

"ON ANOTHER SABBATH"

I. Introduction

- A. This passage features another Sabbath controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees.
1. Last week, as we studied the Sabbath controversy that was described in the previous passage, we saw how Jesus's words pointed to the connection between the Sabbath and Jesus's rule over the world as the Lord's anointed.
 2. When Christ claimed to be "lord of the Sabbath", he was not just saying that he is Lord *over* the Sabbath, he was also saying that he is the Lord to whom the Sabbath points.
 3. This pointed us back to the creation account in Genesis, where we see that God instituted the Sabbath in order to testify to his total Lordship over the world that he has created.
 4. In the words of Old Testament scholar Meredith Kline, "God sets forth his creative acts within the pictorial framework of a Sabbath-crowned week and by this sabbatical pattern he identifies himself as Omega, the One for whom all things are and were created, the Lord worthy to receive glory and honor and praise." [*Kingdom Prologue*, 33]
 5. In other words, when Jesus called himself "lord of the Sabbath", he was declaring that "from him and through him and to him are all things." (Rom. 11:36)
- B. In the verses that we are considering today, the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees helps us to see the connection between the Sabbath and Jesus's renewal of the world.

1. This renewal is already taking place in the lives of Christ's redeemed people.
2. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."
3. At the same time, this renewal will not reach its final stage until the day when Jesus returns and ushers in the new creation in its consummated state.
4. The Sabbath was instituted by God to be a foreshadowing of that glorious day.
5. That was the point that Jesus was making when he healed the man with a withered hand in the synagogue one Sabbath day.

II. Plotting Evil

- A. The first thing to note as we begin our consideration of this text is the contrast between how Jesus kept the Sabbath and what the Pharisees were doing on this particular Sabbath.
 1. Jesus went to the synagogue on this Sabbath day.
 2. This was his regular practice, as evidenced by his synagogue attendance in Nazareth on another Sabbath, which was described back in Luke 4
 3. Jesus kept the Sabbath by going to church.
 4. He did not neglect the covenant assembly of God's people.
 5. He went to synagogue and taught God's people because he knew that the Sabbath is the day that God set apart to provide spiritual rest and refreshment for his people.

6. If Jesus kept the Sabbath by regularly attending public worship, then we should certainly do the same.
- B. The Pharisees were spending this particular Sabbath in a much different way.
1. While they too were present at the synagogue, their thoughts were not on the things of God.
 2. They were watching Jesus with malicious intent.
 3. It may be that they brought the man with the withered hand into the synagogue so that they could use him as bait to ensnare Jesus.
 4. To understand their plot, we need to remember that the Pharisees had added their own traditions to the law of God.
 5. According to the Pharisaic interpretation of the law, medical help could only be extended to a person on the Sabbath if it was a matter of life and death.
 6. Apparently they considered miraculous healing as falling under the general category of medical care.
 7. Now, whatever the precise cause of this man's withered hand was, it was obviously not a mortal illness.
 8. It would not kill him to wait an extra day to be healed.
 9. But the Pharisees suspected that Jesus would not be able to wait one whole day to heal this poor soul, especially not when he saw him sitting right there in front of him.
 10. And if Jesus did heal this man, the Pharisees were ready to seize the opportunity and condemn Jesus as a lawbreaker.
- C. Let's take a moment to reflect upon what was going on here.

1. Let's consider the Pharisees' reasons for being so opposed to Jesus.
 2. Ironically, they were motivated by their longing for the renewal of the world.
 3. They had an eschatological outlook, and the Sabbath played a key role in that outlook.
 4. They thought that the extra rules that they created for keeping the Sabbath holy would help usher in the messianic age.
 5. They were zealous, but look at what their zeal drove them to do.
 6. They plotted evil on the Sabbath.
 7. They set a trap for Jesus by playing on his sense of compassion.
 8. They used this poor man as bait.
 9. They even believed that Jesus could heal the man, but they did not stop to think about the significance of that fact.
 10. Jesus's healings were a sign pointing to the renewal of the creation, the very thing to which the Sabbath was pointing, the very thing for which the Pharisees were longing.
 11. But their blind zeal prevented them from seeing this.
- D. When you think about it, everyone has an eschatological outlook on the world, whether they are religious or not.
1. Everyone is trying to usher in some form of paradise.
 2. Yet like the Pharisees, their zeal only leads them to plot and carry out that which is evil.
 3. We could even say that this is the story of the world.

4. It goes all the way back to Eden.
5. Eve wanted to be like God, so she ate the forbidden fruit in defiance of God's explicit command.
6. Cain was jealous of the divine favor that his brother Abel enjoyed, so he killed him.
7. We see the same type of thing happening down through the ages all they way up to our current day.
8. The more fallen man works for paradise, the more he condemns himself to hell.

III. Doing Good

- A. Jesus knew the Pharisees' thoughts.
 1. He was aware of what was going on.
 2. He knew that the man with the withered hand was a pawn being used by the Pharisees to ensnare him.
 3. So he confronted and challenged them, asking, "is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?"
 4. That question highlights the sharp contrast between Jesus's Sabbath activities and those of the Pharisees.
 5. The Pharisees were trying to harm Jesus.
 6. They were looking for a way to destroy his life.
 7. But Jesus was only doing good.
 8. He was about to restore this man's shriveled hand.

9. He was about to bring something that was as good as dead back to a state of life.
- B. Jesus performed this miracle right in front of the Pharisees, even though he knew that that was exactly what they wanted him to do.
1. He did not carry out his work in secret.
 2. He did it openly and in public.
 3. He had nothing to hide.
 4. In spite of what his enemies thought, he was not doing anything wrong.
- C. Another thing to note about this is that Jesus performed this miracle in the same way that he performed most of his other miracles: merely by speaking a word.
1. He told the man to stretch out his hand, and when the man did so, his hand was restored.
 2. How in the world could the Pharisees conceive of this as a form of human work?
 3. No other man could have done such a thing.
 4. This was not a human work but a divine work.
 5. It was a perfect picture of the work that God does in us when we rest from our works on the Sabbath.
 6. This is why it was entirely appropriate for Jesus to heal this man on the Sabbath.
 7. The Sabbath was given to be a sign of renewal and consummation.
 8. Jesus came in order to bring about that renewal.

9. He came to undo the miserable curse that has come upon this world as a result of mankind's rebellion against God.
- D. The miracle that Jesus performed that day reminds us that the Sabbath is a day for doing good.
1. We too should use the Sabbath to do good, both to others and to ourselves.
 2. We do not always give much thought to what is really good for us.
 3. We get so caught up in the world of technology and entertainment and social media that we fail to see that by devoting so much time to those things, we have little time for other things that are far more important.
 4. As we live in this age of distraction, it is vital that we create time and space for contemplation.
 5. If we fail to do so, our hearts will held captive by those who are spending billions of dollars to hold onto our attention.
 6. As one writer observes, "If you don't control your own attention, there are plenty of people who are eager to do it for you." [Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, 227-228]
 7. The Sabbath is a fitting day to take a break not only from your work, but also from spending so much time in your diversions so that you can focus upon the world to come.
- E. To press this point a little further, consider the good things that you should be doing that you either aren't doing at all or aren't spending much time doing.
1. Our weeks can become so full that it seems that we don't have time for things that are really important.
 2. We don't have enough time to pray.

3. We don't have enough time to read the Bible and good Christian literature.
4. We don't have time to visit those who are sick or shut-in or lonely.
5. We don't have time to open up our homes to others.
6. We don't have time to talk with our neighbors about the gospel.
7. What we need to realize is that we actually do have time for these good things.
8. We have one day every week that is especially suited for such things.
9. The Sabbath is the day that the Lord has freed up for us so that we can do things that are good.

IV. Being Hated

- A. Jesus did something very good on that Sabbath day, but the good that he did was met by a hostile response.
 1. Mark tells us in his Gospel that after seeing Jesus perform this miracle the Pharisees plotted with the Herodians, a group with whom they had no affinity, about how they might destroy Jesus.
 2. Now think about that.
 3. It was completely irrational for them to be angry at Jesus for healing this man.
 4. The healing not only helped that man; it helped the entire community.
 5. If the man had a family, he would now be able to work to support them.

6. He and his family would no longer be a burden to their community but would instead contribute to its productivity.
 7. Yet the Pharisees were so bent on preserving their place of influence in their society that they took absolutely no notice of the good that Jesus had done.
 8. All that they knew was that Jesus did something that made them look bad, and this caused them to hate him with a murderous hatred.
- B. There is a parallel between the Pharisees' response to Jesus and the way many people respond to the gospel today.
1. The gospel is God's good news for the world.
 2. The word "gospel" means "good news."
 3. In the gospel God does something that is good beyond all comparison for a people who are not good at all.
 4. Yet apart from the working of the Spirit of God in a person's heart, the gospel will always be met either by anger or by a shrug of the shoulders.
 5. The gospel provokes opposition, even though it does the greatest good of all.
 6. The gospel offends people because it makes them look bad.
 7. It tells us that we cannot do anything to make ourselves acceptable to God.
 8. It also tells us that we are not in the position of lordship over our lives, because Jesus is the true Lord over all.
 9. That message will never be received as good news unless and until the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the fact that we stand in need of the same kind of renewal that Jesus brought about when he

restored this man's withered hand.

10. Our sin-withered selves need the life that only Jesus can give.

V. Conclusion

A. This passage helps us to see the Sabbath's function as a reminder that this world is moving towards a glorious goal.

1. As we keep this weekly day of rest, we declare to ourselves and to the world that our lives are not consumed with the things of this world.
2. We are waiting for the day when we will share in the consummation of God's purposes for his creation.
3. We are being formed as the people of God's new creation.

B. The Sabbath tells us that this world will not remain broken forever.

1. Evil will not go unpunished forever.
2. Sin will not plague us forever.
3. God's plan will reach its goal.
4. The Sabbath is the day that we celebrate in order to stir up our hope as we wait for that day when we will enter into the full enjoyment of God's rest.

*This is the day that God has blessed, the brightest of the sev'n,
Type of that everlasting rest the saints enjoy in heav'n.*