

Laying Hold of Sabbath Joy

Isaiah

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Bible Text: Isaiah 56:1-8

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Our sermon text this morning is Isaiah 56:1-8.

1 Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come, And My righteousness to be revealed. 2 Blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil." 3 Do not let the son of the foreigner Who has joined himself to the LORD Speak, saying, "The LORD has utterly separated me from His people"; Nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree." 4 For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant, 5 Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off. 6 Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants - Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant - 7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." 8 The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, "Yet I will gather to him Others besides those who are gathered to him."

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we're so grateful for your word. We're grateful for its power, its authority, its instruction. I pray that you would open our hearts, open our ears, open our minds today, Lord, that you would fill us with your Spirit. Lord, lift up Scott as he comes. That's in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

As we enter into the unsearchable treasures of the wisdom and the knowledge of God that we find here in Isaiah 56:1-8, it answers many questions for us and it answers questions like: how do we at Hope Baptist Church involve ourselves in social justice? Or how do

we enter into the joy of the Lord? Verse 7, in this text speaks so clearly about it because God brings his people to himself, to his holy mountain, to make them joyful in his house of prayer. How do we lead our families to the worship of God? How do we have an impact on the world? Well, Isaiah 56:1-8 provides a really very surprising answer and in this section of Isaiah, we find an encounter really with the principle of the centrality of Sabbath worship in prayer in his house as one of his great means for bringing joy to his people and justice and righteousness into the world and these purposes are very clearly declared here.

So as the people of God come together to observe Sabbath worship, they come streaming in to the mountain of the Lord and they come to have their whole thinking recalibrated to consider their ways, the steps that their feet had been traveling and even maybe their past and where they are going and the Sabbath is really designed to sort of be a reset but it's a reset that ends in delight because it's a day of delight when we get to Isaiah 58, in that last section of that chapter, we'll see this so clearly. But we set aside a day for this very purpose and as a result of it, many things happen. A sense of God's justice is declared, first of all, in our hearts and then it is proclaimed out in the world as we take the things that we have acquired on this day of delight, this day of justice and righteousness and it changes our whole life.

So as we progress in the coming chapters of Isaiah, we learn as we get to chapter 58, that the Sabbath and prayer are ordinances of God. He calls them ordinances of justice. Think about that for a minute, they are ordinances of justice and it's for those "who take delight" in approaching God, that's in 58, verse 2. So this whole matter of taking delight and approaching God, entering into justice and righteousness, considering it for ourselves, spreading it out in the world and tasting of the joy of the Lord, this is the whole essence of the Sabbath and it is declared here in this passage and you see it here over and over again. A little boy came to me at the beginning of the service and he said, "Mr. Brown, what should I be listening for?" I said, "Listen for the word 'joy' because you're going to hear it a lot." It's a day of rejoicing. It's a day of remembering. It's a day of public demonstration that Jesus Christ is Lord. We all stop from our business and everybody knows that you're not doing business today and it's a way that you declare the beauty and the righteousness, the justice, the joy of the Lord and there is this visible expression that we have as we have come together here today. We're really declaring to the whole world that Christians can rest because Jesus Christ is such a satisfying provider for his children.

Now, the context and the flow of thought, I think it's important to remind ourselves. If we go back to chapter 53, you remember there is the promise of the Messiah and his work and then in chapter 54, the expansion of the tents as the message of the Lord Jesus Christ is embraced. Then what happens? It expands and so we hear this command, "Enlarge your tents," and we should consider how we should be doing that and we've seen how that has happened in the world since the time the Lord Jesus Christ entered the world. In chapter 55, there are the blessings of salvation. The thirsty are coming to the water. The people are returning to the Lord. They receive his ways and the chapter concludes with replacing your wisdom with God's wisdom and clapping your hands because his wisdom

is so much better than ours. This is what happens when your soul lives; when you have embraced what's called here in Isaiah "the everlasting covenant."

So now as we have come to the end of chapter 55, God explains two main illustrations of how to enter into that blessedness and it's the justice of the Sabbath in the first half of the chapter in 1 through 8, and then the keeping of good watchmen and what it looks like when you don't have good watchmen in your church. So Isaiah 56 has two sides to it: first, God speaks to an ingathering of a new and happy community of obedient sons and daughters and they have experienced the joy of the mountain of the Lord; they are obeying his commandments; they are forsaking their own thoughts. This is what it means to be a Christian: to be less about your own thoughts and your own self and more about God and his. I love the illustration that Dan gave last week regarding the end of chapter 55 where he talked about man's wisdom is at the 6 foot level and in 55, the Lord says that his wisdom is higher than the heavens and we learned that the nearest star is a little bit beyond 6 feet from our own kind of thinking, it's 491 billion feet.

So this is the whole essence of the Christian life. You begin to take on God's thoughts and they are so much higher than yours and part of this is the forsaking of your own thoughts and ways on the Sabbath and that's the whole matter that's really before us and how it is that people come from an unprofitable life, a sinful life, doing very despicable things but how even though they have been such idolaters, that God receives them and he brings them into this community of joy that he has designed for them for their benefit.

You know, when I was a young father, one of my great delights on Sunday morning was to say something to my children and I would say, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go unto the house of the Lord." This is one of the first verses they learned. It was easy. "I was glad when they said unto me," and I would say it with such vigor. They know that verse and this is the essence of it here. There is a song that we sing about it, "This is the day that the Lord hath made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." Now, that is from a Psalm that really is relating directly to the Sabbath day. When you sing that song, "This is the day, this is the day that the Lord hath made," you're singing about the Sabbath day. Not just any old day.

So you have this picture of people flowing to the goodness of the Lord. That's the whole context that we have here and in 56 we see a people who have heard the call to follow and obey. They take hold of the covenant in the form of the Ten Commandments by keeping the Sabbath for their worship and also I just want to recognize that this has been thought of as a new section in Isaiah and it may or may not be. I kind of think it actually begins in chapter 53 and there is a logical progression that I've just spoken of a moment ago, but some authors have thought that 56 sets a whole new tone for the rest of Isaiah speaking of this happy future that is for those who love God and are called according to his purpose so that in chapters 56 through 59 there is an explanation of the blessings that the Jews and the Gentiles experience when they obey the Lord and keep his covenant and hold his day as a holy day. There does seem to be a thematic shift here. It doesn't mean there's a different person writing, by the way.

So the flow of the chapter begins with a voice of authority, "Thus says the LORD." Thus says the Lord, and it's a call for obedience to observe justice and righteousness and to prepare the way, really, for our own happiness as we enter into this time of ingathering that we demonstrate on the Sabbath day and it has many aspects to it as we'll see. Also, let me just say by way of introduction: it's a prophecy. Fundamentally, chapter 56 is a prophecy of the conversion of the Gentiles such that they found rest in keeping the Sabbath and how the idolatrous sinners in the world are brought into a place of joy and they keep the Sabbath and there is this definition of justice.

Let me just get out of the way a few hermeneutical matters. Who is the voice that is speaking? God. Second, who is the voice speaking to? He's speaking to contemporaries of Isaiah, but most particularly saints in the future after the second coming of Christ. Third, who or what is the voice speaking about? It's speaking of an ingathering of people to do justice by keeping God's laws. Their heart is changed. They have been gathered to God and they desire to keep his commandments. Four, what time frame is he speaking of? The future, the new covenant. Five, what imagery provides clues to the message of the Old Testament and the New Testament? They are eunuchs, outcasts, foreigners, the mountain of the Lord, there is blessing. All these are figures to help us understand the power of the Gospel in our lives. How does it relate to Christ? Well, it speaks to his work of happiness in the heart of a Christian. Finally, what are the appropriate applications? Keep the laws of God and rejoice.

So that's sort of an introduction to this. I wanted to try to help us see where we have come from and how it is that we have now landed in Isaiah 56 and how it fits with the previous section. So what we read in verse 1 is an appeal to keep justice, "Thus says the LORD: 'Keep justice, and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come, And My righteousness to be revealed.'" So verse 1 begins with an appeal to keep the moral law of God and he is speaking of a future time when "his salvation comes and his righteousness is revealed." When is that? In this context it is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ which has been introduced many times in Isaiah so far. And something is happening during this time after the death and the resurrection of Christ and what is it? The eunuch, the stranger, the outcast, is celebrating the Sabbath and so Isaiah is appealing to the people to keep the Sabbath because a time is coming when the Sabbath will be even more wonderful than it is in the days of the old covenant.

I think we should recognize that keeping the Sabbath in this passage brings us to a thought that maybe you haven't had before and I really haven't had before until really this week pondering this passage and that is keeping the Sabbath is a way of bringing about justice: social justice, spiritual justice, any kind of justice you can imagine. This thing that God has his people doing, it's designed to have a powerful affect on the world as the people of God gather together. This is why Matthew Henry spoke of it this way, he says, "It's a treasure we are entrusted with. Keep it holy. Keep it safe. Keep it with care and caution. Keep it from being polluted. Allow neither yourselves nor others either to violate the holy rest or omit the holy work of that day."

Now, there are two of God's objectives that are spoken of here in this passage so very clearly. Now, let's look at the blessedness of keeping the Sabbath because I think we find one of the great objectives of God in salvation is hidden here in this passage on the Sabbath. In verse 2, you see the blessedness, "Blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil." So there is a blessedness that is promised to those who lay hold on the Sabbath.

This phrase "blessed is the man" is such a beautiful phrase. It is found all over the word of God and it's one of the most important markers to understand the work of God in the soul of man and what God has designed to achieve in all of his commandments and why they are so good and why you should embrace them all and delight in them and it's because God's ways are higher than our ways. So he says, "Blessed is the man," and blessed is the man who does what? He keeps justice and righteousness by keeping the Sabbath. It's a wonderful study to consider how God uses this phrase in Scripture, "blessed is the man." Go look for it. I have many references to it but just recognize this is the person that God has designed to be in his kingdom; the happy person who has been blessed, in this case, by the keeping of his commandments so that he is not wandering aimlessly, trying to make up his own life but he has found a way to live in the word of God alone.

Now, there are three things that this blessed man does here. First, he lays hold. Second, he keeps from defiling it. Thirdly, he keeps his hand from doing any evil. Now, this is positive direction for how you should keep the Sabbath and as we consider the Sabbath, we should always be seeing it as well in its greater background because there is significant teaching in the Scriptures about the Sabbath. Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 are the two primary places that the whole matter of the Sabbath was revealed to the people of God and the specificity of the commands of God regarding the Sabbath are delivered there but we don't learn everything in those passages about the Sabbath. For example, God established the Sabbath at the beginning and then he reaffirmed it through Moses in giving the law and the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." Exodus 20:8-11 give very specific directions about the keeping of the Sabbath. Exodus grounds the Sabbath in God's work of creation. Deuteronomy has a little bit different thrust to it and it gives greater color and detail. Deuteronomy connects the Sabbath with deliverance from bondage in Egypt. So in Exodus, God's people are given the rationale for the Sabbath is God's command to give rest while in Deuteronomy, God's people are given the rationale of God's compassion as he rescues his people from slavery. Exodus looks back to creation. Deuteronomy looks up to God's kindness toward his abused people who are caught in bondage in Egypt. So in both these texts you learn a different angle to the Sabbath.

Now, here is what the happy man does. First of all, he lays hold of the Sabbath. That language is critical. "Lay hold of," and as we're learning how to celebrate the Sabbath here at our church and I think we're in a lifelong learning process on how to celebrate the Sabbath in any church, but as we're learning to do this, think of the idea of laying hold of it. Lay hold of the Sabbath. Often the Sabbath becomes sort of a byproduct, an

afterthought. It's something that just kind of rolls along in the week and you do it. No, he says, "Lay hold of it." The terminology that he's using has to do with strengthening or hardening, in other words, kind of ossify yourself toward it. Get yourself in line with it in a strong powerful kind of way. Make it be sort of a powerful force in your whole life. You lay hold of it. This is the matter of laying hold of God and really, in many ways it summarizes the whole life of a Christian because our whole lives are for this purpose: to retreat from evil; to turn to the positive commands of God to do justice and righteousness. How do you do that? How do you keep justice and righteousness? You have to lay hold of something. You have to let go of one thing and lay hold of another thing.

And I think as we're learning how to celebrate the Sabbath, we should consider what we're holding onto on the Sabbath and there is a laying hold of the Sabbath and an actual letting go. Letting go of your work, your sorrows, your fears. Bringing them all before God. Laying them before him. And it has to do with a recalibration of your mind; refashioning your thinking about all of life, that your whole life needs to be reordered in the same way that many of our garages need to be reordered. Our thinking, our attitudes, our perspectives, they need to be set back in order. They're just such a mess. They're hard to get through. You don't know where anything is. This is the problem with a disorderly garage and I know that some of you don't suffer from a struggle with a disorderly garage as much as others might like myself, but we all understand the problem with disorderliness in our lives. The Sabbath is laid hold of in order to bring order to everything, to righteousness, to justice, and then finally to replace all of that disorder and confusion and junk and obstacle and replace it with God and thoughts that we know are right.

So the Sabbath has been designed by God to be a spring of life into every area of your life. It's meant to transform you here and then in your family and in your business and in your church and in your nation. It's a wellspring of justice that flows everywhere and it sets God's people on one thing: the holy word of God and his calling. And he brings his people together for this very purpose, for this reset, for this recalibration, 52 days a year, that they would set aside an entire day for this purpose. I was reading a very interesting book, actually written for children, on the Sabbath. Horace Hooker wrote a book, "The Child's Book on the Sabbath." He made, I felt, a very helpful statement particularly for us, particularly for us as a church who has had many, many young people grow up here. Most of the people in this room are not young children anymore. Many, many, many in their teens and early 20s. Here's what Horace Hooker spoke about the rising generation and their understanding and grasp of the Sabbath and I think this should cause us to pay attention. "The children and youth of the present generation will without doubt have to decide whether the Sabbath shall be preserved to our country as a holy day unto the Lord. Ought they not then to know the nature and value of this institution and the dangers which threaten its existence?" This is in the preface to "The Child's Book on the Sabbath" by Horace Hooker. I think it's appropriate for any church to consider that. He continues on and he says, "The enemies of the Sabbath are many. They are active and bitter in their opposition." We all know that.

One of the things that we learn about this passage is that the Sabbath is observed in the new covenant. Do you understand that? Did you see that? There are people that say, "No, the Sabbath is not observed in the new covenant era." Well, this actually speaks of the new covenant era and something is happening and one of those things is that people are celebrating the Sabbath.

So the first thing is laying hold of it. This is the thing that God has designed for the happiness of his people, to lay hold of it. Hold onto it and let go of everything else that's normal. It's not a normal day. Then the second thing is, he says, "Keep from defiling it," and he's teaching us how the true people of God celebrate the Sabbath. "Keep from defiling the Sabbath," and I want to say that there are at least three ways that you defile the Sabbath and the first is by engaging in the forbidden practices that you find in Exodus 20:8-11 and in Deuteronomy 5. It says that this man that he is speaking of here who is converted, he keeps his hand from doing any evil and he's likening this to breaking the Sabbath as doing evil.

Number 2: by neglecting the practices that are commanded. So not only do you defile the Sabbath by engaging in the forbidden practices of buying and selling and doing your own thing and making it a day just like any old day, secondly, by neglecting the positive practices that are commanded in it and those are found in a number of places in Scripture. But I think the primary or the heart of the matter in observing the practices that are commanded is delight. To delight in it. To delight in the words of God. To hunger for the ways of God. To speak of God in our midst.

Then the third way to defile the Sabbath is to avoid what's forbidden and to observe what is commanded but without a heart of love, without a genuine heart. Like you can do the technical stuff of the Sabbath but if your heart is disconnected from it, you're just going through the motions or because it's just socially unacceptable you're going to follow social convention in your church, you do it without a heart of love.

Those are the three ways that you can defile the Sabbath: by doing what's forbidden; by neglecting what's commanded; and doing both of those without any genuine heart of love for Jesus Christ. That's how you break the Sabbath. How easy it is to break the Sabbath. It happens inwardly all the time as we're engaging in the Sabbath. You know, we have a pattern for this in the New Testament. In Mark 3:6, we learn that the Pharisees were observing the technical details of the Sabbath while at the same time in their hearts there was bitterness. And while they were advocating the keeping of the Sabbath, they were plotting to kill Jesus Christ and what you learn from that is that you can be involved in a time of worship of the Sabbath and you can have bitterness in your heart toward your brother. You can be carrying the burdens of this world and obsessing about all the problems in your life rather than laying them down. You can be upset at the song that was just sung. You can be disturbed with the thing that the pastor said last week that offended you, that you thought might have been a little bit too close to your toenails. There are just different things that can happen that can mar your celebration of the Sabbath and it's just so easy to break the Sabbath. Your mind can wander and God has given you glorious things to do and it's hard to get your mind off them. You want to plan them. You write

little notes. I do this. I'm constantly writing notes to myself about what to remember and often I find myself thinking about what's going to happen next week or maybe even next year.

So we're all in the same boat. It's hard to keep the Sabbath, but it was not hard for Jesus and the Lord Jesus Christ kept the Sabbath perfectly. He is our atonement for the ways that we don't keep the Sabbath so if your mind has wandered a little bit already this morning, turn to Christ. He understands these things. But it's easy to kill and murder on the Sabbath while singing a song and that was the problem with the Pharisees so if you've been struggling with that, just recognize it's very Pharisaical to do that.

So then there is God's great objectives for this whole thing as we see in verse 7 and it is to "make them joyful in My house of prayer." That's the heart of the matter. All of this is for that. Then the third element in your outline, you see the way that God blesses foreigners who keep the Sabbath, verses 3 and 4. He first speaks to the foreigner, "Do not let the son of the foreigner Who has joined himself to the LORD Speak, saying, 'The LORD has utterly separated me from His people.'" The term "foreigner" is code for someone who is so far away from God. They don't know the ordinances of God. They don't know the love of God, the laws of God. They know nothing about the Bible. It is all foreign to them and then they hear something and they turn to the Lord and God takes them in just as they are. He takes them in even when all of this seems so foreign to them but their hearts have changed. He brings in the foreigner. Now, this is why Hosea in chapter 1, verse 10 says, "I will call My people who were not My people. They shall be joined to God." The foreigner gets joined to God.

Then you have the eunuch in verse 3, "Nor let the eunuch say, 'Here I am, a dry tree.' For thus says the LORD: 'To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant.'" So now he moves from the foreigner to the eunuch. The eunuch is the person who is engaged in a practice that was against the law of God to make himself a eunuch and to be unfruitful. To not be able to have any children and really as a result of his breaking the law of God to be fruitful and multiply. In Leviticus 21:20, eunuchs were prohibited to become priests because becoming a eunuch among the people of God was a sign of disgrace. In Deuteronomy 23:1, they could not enter into the congregation. We read it like this, "He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the LORD. One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the LORD." So the eunuch could not enter into the temple to worship nor could he enter into the congregation and this is a person who has really messed up his life through disobeying God and God says, "No, I'll take you in. You turn to me, I take you in no matter how unfruitful you've been. No matter what you did to get there, come to me. Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." This is the love of God being declared here.

What do they do? Well, they choose what pleases him. They turn from what they were and they choose what pleases him and what that means is that God can save anyone. It doesn't matter who you are or what station of life or what you've done in the past or what

idols you've been hanging onto your whole life. It doesn't matter what immorality you've committed. It doesn't matter what theft. Thefts or adulteries or sodomies you've committed, the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Come." This is the love of God in Christ Jesus. This is the power of the Gospel and this is why the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 says, "Such were some of you. You used to be like this but you're not like that anymore. You have turned to me," and that's the power of God working.

There is an example of a eunuch actually being brought into the kingdom of heaven in the New Testament in Acts 8, beginning in verse 26 and ending in verse 40 where Philip goes out and he speaks to an Ethiopian eunuch and that eunuch reads Isaiah 53 and is converted and though he did a despicable thing to himself by emasculating himself. There are some very popular people who are emasculating themselves today and you should not think that anyone is too far gone. Kaitlyn Jenner, whoever it might be, even emasculation will not keep you from the kingdom of heaven if you turn to Jesus Christ.

So the foreigners are brought in, the eunuchs are brought in. Now, here are some quick observations about this. First of all, God is referring to an ordinance that is binding on the Gentiles. Do you see that? Secondly, this places the Sabbath in the category of moral law because it has to do with the spread of the righteousness of God in the society. It is moral law. It's not only ceremonial law. Thirdly, the Sabbath is a required ordinance in the New Testament era. The Father is seeking worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth and that's why the Lord Jesus Christ said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer."

You know, Sabbath breaking is legendary in our society. It's hard to keep from it as a result. Who breaks the Sabbath today? Professional athletes. News broadcasters. Food stores. Sports fanatics. Restaurant owners and workers. Various kinds of stores. And it's also broken by people who actually go to church and show up. It's broken by actually a lot of people, but why has God brought it? Verse 7, "To make them joyful in My house of prayer." This is the purpose of the Sabbath and it's the purpose of every command of God.

Then we get to the fourth element of our outline: the blessings for Sabbath keepers, verses 5 through 7. "Even to them I will give in My house." Notice those words, "I will give in My house." This is God giving to his people in his house. "And within My walls a place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off." So God is promising a gift that he is going to give, "I will give," and what is that gift? It's intimacy and that's why he says, "within My walls a place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off." He brings you within his walls, that's intimacy. "Within My walls." You are brought into a fellowship into the secret place of the tabernacle of the Most High. He hides you in his holiness.

He takes you upon his mountain and he has intimacy with you, but he also gives you a place and a name and this has to do with his power and his assistance in your life. He gives you a new name, an everlasting name. He gives you his name, that's why Hosea

2:19 says, "I will betroth you to Me forever." You'll become part of my family and I'm going to give you a name. Revelation 2:17 speaks about those who overcome. He says, "I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name." A new name. God changes people's names. He changes their whole identities, their whole way of living. It's a better place and a better name and the result is better than even just having children. He says, "better than that of sons and daughters."

Then in verse 6, he speaks of the foreigner again, "Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants - Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant." Now, in verse 6 I want to point out just a few of the really remarkable matters that speak of the wonders of gathering together as a people. First of all, joining. This is the most wonderful thing that can happen to a foreigner, they are joined to the Lord. Foreigners aren't joined to anything, here they are joined to the Lord. Secondly, serving. Not only are they joining themselves to the Lord, they are serving him. Not only that, they are loving. It says they love the name of the Lord and they are keeping the Sabbath holy. Keeping from defiling the Sabbath, literally in verse 6, and they are holding fast to his covenant. Now, in this passage, the covenant and keeping the Sabbath seem to be synonymous. Many of the commentators are saying that the Sabbath is really code for just loving the whole law of God. That's possible.

In verse 7, we learn more about how the Sabbath affects us. "Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." Here we find, I think, helpful patterns, helpful thoughts, that should guide the way that we consider our gathering for the Sabbath because that's been a long time, hasn't it, that God has been teaching us about the Sabbath. Many years he has been working with us, you know, one step at a time. I remember when we preached our first sermon on the Sabbath in this church. You know, all of us were very unclear about it. The pastors were unclear about it as well, by the way, and over time in preaching through the passages, there has just been increasing clarity about it and now here we are in verse 7. Here's more clarity. Are you ready? "Even them I will bring to My holy mountain." This is just this picture of people streaming. They are streaming to this place of fellowship and solitude and joy. That's what they're doing. That's what happened this morning, people were streaming here from all over the place. It's a beautiful thing to think about it. Every Sunday morning it happens. The cars start to stream, in a sense, to the mountain of the Lord. Why? To make them joyful in his house of prayer. To make them joyful in his house of prayer. This is how we should think of it.

Jonathan Edwards in his sermon "The Perpetuity of the Sabbath" writes this. I love these sentences. "Let us be thankful for the institution of the Christian Sabbath. It is a thing wherein God has shown his mercy to us and his care for our souls. He shows that he, by his infinite wisdom, is contriving for our good. Christ teaches us that the Sabbath was made for man." Then he quotes Mark 2:27, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man the Sabbath." Then he says, "It was made for the profit and for the comfort of your souls." It was made for the profit and the comfort of your soul.

Now, let's just learn more and more how to make it that way. What a blessing it would be that as the years pass as we're together, it would be a time of even greater comfort, even greater profit and as in verse 7 declares, even greater joy. It's the day of delight. It's the day of joy and I think God has brought various passages of Scripture to help us rethink our whole approach to the Sabbath because we've all had different thoughts and attitudes toward it all our lifelong and, you know, it takes time for us sometimes to recognize what it is all about. That's why Psalm 118:24 says, "This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it." He's talking about the Sabbath if you read that context in Psalm 118. It says that he will accept their sacrifices. What that means is that when a person with a genuine heart before God trusts in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, then his sacrifices are accepted because the sacrifices really are the sacrifices of Christ.

Then he says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer," and this is easily recognizable as a phrase that comes out of Mark 11:12-19 where Jesus Christ declares the bankruptcy of the Jews. He goes in and he clears the temple and he drives the moneychangers out of the temple. He says in verse 16, "It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for the nations but you have made it a den of robbers.'" In other words, "You have made it a place to do your own thing but my thing is the thing of joy. It's justice and righteousness. Use the Sabbath for that."

Then finally in verse 8, you see God's care for another category of people. He has talked about the eunuchs, those who have done defiling things to their bodies. He has talked about the foreigners, those who have no real connection. They don't really know anything. Then now he talks about the outcasts. Verse 8, "The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, 'Yet I will gather to him Others besides those who are gathered to him.'" So this is an ingathering. Now notice what God is doing. Notice the word "gathering." Notice that this word is repeated four times in verse 8. "The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, 'Yet I will gather to him Others besides those who are gathered to him.'" So there is a gathering of really different kinds of people here in verse 8 and so he gathers his people. He gathers them to draw near and he continues to gather because his people are continually being scattered. The devil is scattering people, God is continuing to gather people.

You know, the Sabbath gathering is a sort of a divine encroachment on your life. Have you ever noticed that? It's really designed to be a divine encroachment upon your life, the way you live, the way you think and it's designed to penetrate into our ways to deliver us from ourselves at the six foot level. It delivers us from irrelevant affections that we have acquired. It challenges our selfishness. It confronts our bitterness and our lack of love and it draws us into a better world and, in that sense, it's a divine gathering. God gathers us with others that he is gather to us and to himself. So the gathering isn't just to God, it's the gathering of a people and then gathering others to themselves. In other words, God adds people to the gathering. He does that because all of us need this recalibration. All of us need to learn justice and righteousness at a much higher level than just the banal six foot level that we're so used to jiving around with.

I often wonder how easy it is to take this for granted, that it becomes so normal for us that we forget what God is doing when he gathers us together. I hope a passage like this can help us see the miracle and power of the Sabbath and the true secrets of why it has been instituted, for our joy and for the spread of justice. There is a miracle that is going on today and it's the miracle that's in verse 7, "to make them joyful in My House of prayer."

Okay, having walked through this passage, admittedly rather quickly, I want to give you a number of applications and I'm going to give you many of them. I'm going to give you 17 of them. But why am I doing this? Well, you've heard the doctrine, you've seen the various words that explain this and it's helpful for us to just rethink the whole way that we're keeping the Sabbath. It's always worthwhile to do that. I don't think I've ever kept the Sabbath perfectly in my life but I want more. I want it to be sweeter. You know, the biggest obstacle for me keeping the Sabbath right is me. That's what I've found and so I'd like to deal with some of these things that could be obstacles or opportunities and I'm going to give you 17 of them.

1. See the goodness of the Lord. See how God has called his people into a new community. Hey, the eunuchs get a family. The strangers get companionship. The outcasts get included. Justice is preserved. Righteousness spreads and joy is increased. So see the goodness of the Lord in it.

Second, sanctify it. That means keep it holy. Make it different. It's like no other day of the week. It's meant to function like no other time. It's not the same as leisure and vacation. Vacation is vacating. It's evacuation. The Sabbath is not vacating, it's filling. So sanctify it. Keep it holy for particular purposes. Fill it with every good thing. Fill all the minutes of the day with every good thing as you can.

3. Come to him in sincerity and truth. Comes to him in sincerity and truth. It's worthless without it. The whole help of the Sabbath evaporates when your heart is hard and holding bitterness. It's why the Lord Jesus Christ said, "If your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go your way. Be reconciled to your brother." There is no more common way than to blow the sincerity of the Sabbath than to be singing a song while still have ought in your heart toward your brother.

4. Cry out to God. Romans 8:15 speaks of what the Spirit of God does in us. He puts a spirit in us that cries, "Abba, Father." Cry out, "Abba, Father." You know, I'm concerned. We don't really cry out like we could or should with the joy, with the exhilaration that really has been designed for us, I don't think. I think we're kind of short on it, actually, and I think one of the reasons might be somewhat traced to some of your leaders like me.

5. Refocus your thoughts. Set it apart to take every thought captive to Christ.

6. Reorder your perspectives. Reorder everything according to the majesty of God. We're faced with the bigness of God whenever we enter into the greatness of the treasures of the wisdom of God.

7. Capture time in a more beautiful way. Redeem it. Buy it up more than any other day of the week. Apply a discipline and an exuberance to it to buy up every moment of time you can. Just saying that just reminds me of what a failure I often am at that in my own family.

8. Stop creating and be recreated. Stop creating and be recreated. It's so easy to start planning for the weeks. Let's just don't do that. Let's savor the moment. Let's soak it in. Let's just relax. Let's just savor it with all of our hearts.

I remember several years ago, Bill Gates commented that he did not go to church on Sunday because it was not very productive and that he said that it was not time efficient and it's not, except that actually it really is. It really is. It's the most time efficient thing you can do is just stop creating and be recreated.

9. Heal and be healed on the Sabbath. The Lord Jesus Christ when he was accused of breaking the Sabbath would often turn around and heal someone because the Sabbath was designed for man. It was designed for healing and to be healed and it's such a good time for us to get well, to get better, to pick up the pieces of our lives and put them back into a healthy framework, to take that messed up garage and start putting things back in order, to see how we've lingered on unprofitable passions. We have pursued vanity and we need to consider our ways and we need to heal and we need to find all of our healing in him.

10. Pray. 1 Timothy 2:8 talks about the gathering of God's people, that men should pray lifting up holy hands. Pray. Have you not been praying? Consider praying. Some of you have been Christians a long, long time and you hardly ever pray in public. It's just a fact. The Bible calls righteous men to pray. Sometimes it's only a few people, the same old people who pray.

11. Taste and see that the Lord is good. This is the whole matter of the Lord's Supper, it's we're satisfied with the finest of wheat and new wine. We're hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

12. Consider heaven. The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the wedding supper of the Lamb and the feasting of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is righteousness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. That's what Romans 13 says.

13. Hear from God. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Hear. "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening," is really the whole matter of, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

You know, Jonathan Edwards had some very tender things to say about God, about the way God celebrates the Sabbath. He says that God observes the Sabbath himself. He says he delights to give his Holy Spirit on this day as he did in Acts 1, 2:1-4 and in Revelation 1:10. Edwards says that Jesus Christ delights in his own day. He honors it and he delights to meet with his people to manifest himself to his disciples. So it's not just a day of delight for the Christian, it's God's day of delight as well. He delights to gather with his

people and heal them and fill them with everlasting joy and to deliver them from all of their fears and all of their sins.

14. Remember the glory of the kingdom of heaven. He takes sinners into his house. He gathers the outcasts, the foreigner and the eunuch. This is the glory of the kingdom of heaven.

15. Use it for justice and righteousness. Will there be justice and righteousness in this world? Only if the people of God proclaim it and continue to uphold it. Will there be justice regarding Planned Parenthood? Will there be justice regarding the whole abortion industry or Kim Davis or this whole wave of wickedness that's washing over our legal and our political realms right now? Is there any justice? Let there be justice in the world as we scatter out from here and bring justice and righteousness into the world.

16. Avoid extremes. Avoid extremes in keeping the Sabbath. I heard a message by Lloyd Jones on the Sabbath and it was a wonderful message but he talks about extremes, extremes miss the heart of the matter.

17. Prepare for it. Prepare for it.

So those are 17 things to enter into the joy of the Lord in his house of prayer. You know, God has given the Sabbath for families and for those who don't have families and in the law, he gives their responsibility to fathers and mothers to make sure that the Sabbath is observed by everyone including the animals and so it's a comprehensive discipleship tool that God has used. Why? For joy. To increase the joy of his people which is why we read in verse 7, "Even them," who? Them: the stranger, the outcast, the eunuch. "Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer." Are you up for it? Let's keep learning.

Let's pray.

O Lord, we pray that you would help us to acquire wisdom from your word that we would live your ways, not ours. That we would acquire your thoughts, replacing them with ours. Our ways with your ways. Our joy with your joy. Lord, I thank you for the sending of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has secured such joy for us, gathering us together from the four corners of the world and from the four corners of politics and morality and legality and you have brought us into one home so that we might adore you forever. Amen.