

The Sabbath was Made for Man

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When this scene breaks in Matthew chapter 12—and it is a beautiful scene. You just think about picturing it in your own mind. Jesus and his disciples are walking through the grainfields on the sabbath day. Can you imagine that? What a beautiful picture that must have been. Imagine even on a day like today walking across the fields and seeing all the glories of nature that God has built in to his world. And there the disciples are walking on the sabbath day.

The Lord Jesus has just told them something that is so wonderful. He has told them what he is going to tell them again and that is the value of a man. He says before this scene in the grain field that there is a yoke that Jesus Christ makes for his children.

He says, “Take My yoke upon you.”¹ And in saying that he is implying that there are many yokes in this world you can take upon yourself. There are many task masters in the world. And Jesus says, “[No,] take My yoke upon you.”² And he says:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.³

The disciples are walking through the grain fields and they are thinking about the rest of the soul. They are thinking about the blessing of Jesus Christ and how good he is. They are thinking about this wonderful world that he has placed them in. But not only that, he would place them in a world, but he would give rest for their soul, that he would do something deep within their hearts that would bless them because there is a value in a man.

And so he tells them that his yoke is not burdensome at all. He said in another place, “My commandments are not burdensome to you.”

But here we this saying there is a yoke and here is my yoke. It is made perfectly for you.

¹ Matthew 11:29.

² Ibid.

³ Matthew 11:28-30.

If you know anything about yokes and oxen and things like that you know that often a yoke had to be made custom. All animals are not created alike. Some are big and some are little. But some need, you know, a bigger yoke and some need a smaller one. Some need tighter and some wider. Some are shaped in one way for one animal and another for a different animal.

And the Lord uses it to say, "Take my yoke because it fits you. I will make a yoke for you that will be a blessing to you."

And so that is the context that we find in this passage here. They are walking through the grain fields. Jesus talked to them about rest. "Buy my yoke is easy and my burden is light and you will find rest for your souls."

So he has already got them thinking about rest. And then, wham, the Pharisees come up against this whole idea of rest.

So it is really an amazing place to be to help us understand how we apply the Old Testament, how Jesus viewed the Old Testament and these very controversial laws regarding the sabbath because the sabbath has always been controversial. So what do we do in such great controversy?

Well, what we will be doing in the next few weeks is examine various texts on the sabbath day. And what we find here in this text is a confrontation with those who misapply the laws regarding the sabbath. They drew a fence around the sabbath in order to protect it.

The Talmud has 24 chapters on the sabbath.

And Jesus is telling them they don't understand the law. They do not understand the heart of God regarding the sabbath.

So here is the question that we all have before us. Do you understand? Do we understand, as a church, what God has said on the sabbath?

Well, the elders of this church are thinking, I don't think we understand it very well, honestly. So we are going to spend some time studying various passage of Scripture.

So really we want to present this question: Do you understand what Jesus has said about the sabbath? Do you understand that as Jesus sums up everything in the law, that everything in the law that was said about the sabbath is also accurate? And do you understand that? Do you? Do your children understand it?

When they walk through the door today, did your children understand the vision of the sabbath that God has? Was it riveting their souls? Were they thinking what David was thinking? "Better is one day in your courts than 1000 elsewhere." That is like saying, "I

would rather be in the house of God for one day than 20 years of sabbaths anywhere else.”

And so was that the heart that your eight year old walked in here with? Or what about you 80 year olds or you 50 or 60 year olds? Did you walk in having a biblical understanding of this day? Did you get up and sing the sabbath day song in your heart? Or were you just going through another routine?

Well, we want to spend some time spelling out clear statements from Scripture about the sabbath.

So what we are going to do in the next four weeks we are going to identify. We are going to walk through four different tests. Today is Matthew 12:1-13.

Now each one of these texts has really sort of an overwhelming focus to help us understand what the sabbath is all about. You will not get all your answers about the sabbath today because we are going to deal with one text. The other answers are coming. So be patient.

Go through a process. You know, you are being sanctified by the Lord. You are not sanctified in one day, so we are going to take four weeks to sanctify us together, you know, on the sabbath. And then we can spend the rest of our lives continuing it.

Matthew 12:1-13 focuses on a couple of things, mainly the value of a man for the sabbath. He says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I desire love.”

So the principle we are going to really camp on today and jump all of our weight on is this whole principle that the sabbath was made for man. And then we will go into Exodus chapter 20 and Deuteronomy five where we find the duty of the sabbath, that we keep it holy. And then we will go into Nehemiah chapter 13 where we see the consequences of keeping or not keeping the sabbath. There are terrible calamities that await those that reject this principle and we will see that in Nehemiah 13. And then we will end up with Isaiah 58 and we will see how one would maximize his delight in the sabbath by figuring out what you are supposed to do.

What are you supposed to do with the sabbath, with your brain and your feet? You know, is it lawful to do this or that or the other thing? Well, Isaiah 58 will give us principles to help us understand that.

So do you understand what we are doing here? We are talking about Matthew and the heart of the sabbath and the value of a man. But then it is the duty of sabbath to keep it holy and then it is the consequences of the sabbath. And then it is the duties of delight for the sabbath. So that is where we are headed in the next few weeks.

Thank the Lord that he has created a world in which he would call his people to live differently, that we would not be like automatons always striving, always pounding, no

break from our labors, always strategizing, always putting plans, always pushing the ball forward. But God says, “I have something better for you. Pull back. Pull back from it and spend a day, a day of delight like no other day. Make it holy. Make it very distinct. Make sure that as you are living your life that you have this one day.”

People will have more than 1000 days in his courts, 1000, 2000, 3000, that would be 60 years. Eighty years, 4000 days of sabbaths. That is a lot of sabbaths. So if you are going to call yourself a believer and you are going to try to celebrate the sabbath you better figure it out. That is what Jonathan Edwards said.

He said, “You need to understand what the Bible says about this for you and your family’s sake. If you are not clear get clear.”

We want to drive our church into a season of studying and understanding the doctrine of the sabbath so that we find ourselves at some level of clarity.

You know, it is so important that we think and that we feel rightly about the sabbath because we will have so many of them. We also need to acknowledge that the sabbath can be a stumbling stone. I recently read a testimony of a young lady who said, “I refrained from my repentance because I thought God was going to make me read the Bible all day long on Sunday and I just couldn’t stand to have my life regulated like that. But God so refreshed me and changed my heart and my mind on that.”

The idea of the sabbath can be a stumbling stone.

Let’s give some historical perspective on this. Let’s talk about theologians who spoke distinctly, theologians that I happen to agree with.

Jonathan Edwards believed that the sabbath was a requirement. He says, “By a strict observance of the sabbath, the face of religion is kept up in the world. If it were not for the sabbath there would be but little public and visible appearance of serving, worshipping and reverencing the supreme and invisible being.”

Do you see what Edwards is saying? Here with the sabbath is a visible time in the calendar of every nation that people would worship God. And it makes God visible in the world as works tops and people move toward worship.

He continues, “The sabbath seems to have been appointed very much for this end, to uphold the visibility of religion in public and, or among professing societies of men by how much greater the strictness is with which the sabbath is observed and with how much more solemnity the duties of it are observed among the people by so much the greater the manifestation of them in respect to the divine being.”

So Edwards says the sabbath is important for many reasons. It is a solemn assembly. Mark that word “solemn,” because that word appears in connection with this term sabbath in Scripture. We will deal with that in another time.

But also Edwards viewed the sabbath in one way as a visible expression that God is king, that he is alive in the world. And it is a way that we market and express that. If we go along in the ways of the world we are not marking his existence and his authority over all the world.

Matthew Henry speaks of the help and the care of God through the sabbath. He says, "The sabbath was made a day of rest only in order to its being a day of holy work, a day of communion with God, day of praise and thanksgiving and rest from worldly business. It is necessary that we may closely apply ourselves to this work and spend the time in it in public and in private. But then time is allowed for us for that which is necessary to be fitting for our bodies, for the service of our souls in God's service and the enabling of them to keep pace with them that work. See here what a good master we serve all whose institutions are for our own benefit. And if we be so wise as to observe them, we are wise for ourselves. It is not he, but we, that that are gainers by his service."

I love the way that Matthew Henry speaks of it because I have always felt that way. I have always felt that God's ways were always pleasant ways and that all his words are pure and every single word of God is beneficial to my soul even if it rubs contrary to my own brain which most of it does. I know this and I really do believe this, that his commandments are not burdensome and that his yoke is a good yoke.

And that is what Matthew Henry is saying.

You know, much has been spoken about the sabbath. I sent out to us this week this beautiful poem by Christopher Wordsworth,

Oh day of rest and gladness.
Oh day of joy in life.
A balm of care and sadness,
Most beautiful, most bright.
On the high and lowly,
Through ages joined in tune,
Sing "Holy, holy, holy,"
To the great God triune.

You know, this week I asked my family: What is a blessing to you about the sabbath?

And they said the things that would be consistent with the blessings of God, the sweetness of being together, the joy of singing.

You know, when you say the sabbath, what first comes to your mind? And those are the things that I heard from my own family. Oh, the fellowship. Oh, the smiles of the people of God. I love them. Oh, the prayers. Oh, the songs.

For me when I hear the term “sabbath” and the joy of the sabbath I think of the singing part of it, the sweetness of the songs, the words that are so comforting. And they carry you along into the next day and the next week.

Have you ever found yourself humming just unconsciously on Monday the songs you sang on Sunday? It happens and this is the blessing of God as he comes to us.

Well, that is not the only way that people feel about it. We could go to the prophets. We could go to Amos chapter eight and there is a scene of judgment there. Songs in the temple are wailing. There are dead bodies everywhere. The feasts have turned into mourning and it is a terrible kind of mourning like the mourning for an only son, a bitter day.

And the prophet says, “Hear this. Hear this.” And he talks about those who are anxious to just get on with life and to get past the day. He says, “Hear this, those of you who say, ‘When will the new moon be past that we can sell grain? When will the sabbath be done so that we can trade wheat? When can we get by this?’”

And that is another attitude regarding the sabbath.

If you are an American it is a hodge podge. How do Americans view the sabbath? Many Americans view the sabbath as a new covenant option. Some view it as an old covenant bondage. Most people in America view it as at least, at minimum a half a sports day or maybe a full sports day. It is the best day in sports, honestly, in America. And if you worship the NFL and those you will, you can worship right there on the sabbath day because they run on the sabbath primarily and most powerfully.

Some people believe that the sabbath is kind of an infringement on my rights. Or if you are Bill Gates it is just a waste of time. It is not efficient use of time.

One unknown author said, “In America we worship our work. We work at our play and we play our worship.”

So if you are an American, the sabbath can be a confusing cacophony. You know, it can be any kind of day that you might imagine.

But what kind of day has God designed for it to be?

You know, it is interesting, even churches offer alternatives. They recognize that Sunday is a big sports, hiking, play, sailing day. So they have Friday night services or Saturday night services for that specific reason.

Or they have really early services for the people who want to just get on with it. You know, get it over with. Come on. Like, we are going to go to the early service so that we can hit the beach.

There are many, many actual entire churches and even denominations that promote this kind of behavior.

Does this square at all with what Jesus said? Does it make sense with what the prophet said about it? Does it jive with Moses? Does it make sense in the historical testimony regarding the sabbath that we find in the book of Genesis? Does that seem to square rightly with it?

We subscribe in our church to a statement on the sabbath that you find in the Second London Baptist Confession. I will read it.

“God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth whether in private families daily, in secret by each individual or solemnly in the public assemblies. These are not to be carelessly or willfully neglected or forsaken when God by his Word and providence calls us to them.

“As it is the law of nature that in general proportion of time, by God’s appointment should be set apart for the worship of God. So he has given in his Word a positive, moral and perpetual commandment binding upon all men in all ages to this effect. He has particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy for him. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ this was the last day of the week. And from the resurrection of Christ it was changed to the first day of the week called the Lord’s Day. This is to be continued until the end of the world as the Christian sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week having been abolished.

“The sabbath is kept holy to the Lord by those who, after the necessary preparation of their hearts and prior arranging of their common affairs, observe all day a holy rest from their works, words and thoughts about their worldly enjoyment and recreations and give themselves over to the public and private acts of worship for the whole time.”

They say “whole time” in contrast to half the time because even in the 17th century a half time sabbath was popular.

“And to carry out the duties necessary and the mercy.”

So that is the Second London Baptist Confession which is an explanation of the biblical doctrine of the sabbath that we accept in our church.

Now, let’s dive into this text. We have read Matthew chapter 12. The disciples had just been instructed, “There is a rest for you, brother. Take rest for your soul because my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

He has just said that. And now they are walking through the grain fields and we have this passage. It is an amazing passage just for many reasons. It is a confusing passage in many ways. I will just have to admit that to you. I have had difficulty understanding

certain aspects of it. There are some things, though, that I think are so clear that we can rest everything on them.

But it is a critical passage and here is one reason it is a critical passage. After this scene the Pharisees decide to kill Jesus. Isn't that interesting? The controversy over the sabbath was the trip cord for the plot to kill Jesus. That is how controversial this is. Ok. When you start stamping on the sabbath there are a lot of toes there and Jesus is going to stomp some toes so bad that they are going to want to kill him as a result of what he had said.

Ok, so the scene is walking. They are hungry. They are eating.

Verse two we see the accusation. Do you see it?

“And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!’”⁴

So the text begins with an accusation. Here Jesus has just said, “I will give you rest.”

And then the mean old Pharisees show up and start spilling their bile.

Now, you know, they perhaps spent time in the morning in worship and they had, perhaps, had no time for a morning meal. We don't know. It seems that they are headed to the synagogue. It seems like they are doing what we read about this morning in Psalm 84 where David says, “My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home... For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”⁵

So the disciples are headed toward worship and they are picking grain and they are doing what the Pharisees said you never could do on the sabbath. They are harvesting, in other words, picking. They are threshing. They are winnowing. They are milling the grain. And they are doing it all in their hands. They have taken and they have broken the sabbath by doing all of these work activities associated with their eating.

And, you know, the Talmud forbids any of this kind of activity. And so the Pharisees were very upset about it.

Were they correct? Was the accusation correct?

No. It was not correct. They were wrong. They had misrepresented the Scriptures.

In Deuteronomy chapter 23 we know that the law allowed the picking of grain under certain conditions. And so the accusation was wrong. And, of course they were constantly trying to trick Jesus and their hearts were betrayed at the end of the story when we find that they would use this as an opportunity to make a plot to kill him.

⁴ Matthew 12:2.

⁵ Psalm 84:2-3,10.

So there is the accusation of sabbath breaking. That is the first thing you see.

Then, second, Jesus replied. And then in verse three we pick that up. And Jesus begins with Scripture. He uses that phrase that he uses elsewhere. “Have you not read...?”⁶

If there is ever a question on the table opinion is not going to work. But what does work? Have you not read...? The Word of God works.

Jesus here is applying a doctrine. He is applying the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. He was the author of the doctrine. He is the demonstrator of the doctrine and he now is the grand communicator of it because when a question comes up he answers it with this: “What does the Scripture say? Have you not read?” Not, what do you think? Not what do you feel? Not what do your friends do? What do you read? And that is what Jesus does.

“Have you not read...”⁷ You see that in verse three.

We have already read in Deuteronomy that we cannot add or subtract from the Word of God. The final judgment warning in the book of Revelation are terrible tribulations for those who would add or subtract from the Word of God.

And so Jesus is applying this principle of the sufficiency of Scripture. And so Jesus is confirming his teaching by going back to read what the Scripture has said. And what we find Jesus does with these Scriptures on the sabbath, the same thing that he does with everything else that he quotes in the Old Testament.

You remember Jesus always presents the law as spiritual. There is a law associated with it, but there is always this spiritual part of the law. And so Jesus is very consistent. He does what we have seen him do many times in our studies in Deuteronomy. He makes it clear that the law is spiritual, that there is a heart of the matter and there is also a principle to be regulated, a rule to follow. There are both. The spiritual principle doesn’t throw out the regulation and neither does the regulation overwhelm the spiritual principle. And so Jesus does that again.

And he cites a number of examples. He cites David example in verse four, David eating the showbread. He says:

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?⁸

⁶ Matthew 12:3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Matthew 12:3-4.

Now, understanding exactly why used that example I have honestly just very candidly struggled with what exactly he meant by this. You know, Calvin says that he meant that the ceremonies of the law are not violated when there is no infringement of godliness. In other words that David was godly.

I am not confident that is actually right.

We do know that Jesus was exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. But he doesn't say that specifically as his reason. But what we do... here is what we do find here, though, that is so clear that you cannot miss it. And that is the Lord Jesus Christ is establishing a principle of the sabbath that ends up for the blessing of mankind. The sabbath is made for man. The sabbath is a day of mercy. The sabbath is a day of love. God desires to express love to his people on the sabbath. That is the principle that he is speaking of here.

And we find that of the... I believe there are 12 conflicts over the sabbath that we read in the gospels. Do you know what they all have to do with? Some blessing of mankind. They have to do with healing someone.

You know, the big trouble that Jesus got into on the sabbath was all over the blessing of man. And that should help us understand the purpose of the sabbath. The purpose of the sabbath is mercy, the mercy of God toward mankind. That is the heart of the matter. In the same way that adultery is not only physical, it is something of the mind, that the sabbath is about far more than just keeping. It is about keeping a rule. But it is about way more than that. It is about mercy toward mankind.

And so Jesus is recalling the satisfaction of the hunger of David and in Mark chapter three it was over a man with a crippled hand. In Luke chapter 13 it was a crippled woman who for 18 years had been sick. Everybody knew it in town. And the Lord Jesus, on the sabbath day, he comes and he heals her. And in Luke chapter 14 it was about a man suffering from dropsy and in John chapter five it was about a bunch of crippled people around a pool in Bethesda and there was a showdown in Bethesda and Jesus says to a man, "Do you want to get well?" And he is made well on the sabbath.

You know, think of all the wonderful things that can happen and have happened on the sabbath. You know, I think it was Jonathan Edwards who said he wanted to die on the sabbath day. And, you know, it is interesting. Their testimony is that many of the great saints who did, they did die on the sabbath. And they thought it to be a very precious thing.

The day of rest to enter into your rest eternally on the day of rest. That is the idea. But why do they think that way? They think that way because the sabbath is made for man, because God desires blessing and mercy and love toward mankind on the sabbath.

Don't worry about what God has said about the sabbath because everything that he says about it is about the blessing of man. If you feel it restricts you, it is only the devil lying to you. The devil would make you think that God has said something that would hold

you back. But not true. God in his commands for the sabbath only has things to bless you and to promote you and to help you.

And so Jesus goes back to this principle of blessing.

The clashes that Jesus had on the sabbath, do you know what they were all about? They were all about the body. Something was going to happen to somebody's body and the Pharisees were upset about it. That should help us understand.

As a church here is one thing we need to understand. The sabbath was made for the blessing of the body. When you get up on the morning on the sabbath and when you come here and you engage in the day, know that God has something for your body. He has a blessing for your body to refresh and restore and to heal and to bless us.

And then Jesus shows how the priests are blameless when they profane the sabbath in verse five.

Again, he is talking now about the labors of the priests and he gives this as an example. And, again, he is, perhaps, just exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, you know, in this matter. The priests do lots of work on the sabbath, but it is not considered sabbath breaking.

But there is something greater here. There is mercy. There is sacrifice.

Matthew Henry says, "Works of necessity are lawful on the sabbath day." In other words, the satisfaction of hunger is lawful on the sabbath day. The sabbath is not a fast day. It is a feast day. It would be wrong for us to fast on the sabbath, but to feast on the sabbath is what we ought to do. That is the pattern. It is a feast day.

And then in verse six Jesus proclaims his grace. He says, "Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple."⁹

And Christ is saying, "I will speak on the sabbath. I will tell you what it means." That is basically what he is saying. He is really finding himself in the position that God almighty put him in when God said, "This is my beloved son. Hear him."

And here Christ interprets everything that the Old Testament said about the sabbath day. And he is saying something greater than the temple is here. There is a fulfillment of the temple here.

And, you know, I think one thing Jesus is saying here is he is proclaiming his lordship, his deity and that he is fulfilling everything that the temple was all about.

I think it is... let me test this with you. Is Jesus saying, "I designed the temple and now I am going to tell you exactly what it meant," because he did design the temple. He did

⁹ Matthew 12:6.

design the temple to be a picture of the gospel and a picture of everything related to the salvation of mankind, the sinfulness of mankind and the provision for salvation and the blessing of salvation. The temple tells all those stories.

So the principle of the temple is here that God desires to bless mankind. God gives the temple in order to relieve man of his sins and give him the sense that God is alive, that there is a God in heaven and he does dwell with man and Jesus is making this connection.

“There is something greater than the temple here. All this conversation about the temple is now being fulfilled in what I am telling you about the sabbath.”

So he proclaims his greatness in verse six and then, in verse seven, he reproves the Pharisees. By loving their ceremony and forgetting mercy. And here, again, I think this is the heart of this text for the Lord Jesus. He is helping them to understand how wayward they have become. They have just gotten locked on to ceremony and they have nothing to do with the heart. They have nothing to do with the blessing of mankind. It was a cold transaction. It was business as usual and there was no heart in it.

So Jesus is coming against a church that would lose a sense of the mercy of God in their midst. And he said, “But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.”¹⁰

Who are the guiltless? The disciples walking through the grain fields on the sabbath day. They are the guiltless in the story.

And Jesus is saying, “You don’t understand this statement, ‘I desire mercy or love or charity and not sacrifice.’”

So Jesus is coming and he is summing up the law in the way he always does with the word Love. He is quoting Hosea 6:6. This phrase is also found in 1 Samuel 15, but the 1 Samuel 15 context I am not sure if it works. It seems that Hosea 6:6 is what he is talking about.

And in Hosea the prophet is saying, “Come, and let us return to the LORD.”¹¹ And he is talking about hearts broken before God, bowing down before him. “[And] he will heal us.”¹²

So Hosea is talking about the healing balm of God in a person’s life, that there is something that happens to your body and your soul and your mind when you come before God. And Jesus is casting this same vision. He is going back to Hosea and he is saying, “This is that. What I want to do is exactly what Hosea talked about. You return to the Lord that he will heal you. He will bind you up.”

¹⁰ Matthew 12:7.

¹¹ Hosea 6:1.

¹² Ibid.

In verse two, “After two days He will revive us.”¹³

In other words, there is a short period of time of affliction, but there is a time of revival and that is what the sabbath day is for. It is a time to revive the soul. You have been beat up in the world. You have banged your head against the wall so many times. You have had enough failures for any man or woman. And now you have an opportunity to take a break from all of that and enter into the mercy of the Lord. That is what he is saying.

Jesus is going back to the prophet and he is saying, “Yes, he has... we have been torn up. We have been stricken. But now he is going to bind us up that we may live in his sight.”

And he says, “Let us pursue the Lord and the knowledge of the Lord. Then he will come to us like rain, like the latter rain that rains on the earth.”

So Jesus goes back to Hosea and he picks up this beautiful context of God being like a shower of blessing toward his people.

You know, he has made a yoke for them. He has told them it is a yoke of rest. And now he is coming back again and saying, “You know, it is like rain. It is like getting healed. It is like having your wounds bound up. It is like being raised from the dead. That is what it is like. It is like after two days getting beat up and then just restored. That is what the sabbath is all about. Jesus is going back to that.

And then he says:

For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But like men they transgressed the covenant; There they dealt treacherously with Me.¹⁴

So he is drawing this contrast. The people who have rest and the people who don't, the people who reject the commandments of God and those who embrace them. And there is a big difference. Those who love them and keep them are getting the rain and the nourishment from heaven. They are being watered like a garden. They have a yoke that has been built custom for them. They are being healed. Yes, they are getting bloody, but God is right there with them. And he has created the sabbath for that purpose.

Did you come here for that reason here today? Did you come to get your wounds bound up and healed? Did you come to let God soothe your soul? Have your sins flashed before your mind and realize how good God is in his mercy toward you and that his ways really are pleasant ways. Let's just press the reset button. Let's go back. Let's remember. Let's remember the principle that God wants to do something for his people. And it has to do with mercy.

You can put the word “love” in place of mercy there. It has to do with charity.

¹³ Hosea 6:2.

¹⁴ Hosea 6:6-7.

And so this beautiful principle. The Lord Jesus commends to us in the parallel passage in Mark chapter two the same theme Jesus is talking about it, the whole grain field incident. Mark records that Jesus said, “The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath.”¹⁵

So, you know, the commentators on this text, especially the old ones, they say that the celebration of the sabbath as a day of love for mankind and the second table of the law is set first, not as superior in dignity for it is secondary in the order of our understanding it.

So he is saying that Jesus is setting before us the two tables of the law, love for God, the first table of the law and love for mankind, the second table of the law. And they both stand together. You can't take one out. They both exist simultaneously. So Jesus is presenting this principle.

Think about the goodness of the sabbath for a minute. I didn't count how many sabbath days I have had as a man in my lifetime. Many, many sabbath days where I was conscious of the blessing of the Lord, where I was aware that God wanted to heal me on the sabbath day.

When I was first converted I was astonished in my own soul about the healing intentions of God toward me on the sabbath day. I was very well aware of it and I have always loved that theme. And I recall when I was a young pastor in California in my 20s preaching on these texts that speak of the healing balm of Gilead. My soul would just jump because this is the way that God is.

Think about how good the sabbath is. Think about how good it is for the body. It is a day of rest. It is that day when the labors and the energetic activities for the making of money cease.

Think about how good it is for the mind, to stop the mind at grinding and all the plans and strategies and worries and things that are happening. You know, all the enemies and the demons that are out there. How many times have I stood in the congregation with an awareness of the wolves nipping at my legs, aware of the stress out there and then just desiring to just self consciously put them in the hands of the Lord and not to worry about them anymore. Think of how good the sabbath is for the mind.

I know that every person in here is carrying a burden, a burden for their own prosperity, a burden for their own family, a burden for their business, a burden for the future, a burden for the kind of economic times that we live in. Do you carry those burdens? This is the day for you. This is the day for your mind, to give you relief and to put these burdens into the hands of the Lord.

¹⁵ Mark 2:27.

Think of how good it is for the soul. Jesus said, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”¹⁶ Well, the sabbath was made for the blessing of the soul of mankind.

Think of how good it is for the heart. The Bible says it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace. Think of how good it is for the conscience, a day to confess what we learn about in Ezekiel chapter 20, that the sabbath is made so that you would know who sanctifies you, that it is not yourself, but God is your sanctifier.

Think of how good it is for your family to bring them up in the training and the admonition of the Lord and to gather them together with the saints.

Think about how good it is for the Church to gather a diverse people with various gifts toward one another. It is a blessing to be among the family of God where one man’s lack is another man’s strength and to be able to enjoy that together, to find help on that day.

Think of how good it is for your relationships and how it gives you brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers. Here is God’s intention for you, that you would never lack a father even if your dad died, that you would never lack a mother even if your mother was wayward or she died, that you would never lack a sister if you never had one, that you would never lack a brother if God didn’t give you one, because he would give you fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters.

You say, “I don’t have grandparents that are godly.”

Well, there are godly grandparents in his Church. God has provided so beautifully. And in the sabbath day he gathers the brothers.

Think of how good it is for your relationships. It multiplies things that you might not even have on your own. What a wonderful thing that is. God would never leave his people without the blessing of a father or a mother or a brother or a sister or a grandmother or a grandfather or an aunt or an uncle or a cousin. It goes on and on.

What a blessing it is that God would be so thorough in his kindness toward his people that he would provide so much, way more than we could ever provide on our own. The sabbath is good for your relationships.

And then the Lord Jesus speaks of his authority over the sabbath.

“For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”¹⁷

Now Jesus is not abolishing the sabbath. Do you get the idea that Jesus is not abolishing the sabbath here? Is there any indication that the sabbath is something that Jesus is arguing against? No. He actually proclaims himself Lord of the sabbath. Do you think he

¹⁶ Mark 8:36.

¹⁷ Matthew 12:8.

would proclaim himself Lord of something that you should not do? I don't think so. It makes no sense at all. And so he is proclaiming the proper use of the sabbath, not its abolition. He is just stripping its lousy traditions off of it that the Pharisees had encumbered it with in his day.

You know, you think about how thoroughly this is testified to in Scripture. If you go back in the Old Testament to every category of Scripture, if you go to the New Testament, every category of Scripture presents same argument. If you go back to the book so history in Genesis in Genesis 2:3 we read—and this was before the law was given. “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.”¹⁸ It begins way back in the dawn of time.

And then in the law we read in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy five of the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. And embedded in the 10 Commandments is the law of sabbath keeping.

And those who say that the sabbath is not for today, they are doing nothing but getting out their scissors and cutting out one of the 10 Commandments. And they are saying, “I say there are nine commandments. I have declared it. It is no longer for me.”

And that is exactly what declaring that the sabbath was for another day is all about. It is as if you would take authority over the 10 Commandments and manhandle them and rip one of them out and throw it away and say, “I have declared it to be.”

Well, Jesus doesn't do that at all. He says, “I am the Lord of the sabbath.”

He didn't say, “I am the Lord of everything in the nine commandments, but not the 10th. I heard not the fourth commandment. I don't buy into that one.”

Jesus proclaimed himself Lord over it.

If you go to the prophets you find in Nehemiah 13, Jeremiah 17, the breaking of the sabbath is a heinous crime and there is judgment for it.

When you come to the New Testament you find the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He keeps the sabbath. Not one word that he says, not one action that he performs discredits the observance of the sabbath. He shows us how to keep the sabbath, not how to avoid it. He speaks almost a dozen times about the sabbath and he is always correcting the wrong about it, not kicking it out the door. He is always assuming that people will be keeping the sabbath.

And in Matthew 24 he assumes that at the end of the world he said, “Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.”¹⁹ He is acknowledging that the sabbath goes far beyond his own time.

¹⁸ Genesis 2:3.

¹⁹ Matthew 24:20.

If you go to the writings of the apostles there is no breath of the idea that any of the 10 commandments passed away. When you see the practices of the apostles you see them over and over again keeping the sabbath.

Well, if the sabbath is not for today, did anybody tell Paul? Could someone please inform Peter that he should stop keeping the sabbath? They keep on keeping it. And they assumed that it is for today.

So the Lord Jesus did not eliminate the sabbath. He tried to restore it from its phony rituals. And so he proclaims himself as Lord over the sabbath.

And then this story concludes with a healing in the synagogue in verses nine through 13.

Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" —that they might accuse Him.

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? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand."²⁰

Wouldn't you have loved to have been there? "Stretch out your hand."

I have always wondered how he said that. Here is how I would have said it. I don't even want to try. There are many ways you could say this. I would have been angry. You know, the Lord Jesus may have had some other tone in his voice, but he did say, "Stretch out your hand." You could hear a pin drop I am sure.

And it is interesting. All of the gospels report this incident. Not one of them leaves it out. And so we find this principle that it is often that we place more importance on ceremonies than mercy.

We might place more emphasis on showing up to church than the heart of the matter.

My belief is this. Even though I have assiduously tried to keep the sabbath, you know, since I was saved, I have always really honestly desired to be with the people of God. Even though I have been in church for many, many sabbaths, I am pretty confident that you are like me, that you have been here, but you have broken the sabbath because you have forgotten the meaning of it. You forgot the mercy. You forgot the blessing toward your body. You forgot the love that was meant to be expressed. You forgot the nourishment and the blessing. You forgot that Jesus Christ was Lord of the sabbath. And what does he desire? He desires mercy and not sacrifice.

²⁰ Mathew 12:9-13.

And so then we find the next verse in the text is verse 14.

“Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.”²¹

You know, the Lord Jesus was always messing up people’s views of life and when you do that there are often people who want to kill you and it was true with the Lord Jesus.

My encouragement to us as a church: If we don’t understand everything about this text at least there are a few things that are very, very clear that all of us should understand. And it is this. As we gather together as a church as we exist in the sabbath day, know this one thing that it was designed for a blessing to bless your mind, to bless your body, to bless your soul, to bless your conscience, to bless everything about you.

And you also have a responsibility to be a blessing to all those others who participate in the sabbath in the same way that the Lord Jesus did because the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.

And I pray two things for us. First of all, that we would keep the rule of the sabbath, but that as we keep the rule, that we would remember this grand vision of love, that this would be a place of love, that when we greet one another it would be like greeting one another like with a holy kiss, that we would greet one another consistently with the value of a man that every little boy and every old man and every little girl and every old woman in this church would find eyes looking at them, eyes that understand the love of Jesus Christ for mankind and that if anything would characterize our fellowship it would not only be that we kept the law, but that we loved the meaning of the law and that is the law of love.

So let’s strike out on this journey with this first principle in mind, that the sabbath is made for man and we must be very careful that from the moment we get up in the morning until the day is done that we would remember that it is a day of love.

Let’s pray.

Oh Lord, I thank you for these remarkable words that take us in a different direction than our own mind takes us. I thank you for your clarity on this matter. I thank you for your yoke. I thank you for your day in Jesus’ name. Amen.

²¹ Matthew 12:14.