When I began this series on the Sabbath, I read to you from a column that came out of a Catholic newspaper, called OUR SUNDAY VISITOR. I am going to read from another clipping that came from the same newspaper, a little bit later, but somewhat on the same subject. Of course, this is by the same man—a Catholic theologian by the name of Frank Sheedy.

Here is the question:

"Why was the Sabbath changed to Sunday and called 'the Lord's day'? I've been studying the Scripture, and it seems clear to me that the commandments are not to be changed."

Now, here's the answer:

"First, there is no commandment that Saturday should be the Sabbath. [That is correct, but it is evading the issue. There is no command that says "You should keep Saturday," but neither is there a command that says "You shall keep Sunday."] The 'six days when we labor and the seventh when we rest' is the commandment. The Jews chose what we now call Saturday to be their Sabbath. This tradition can be traced back to the Mosaic era. But whether Moses took it from the Kenites, among whom he lived, [You see, where's God?] we do not know."

"At the time of Jesus, Saturday (Saturn's day) was looked upon by the Romans as a day of evil omen, when nothing important should be done. The Jews made many laws about the Sabbath, which lead an exasperated Jesus to exclaim, in Mark 2:27, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.' Then He added 'The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath;' and because of this attitude of Jesus to the Sabbath, He gained the hostility of the Jewish priests."

"It was not that Jesus was opposed to a day set aside to honor God. But the day had become so involved in legalisms and red tape that its true meaning was being lost. [That's true.] The Sabbath was a day of the old law, and Jesus had come to fulfill that law with a new law." [Not true.]

"So after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the apostles decided that the Christians should worship on the first day of the week. [Not true.] As the church father, Justin Martyr, explained to Emperor Antoninus: 'It is on what we call the sun's day that all who abide in town and country come together, and we meet on the sun's day because it is the first day on which God formed darkness and mere matter into the world and Jesus Christ, our Savior, rose from the dead. For on the day before Saturn's day, they crucified Him; and on the day after Saturn's day, which is the sun's day, He appeared to His apostles and disciples and taught them.'"

"The observance of the first day dates from the beginning of the church." [Acts 20:7] [Not true.] "For some who might object that the apostles had no authority to do this, we

must remember that Jesus gave Peter great power. [Now, listen closely to this, because this is the basis for the Catholic Church keeping Sunday. I mean, this is what they themselves will quote.] 'Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you declare loosed on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.' [Matthew 16:19]

And, of course, it is the Catholic Church's boast that all of the Protestant churches are following them—because they were the ones who changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday.

Reading again:

"Thus, in their decision, the apostles clearly showed that the new law had replaced the old law, and that the new law was centered in Jesus Christ."

Now, in the last few sermons, [we saw that] the Sabbath law commands one to cease from one's normal work activities on the seventh day. But it does so with two very definite goals, purposes, or ends in mind. Here in Exodus 20:11, it says:

Exodus 20:11 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.

There is the first reason that the Bible gives for the keeping of the Sabbath day. That is, that one is to use time to reflect on Whom it is that we worship. It draws our attention that our God is the Creator. So the Sabbath is a memorial of Creation. That's reason #1 that has been established so far.

The second end that God had in mind is given to us in Deuteronomy 5:15, where the Commandments are reiterated; but we see that there is a change made in the Fourth Commandment, and this is the change.

Deuteronomy 5:15 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 and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

There is a very definite change of purpose—of reason—of why we are to keep the Fourth Commandment. So the second purpose that God had in mind is that we are told to remember on the Sabbath day that we were slaves in Egypt, and that God brought us out. So it is the beginning of the statement that the Sabbath is far more importantly **God's memorial of redemption**.

Redemption is one of the Bible's more prominent terms for *liberation from bondage*. You might remember Ezekiel 20. It shows us an example from Israel's history that, when a nation—or an individual—fails to keep God's Sabbath, it loses its liberty; and it goes back into bondage.

In the sermon last week, we found that redemption has two basic usages. (1) It pictures the buying back of something voluntarily given up. The emphasis here is on **voluntarily giving up**. One makes the choice to do something. (2) It also pictures the meeting of a ransom—a purchase price for something **forcibly taken away**. In either case, something has to be redeemed.

I gave the illustration of how one might be in need of money. And so they take something of value to a pawnshop, and they exchange their "thing of value" for money that they get from the pawnbroker.

There they have *voluntarily* given something up. In order to get it back—in order to redeem it—they have to go back and pay the price that the pawnbroker is asking for it.

There are times, though, when your house is broken into. It's trashed. And the thief takes things away from you *forcibly*. He, in turn, fences them. They sometimes go through a pawnbroker. You find your item in the pawnbroker's shop, and you pay the price to **redeem** it. But it has been forcibly taken away.

So we have the two instances covered there, in the Bible. We see in the Bible that it is used in the sense of buying back, extricating someone or something from blame or debt, freeing someone from the consequences of sin, freeing one from what distresses or harms. It is very closely related to another term—**salvation**, which means deliverance from danger to safety and security.

After this, we began to see from the examples (that came from Jesus and the way that He used the Sabbath in His day), that He clearly tied His activities to **redemption**. He did not focus much on the *rest from work* theme, because of Creation; but He did focus very strongly on the *redemption* theme. We see this where His ministry begins, in Luke 4:18-19. His ministry began on a Sabbath day.

Luke 4:18-19 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.

We see all kinds of freedoms from bondage—of redemptions and salvations, or deliverances—in that very short couple of verses there. We see healing, deliverance, and illumination. He came to free people from spiritual poverty, to free people from discouragement and to give them hope, to free people from spiritual bondage to Satan, and to illuminate people's minds to life's purpose. He came to give hope to the downtrodden. His whole ministry was built on that theme—and it is a theme of **redemption**.

Now right in this circumstance here, in Luke 4, He went on to give some illustrations of that. The first thing that He did was cast a demon from someone. That is, someone who was causing a stir in the group that was around there and interrupting the flow of the teaching that was coming from Him. And so He **freed** this person from the demon influence, and the result was *peace* in the group that He was talking to. Then the next thing that He did was to go into Peter's house; and He **freed** Peter's mother-in-law from a physical ailment that she had, where she had a very high fever.

And so we have first the stating of His mission: He is going to redeem man, He is going to free man. And then we have two examples—both healing examples—where He liberated somebody from something.

I think that an honest evaluation of what Jesus taught will show that Jesus gave very few, if any, **rules** for keeping the Sabbath (or, for that matter, for anything). Very few rules! There was a reason for that. For one thing, the rules were already laid down. And what He came to do was to *magnify the spiritual application* — the spirit of the law, the intention for the law.

It seems to me, brethren, that there is hardly a law that He paid more attention to than the Sabbath—magnifying its use. I believe that there are at least seven different occasions in the four Gospel writers, in which the Sabbath is the issue; and Jesus *magnified its use* for us. And every one of them, brethren, has a theme of **redemption** involved within it.

What He taught us were *principles* for applying the rules that had already been given back in the Old Testament. For some of us, that is kind of disconcerted. We would like very much to have something like a bus or an airline timetable to take us through life—in which every possible avenue is detailed as to exactly how we should go, where we should do something, when we should do it, how we should do it—in every possible situation that might arise.

God allowed the Jews to try that. They eventually came up with 1,521 rules concerning the Sabbath, which they felt would cover every situation that one might possibly get into. But what God is showing us, through Jesus Christ, is this is not needed. It is unnecessary. In short, it doesn't work—or God would have done it. A person is not **free** when they are bound to those kinds of regulations.

Now, living in the Twentieth Century is not quite the same as living in the First or the Second Century. Besides, that approach does negative things to a person's character; and it produces an extremely narrow, intolerant, and critical casuist. What Christ did—in giving us *principles* — is that He gave us things that will last unalterable to the end of time and will allow us to be **free**. They allow a person to not always do exactly the same thing each time. Every situation has to be judged on its own merit.

Brethren, think. What does God want to do with our lives? What is He trying to form? He is creating in us an ability—an expertise—**to judge**. We are going to be kings. What does a king do? A king judges in civil matters, things that pertain to the community. What does a priest do? A priest also judges, but he judges in things spiritual. God is teaching us *how to judge*.

How we use the Sabbath is an integral part of His training program, and so He has purposely left out all kinds of details. But what He did through Jesus is magnify things so that we can see **the intent**. What we are seeing is that the intent for the Sabbath is to free. It is to liberate. It is NOT to bind people with rules. (And we'll see how this works.)

There is **a risk** that is involved in what God is doing. In one sense, it puts a person at very grave risk. Blundering, foolish, and self-centered as we are—there is a very grave danger of taking our liberty and turning it into license to do virtually anything we want. Or, on the other hand, to take our liberty and do as the Jews did and become so restrictive that we turn the Sabbath into bondage.

But God has to do that! If we are going to become judges, if we are going to be trained in the purpose that He wants—He has to allow us this liberty to make the judgments. So it is a risk that must be taken if a person is going to **grow** in judgment and character, so that one will **be prepared** to be a king and a priest—knowing then when to act, and when not to act. God offers to us His Holy Spirit to give us counsel, and to guide. But we must apply the principles in the circumstances of our lives.

You have already seen (in the things that we have gone through) that *in no case* did Jesus give any indication of doing away with the Sabbath. That is an honest evaluation of these things that we have gone through. Always the examples show Him magnifying the Sabbath's intent by doing an act of *freeing* someone.

The last time we got to Luke 13. That's the chapter in which three times He used the verb that means **to free**. In my New King James, they have translated that word "loosed." This is the one where the woman was all bent over with an infirmity that she had for eighteen years. In verse 12, He says, "Woman, you are *loosed* from your infirmity." This happened on the Sabbath.

Luke 13:15-16 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?"

Tie that example to Luke 4, and you will begin to see *the redemptive teaching* being put into **action**—in this case, in this healing. He did it in chapter 4 and Luke recorded it; and He did it in chapter 13, only this time it was much more clearly and forcibly magnified than it was in Luke 4.

Now, I want you to turn with me to John 5 and John 9. We are going to consider the two examples that appear in these two chapters, because they have a great deal in common in showing the relationship between the Sabbath and the work of salvation. In chapter 5 we have the man who was at the Sheep Gate, near a pool (called in the Hebrew, Bethesda). Then we find, in verse 5, that he had had that infirmity for thirty-eight years. In John 9:2 we have the man who was blind from birth.

Both of these men were chronically ill. This was not something that needed to be done [in that] Jesus could have waited until the Sabbath was over. It wasn't going to make any difference at all to these men if they would be blind or cripple for one more day—or, let's say, just a few more hours. Jesus could have waited until the Sabbath was over. But I submit to you that He did not wait because He wanted to teach people a right and proper use of the Sabbath. It is a time to relieve burdens. It is a time to heal. It is a time to make life a bit easier for somebody.

And we find, then, that Christ ordered both of these people to do something.

John 5:8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk."

John 9:7 And He said to him [the blind man], "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam:" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.

In both cases, we find:

John 9:16 Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

What happened here was that, in John 9:15, the Scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath because He made a paste from His saliva and clay, and put it on the man's eyes. Therefore, they considered that to be *work*.

John 5:16 For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day.

What had happened here? He not only healed the man, but He told the man to take up his bed and walk. So the carrying of the pad (the man was using to lie on) was considered [by them] to be *work*, as was the making of the clay paste.

Do you know that the Jews got into an argument and later made a judgment as to whether a man who had a wooden leg could carry that leg on the Sabbath? Some people argued that he could do it because he needed it. But other people said, "*No, it's bearing a burden. It really doesn't belong to part of his body, and therefore he shouldn't be carrying it around.*" So they tried to get into **every detail** to try to help people to judge whether the activity they were doing on the Sabbath was right or not.

John 5:17-19 But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

The charge does not accuse Him of healing, but of breaking Sabbath regulations. In both cases, Jesus repudiates the charge by arguing (1) that *the works of salvation are contemplated* by the Sabbath Commandment (That would have to be Deuteronomy 5:15, where *redemption* is the focus of the keeping of the Sabbath.) and (2) that what Jesus did—being *contemplated* by the Sabbath—is equivalent to God doing the same thing. It was this that really angered the Jews, because they correctly surmised that He not only had "*broken the Sabbath*" but (in their eyes) did something far worse in "*blaspheming God*" by making Himself equal with God.

The concept behind Christ's reply is that God is not a man that He should break the Sabbath. God is not a man that He should lie. (You are probably familiar with that.) God is not a man that He would break the Sabbath either. From what we have seen, it ought to be obvious that Christ did not regard the Sabbath as a time of idleness. He certainly looked at it far differently than the Jews did. And He admitted that what He was doing here, in John 5, could be construed as **work**.

But *what kind of work* is it? Since He equated Himself with God, what He was saying is that He was doing THE WORK OF GOD. That is His justification. "*My Father is working until now*"—and He didn't break the Sabbath!

It's interesting that the word *answered* in verse 17 also appears in verse 19. It's the only place in the New Testament that this particular word is translated, "answered." The words "answer" or "answered" appear many, many times; but this is the only two times that [this particular word] appears. The reason I bring that to your attention is because it is a particularly strong word. What it means is that Jesus was *heatedly defending Himself*. It is showing that He considered their accusation to be "personal," if I can put it that way; and He is *reacting to it* very strongly.

What came out of His mouth was, "*My Father has been WORKING till now. He works ON THE SABBATH!*" What we have to figure out is what kind of work does God do on the Sabbath? This is important to understanding the principle of *the kind of work that is permitted on the Sabbath*. What does God do that Jesus is copying?

John 5:19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He **sees** the Father do."

Jesus is saying, "*I am copying what I have seen my father do. Therefore, I am NOT breaking the Sabbath—because God does this on the Sabbath!*"

God shows, does He not (in Genesis 2) that He rested from His work. The kind of work that God is doing on the Sabbath does NOT involve the work of physically creating something. So we can eliminate that right away.

John 1:1-3 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made [past tense] through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

John is referring there to the physical Creation. Those works were finished, as it were, from the foundation of the world. Jesus is NOT referring here to the work of earning a living. He is NOT referring to the work of physically creating anything. The work that God is involved in is something else entirely!

God does this *ceaselessly*, and He does it *effortlessly*. Jesus is telling us what kind of work this is. **What kind of work is it?** It's the work of redeeming. It's the work of salvation. It's the work of healing people. It is the work of healing people's minds.

In John 5:36, if we lead right up to this, Jesus is going to show you something about what the witness is that He Himself will put stock in—as to whether or not what He is doing is the work of the Messiah.

John 5:31-36 If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.

He is saying, "*What I am doing proves that I am the Messiah.*" What did He just *do*? He just healed somebody. What did He just *do*? He just redeemed somebody from bondage to an illness. He just saved somebody from the bondage of uselessness. He just gave (to somebody) the liberty of having great hope. He just delivered somebody out of their discouragement. That kind of work is ***the work of salvation*** .

John 10:37-38 If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.

It's becoming pretty clear.

John 14:11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

Let's go all the way back to Psalms 74.

Psalm 74:12 For God is my King from of old, *working salvation* in the midst of the earth.

That is plain, and as clear of an explanation that you are going to ever get as to what the work of God is. ***God is WORKING SALVATION.***

John 6:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

God is working to produce *faith* in Jesus Christ—because salvation is by grace through faith. Faith is the foundation from which everything in God's purpose grows. God is working in order to get us saved. He is able to do it; but we have a part in this salvation, in that we have to **make choices**. And the basis of our choices is whether or not we *believe* in Jesus Christ. If we believe Him, then we are going to make the right choices. So it is essential that our faith be increased.

So, the purpose of the manifestation of ***the works of God*** in Christ is to produce faith. If one has faith in God, then what is one going to do? One is going to apply God's Word. And that produces **liberty** in ourselves, and also in others. If you are thinking with me, you are beginning to see the part that THE SABBATH plays in all of this. It is essential to the increasing of faith.

The work that God is doing is not the work of a physical Creation, but it is the work of **a spiritual Creation**. He is creating sons in His image. And Christ is Redeemer; He is Deliverer; He is Savior—and that's His work! What does He spend His time doing? He spends His time *healing*. He spends His time *forgiving* sin. He spends His time *teaching* the way of God. He spends His time *doing good*. That's His part in the work of God.

John 5:19-21 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will."

The greatest gift, I guess you might say, that God can give to a person is **eternal life**; and the Son will do that too. That is the great release—the great deliverance—that comes at the end.

John 5:22-23 For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

So here we see Christ's justification for His Sabbath activities. The physical healing was a "type" of the spiritual healing. And that begins to lead us to a related area. Turn to John 7. This, which we are going to read, is like a reverberation—an echo of chapter 5. In fact, there are some commentators who feel that what we are going to read here is actually out of place. That is, that somehow or other it actually, at first, belonged in chapter 5; but somehow it got into chapter 7. You'll see why in just a second.

John 7:21-24 Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

The Jews considered doing a circumcision on the Sabbath *a lawful Sabbath activity*. Now, why? Why was it lawful, in their eyes, to do a circumcision on the Sabbath? A direct answer is never given in the Bible. Do you know why? Because Jesus nailed them to the wall! They knew why circumcision was lawful on the Sabbath. The Jews rightly considered circumcision to be *a redemptive act*. Why? Receiving circumcision was a Jewish, or an Israelite, lad's introduction to being a part of the covenant. So doing a circumcision was a redemptive act, even as today we consider baptism a redemptive act. And we rightly, lawfully, will baptize people on the Sabbath.

The Jews' reasoning was that they considered it lawful and right to cut off a piece of skin from one of the 248 (by their count) parts of the body. Why? Their idea was to save the whole man by making this person a part of the covenant. Christ's reasoning, then, was that the **works of salvation** are accomplished not only by the Father but also by His servants, or His agents. In this case, who did the circumcising? The priests did. And so the work of circumcision—a work of redemption, a work of salvation—was done by God's agents, the priests; and they [the Jews] considered it lawful.

So Jesus' reasoning is beautiful. *"If you can do this act to save a man, why can't I also make a person whole and save their physical life on the Sabbath?"* He said, *"This is the work of God."* This is redeeming somebody. This is setting them free. This is giving them liberty.

The Sabbath is for Christ, the day to work for the salvation of the whole person—physically and spiritually. If it is legal to cut off a part of a boy's body on the Sabbath because of the covenant, they have no reason to be angry with Him for mercifully restoring a person to wholeness. But His opponents can't perceive. Somehow or other, it doesn't enter into their minds. And we can understand why. God just was not working with them (for salvation) yet. And so it was almost like they had blinders on. They cannot perceive the saving nature of His work. To them, the pallet and the clay were more important than the healed man was.

Let's look at another example, in Matthew 12. This is a little bit different circumstance, which also appears in Mark 2:23-28 and Luke 6:1-5. Each one is a little bit different. Matthew's is the most comprehensive, so we'll use his.

Matthew 12:1-8 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would have not condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

According to the Pharisees, the disciples—in doing what they did—reaped a crop. They threshed it, by rubbing the berries in their hands and getting hulls broken off. And then they winnowed it, by blowing the hulls away. By doing so, they were guilty of preparing a meal.

Let's consider the disciples' **motivation** for what they did. First of all, they were hungry. Next we have to consider that they were itinerate. That is, they were traveling with Jesus. They were going from place to place along with Him, as a part of His entourage. He was teaching them, and giving them examples of His teaching all along the way. He Himself said that He had no place to lay His head.

They had, therefore, no place to prepare. They were not living in one spot. They didn't have a home that they could readily turn to. They didn't have an eight-to-five job that they were going to every day. Rather, they were using "shoe leather express," going from one place to another. In the book of Luke, we find that this was actually a High Holy Day on which this occurred. It was very likely one of the high holy days of the Days of Unleavened Bread.

And so they were, hungry. They had not had any place in which to prepare a meal. These were strong, young men—probably in their twenties or early thirties (as they were probably about the same age of Jesus). So they could have fasted without damage. **But**, because it was the Sabbath, Jesus *deliberately* drew attention to one of the Sabbath's main purposes. ***It is a day of mercy, and NOT a day of sacrifice.***

Notice His justification. It comes from I Samuel 21, and we are going to see this example that came from the life of David.

I Samuel 21:1-6 Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David [He was notorious by this time.], and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one is with you?" So David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.' And I have directed my young men to such and such a place. Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, and whatever can be found." And the priest answered David and said, "There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women." [Implied that if they met this condition, then Ahimelech felt obligated to give them the holy bread.] Then David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men [their bodies] are holy [clean], and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day." [Remember that. It will become important in just a little bit.] So the priest gave him holy bread [And by Jesus' estimation, given in Matthew 12, rightly so.]: for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.

Christ's reasoned that, if it was all right for David to allay his hunger under an unusual circumstance by eating bread that had been consecrated for holy use... This was the bread that was put into the tabernacle on the table, and it sat there during the entire week. Then, every Sabbath it was exchanged for new bread. So what is He saying? He is saying that the Sabbath is a day of mercy. And IF one can

rightly, lawfully, use "holy bread" to do something that—according to the letter of the law was illegal—it was unlawful; THEN it was also legitimate for the disciples to provide for their needs also in an usual circumstance.

The emphasis here is on the word *unusual*. How frequently was David fleeing for his life and finding himself hungry? It did happen, at least this one time; but it was not happening every Sabbath. And maybe in David's lifetime something like this occurred just a very few times. So, even for a man of war like David, it just did not happen all that frequently.

But the overall lesson is that it is NOT the intention of God's law **to deprive** anybody of good things. That is not the intent of God's law. The intent of God's law is *to ensure life*. And, if the need arises, then one should not feel conscience-stricken to use the Sabbath in a way that would not "normally" be lawful. Christ admitted that what David did was not "normally" lawful. Neither was what the disciples were doing "normally lawful," except for the circumstance.

In this case then, they were **blameless** because a larger obligation overruled the letter of the law. ***The larger obligation was to be merciful.*** The letter of the law was that they could not have that bread. The larger obligation said that it was more important to eat than it was to fast (to sacrifice eating). Holy bread, or holy time (the Sabbath), can be used exceptionally in order *to sustain life*.

Matthew 12:5-6 Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.

Again, go back to the Old Testament—to Leviticus 24.

Leviticus 24:5-9 And you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. [This is the showbread that we saw in I Samuel 21, and it is the subject under discussion in Matthew 12.] You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the pure gold table before the LORD. And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to the LORD. Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in the holy place; for it is most holy to him from the offerings of the LORD made by fire, by a perpetual statute.

You put those five verses there together with I Samuel 21; and you will find that, not only were they putting the bread there, but they were also baking it on the Sabbath. Thus, when they put it out there on the Sabbath, it was hot—right out of the oven. Now, was it lawful for a woman—in the ordinary course of her household responsibilities—to bake twelve loaves of bread on the Sabbath? It was not. This is the illustration that Jesus is using here in Matthew 12.

"The priests in the temple **profane the Sabbath**, and are **BLAMELESS**." They not only baked the bread and put it out on the table; they were also making sacrifices on that day, which consisted of a great deal of labor. So, here's your question: *"Why were they blameless?"* The answer is—for the same reason that Jesus justified doing the healing on the Sabbath (in John 5). It's the same reason why the priests were blameless for doing a circumcision on the Sabbath. They were doing the work

of God. They were doing the work of salvation. So what were they doing then? They were fulfilling a purpose on the Sabbath that somebody had to do. This is the issue—all the way through John 5, 7, and 9.

Now, Christ is greater than the temple. He is the Head of God's spiritual temple. He is its High Priest. And the disciples are what? His priests in training—His agents! Thus, their Sabbath ministry—every Sabbath—intensified, even as Jesus' did. Were they justified, then, in eating on the Sabbath? Absolutely! Because of the circumstance, and because of the office that they were now holding in God's spiritual temple!

So, the **circumstances** dictated a "profaning of the Sabbath," because of their involvement in the work of God. *Loving service* is greater than ritual fulfillment. What loving services were Jesus and His disciples performing on the Sabbath? They were teaching God's way. They were healing people. Now, what is mercy? *Mercy* is things like helpful acts. We might say "acts of love," aid comfort, pity, and sympathy for the distress. It may go on and on, with a list of things that may help **relieve a burden** from someone.

I Peter 2:4-5 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious [That's us.], you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood [Remember that I said Jesus is the High Priest, and His disciples are the priests.], to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Let's look, just very briefly, at a few questions regarding the keeping of the Sabbath. I'm not going to necessarily answer these things. But (in regard to keeping the Sabbath in the light of especially these last couple of sermons) we are all part of a spiritual temple; and we have the responsibility to its operations—even as Christ and the disciples.

Now, you answer these questions for yourself. Are your Sabbath activities justifiable in the light of these principles? What does a priest in the temple **do** on the Sabbath? Think about those things. What about praying and studying? That's pretty obvious, isn't it? Those are certainly responsibilities of a holy priesthood. What about rising from sleep? What about showering, or bathing? Shaving? Dressing in Sabbath wear? Driving to services? You answer those things. I think you can begin to see that they are justifiable, because you have to go to the place of your "employment on the Sabbath," do you not? You have to be cleaned up and prepared to serve.

What about using the Sabbath to prepare for and drive to a movie? A concert? A banquet? Or, to go to work? I think that we, [living] in this age, have an especially difficult time properly getting into a **Sabbath mode**—because of the extreme pace of our lives. Our lives are roaring by, at ninety miles an hour. Satan has created a society, has he not, that just keeps us busy and distracted constantly. We can find more things to do than we have time to do them in. And we actually look for things to do, do we not?

It reminds me very much of the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, in Matthew 13. This kind of *principle* that we are talking about here—in the speed of our lives—very much reminds me of the

seed that fell on stony ground. So the person took root, but not very deeply, and sprung up quickly; but there was no strength there to keep the person living spiritually. As soon as difficulty arose—because there was no root, and because the nutrients in the seed were gone—there was nothing to sustain the spiritual life. And we can find *ourselves* victims of that kind of syndrome very easily.

In this world, before our calling, we have been spiritually trained not to *regard a day*, but rather how to use time for ourselves. That is, to use it all in order to satisfy our own desires. And when the Sabbath is revealed to us, making the adjustment takes years. A lot of times we have difficulty because we don't *understand the principles* that are involved either. It's not that we don't want to do it. It's just that we've never really been trained by our culture to think of anything but of **time** as being totally ours—to use as we good and well see fit.

Mark 2:27-28 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

I think it helps to understand it a little bit better if we just change one word. The Sabbath was made **on account of** man. Man *needs* the Sabbath! He needs it *physically*, because he needs to rest (Exodus 20). But over and above that, he needs the Sabbath even more *SPIRITUALLY* (Deuteronomy 5:15). That is, for the purpose of recognition of the fact that he has been redeemed. He is no longer in bondage. And he needs to use his time—to "make it," to be prepared for, qualified for, to be in the Kingdom of God, to please God, to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, to grow spiritually, to maintain the liberty that we have been given and to grow towards the Kingdom of God.

Nowhere does Jesus say that the Sabbath is done away. He doesn't indicate it at all—anywhere! And so when He says that He is "Lord of the Sabbath," He is saying that He has the authority to determine *how* the day is to be kept. We ought to be able to see so far—especially from things that we saw in John 5, 7 and 9—that God does not intend the day to be a day of loafing around

There may be occasions when that is needed, because you are just simply worn out. You need then to feel that you have the liberty to just "crash" on that day. But if that is occurring to you, you need to ask yourself the question, "*Why do I need to crash on the Sabbath?*" Then, make the adjustment. Repent, so that the day does not have to be used to "crash"—because that begins to be a profanation of God's intention for the Sabbath.

He intends the day to be *for the good of His spiritual children* — that they be prepared for the Kingdom of God. To remember why we are here. We are here because we are redeemed, and so forth. So, it can be a day of very intensive WORK—but it is **work that leads to salvation**, getting prepared for the Kingdom of God and giving service to those in need of salvation. And it is through these things that the growth and faith in God is promoted.

How did Jesus keep the Sabbath?

By attending services and fellowshiping. That is very clear. He did not avoid Sabbath services, and He fellowshiped on the Sabbath. He went to people's homes on the Sabbath. They had a meal, and they fellowshiped with one another. So He kept the Sabbath by attending services and fellowshiping.

He taught God's way on the Sabbath.

He did acts of kindness that brought liberty, and joy, and peace to others.

All of these are part of the spiritual temple's operations. But I want you to understand that not everybody in that temple has equal responsibility. It's important that you understand this. Therefore, what might be acceptable for a minister is not acceptable for a lay member. They have different responsibilities, and each situation has to be honestly evaluated.

Let's go back to a previous question. What does ordinary entertainment—or work—have to do with temple responsibility? You can answer that.

Using the Sabbath properly, then, becomes an expression of our **commitment** to God's purpose. It shows where our interests lie. We have begun to see in the principles that we have already covered, and we will continue to see, that God shows that you use the Sabbath to make time for those that you love. Do you love God? You make time for Him on the Sabbath. Do you love your family? You make time for your family on the Sabbath. Do you love your church family? You make time for your church family on the Sabbath. No excuses! God has given that time.

The other six days we can pursue things that more pertain to us. But when the Sabbath rolls around, He wants us to turn our attention much more intensively in a different direction. And we'll never be able to go to Him and say, "*God, I never had the time.*" He's going to say, "*Why didn't you use the Sabbath?*" — to write a note of encouragement, to call somebody up that is shut in. If somebody is going through a trial, you just check in with him or her and try to encourage them. You don't have to correct them. You don't have to say anything great. Just let them know that you are aware of what they are going through, and try to encourage them.

Let's conclude today in Jeremiah 17.

Jeremiah 17:21-22 Thus says the LORD: "Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I have commanded your fathers."

We find, in verse 23, that "they did not obey, nor inclined their ear."

Jeremiah 17:27 But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

Connect these verses with Ezekiel 20. Ezekiel 20 is directed at Israel. Jeremiah 17 is God's admonition to the Jews. What does He say in Ezekiel 20? Why did they go into captivity? They went into captivity because of their failure to keep the Sabbath and their idolatry. Did the Jews go into captivity? Did they keep the Sabbath? No, they didn't! They were warned, but they didn't heed. And so the lesson is clear again that those who misuse the Sabbath lose their liberty.

So, cessation from work is an essential element of keeping the Sabbath. Again, remember that is derived from Genesis 2 and Exodus 20. The redemption motif is derived from Deuteronomy 5 and from Jesus' use—the examples that He gives us in the New Testament.

We'll call that quits for today; but, God willing, the next sermon we will extend this principle out and have another sermon on the keeping of the Sabbath.