

“It Was the Sabbath”
John 5:9
(Preached at Trinity, September 5, 2018)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 4** Jesus had left Samaria and returned to Galilee. It was there that Jesus healed the child of the official. **Chapter 5** begins, “After these things . . .” Jesus has departed from Cana of Galilee and has arrived at Jerusalem. There is no mention of His disciples.
2. We are told of a certain pool called Bethesda that was surrounded by many who were “sick, blind, lame, and withered.”
John wants us to see the terrible extent of their condition. The man was unable to move and had been this way for 38 years.
3. We can see in this account at the Pool of Bethesda an example of the utter helplessness of fallen humanity. We are paralyzed in our sin.
But as a merciful Savior Christ comes to us and sovereignly calls us to salvation. While there was a multitude of sick people around the pool, Jesus singled out this man to receive mercy.
4. The Gospel doesn’t rule out human responsibility.
There are two things equally true about the Gospel.
 - A. God has elected some to salvation and left the rest to perish in their sin.
 - B. Anyone who wishes to be saved can be saved.
5. In **Verse 9** we are given two important bits of information.
 - A. The first we looked at last time. The man was healed immediately.
"Immediately the man became well,"
 - (1) He hadn’t walked for almost 4 decades but when Jesus healed him he instantly became whole. He arose and walked. He didn’t need to go through rehab. He didn’t have to learn to walk. He was completely restored.
 - (2) When God visits us with salvation we are transformed immediately.
Justification isn’t a process but an instantaneous work of grace.
 - B. The second important piece of information in **Verse 9** is the occasion of the healing - "Now it was the Sabbath on that day."
6. The beginning of the verse describes the joyous moment of this man’s restoration. He walked for the first time in 38 years—quite likely for the first time in his life.
Now, the last half of the verse paints a dark cloud over the moment. The joyous occasion was about to become the center of controversy.
 - A. The text doesn’t give any indication that Jesus purposely chose the Sabbath to do this healing, but since we can see this pattern often, Jesus is once again exposing the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees.
 - B. Instead of a day of worship and gratitude for God’s deliverance they had filled it with rules that made it an impossible burden.

7. The Sabbath has been a source of dispute from the beginning. There are two extremes. On one end the Sabbath is disregarded and ignored; on the other it is obeyed legalistically and enhanced with all manner of man-made rules and regulations. Both extremes can be seen in Israel's history. Both extremes can also be seen today.
8. The Jews immediately condemned the man for carrying his pallet on the Sabbath.
John 5:10 NAU - "So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet."
John 5:15-16 NAU - "The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. ¹⁶ For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath."
9. The Pharisees are to be commended for their desire to keep the Sabbath. God commands observance of the Sabbath. The Fourth Commandment demands keeping the Sabbath. The Pharisees were not condemned for keeping the Sabbath but for their misuse of the Sabbath.
 - A. The Pharisees believed Sabbath keeping was meritorious. The stricter the observance, the greater the merit. They were proud of their rules and regulations.
 - B. They failed to comprehend the context of the Law.
 1. The Ten Commandments were given in the context of God's deliverance of His covenant people.
Exodus. 20:1-3 NAU - "Then God spoke all these words, saying, ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before Me."
 2. They were not being given the Law as a means of being redeemed. They had already been redeemed. Their obedience was an expression of gratitude and honor of their covenant God.
 - C. The New Covenant presents the same context. Jesus Christ has kept the Law for us. He has already redeemed His people. Our obedience to the Law is not a means of gaining His deliverance. He has already accomplished all. Our obedience is an expression of gratitude and honor of our covenant God.
10. They failed to understand the nature of the Sabbath. Instead of a day of worship and glorying in their God their Redeemer, they had turned it into a day of ritual and impossible burdens to keep.
11. We must understand that the Law has in no way been abrogated. But the Sabbath must be understood in the context of redemptive history.
 - I. There are four distinct stages of the Sabbath – each a celebration of God
 - A. The Creation Sabbath
 1. The Sabbath is a celebration of God's creative work. He created all things in six days and declared it good. Then He ceased.
 God was also declaring His sovereignty over time and our use of time. He ordained days and weeks and declared one day to be holy.
 It also declares God's sovereignty over work and rest.
 (The tithe is a declaration of God's sovereignty over our possessions)
 2. The Fourth Commandment does not introduce something new but rather points back to something already in existence
Exodus 20:8 – "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."
 3. It originated with God at the time of creation

4. The reason for the Sabbath was to provide for a weekly celebration of God's power and authority demonstrated in creation
5. The Sabbath precedes the Fall – it is a creation ordinance
Like marriage and work, the Sabbath was ordained to continue as long as men live upon the earth

B. The Exodus Sabbath

1. The 4th Commandment in Deuteronomy adds another aspect of the Sabbath – it celebrates God's redemption
Deuteronomy 5:12-15 NAU - "Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God . . .
¹⁵ 'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day."
2. God's people were now to spend a day of rest celebrating both God's power in creation *and* His power in redemption.
Psalms 103:1-4 KJV - "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, *bless* his holy name. ² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: ³ Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; ⁴ Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;"
3. It was a sign of the Covenant of God with His elect people.
Exodus 31:13 NAU - "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you."
4. Anyone who worked on the Sabbath in effect denied God as Creator and rejected Him as Redeemer – they were covenant breakers
This was punishable by death because it was high treason against God.
5. We should note that the Sabbath existed before it was made a part of the Decalogue or Ten Commandments.

C. The Resurrection Sabbath – The Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath

1. Immediately after the resurrection the disciples of Christ began meeting on the first day of the week – a celebration of the resurrection.
2. For the Christian, the Sabbath becomes unto us a celebration of Almighty God as Creator and Almighty God as Redeemer. But it recognizes God's ultimate redemption comes through the finished work of Christ our Redeemer demonstrated in the resurrection.
It has become unto us a sign of the New Covenant
3. Jesus as God incarnate declared His lordship over the Sabbath
Mark 2:28 NAU - "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."
It was Jesus who instituted the Creation Sabbath and who appointed the Sabbath as a covenant sign.
4. Sabbath breakers today in essence deny God as Creator and Redeemer and they deny the authority of the Resurrected Christ in the New Covenant

- D. The Final Sabbath (Our eternal Sabbath rest)
Hebrews 4:9-11 NAU - "So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ¹⁰ For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. ¹¹ Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience."
1. This is fulfilled through the finished work of Christ
 2. This will be the end of all of our earthly toils and the full and perpetual enjoyment of the praise and worship of God.
 3. Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Christ and an anticipation of our resurrection - an anticipation of the full accomplishment of our redemption
 4. Will those who despise one day in seven as a day of praise and worship enjoy the perpetual day in eternity?
- II. Not only did the Pharisees misunderstand the nature of the Sabbath, they also failed to understand the principles for keeping the Sabbath
- A. The Pharisees saw the Sabbath as a strict unbending rule
1. They had attached over 1500 rules to be observed as a part of Sabbath keeping.
 2. There was no mercy in their observance
 3. For the Pharisees, the Sabbath was a means of achieving God's approval and it demanded strict observance.
- B. They were correct in their belief that the Sabbath must be observed.
1. It is a command – the 4th Commandment.
 2. The Law is God's standard of righteousness and His standard of judgment. Jesus was made under the Law and kept it perfectly on our behalf. This included the 4th Commandment.
 - a. It is a faulty theology that believes God's standard of righteousness before salvation which drives us to Christ somehow disappears after our salvation.
 - b. It is false to believe that failure to keep the 4th Commandment (part of the Decalogue) will condemn the lost man to eternal damnation but after salvation the commandment ceases to exist.
- C. The Sabbath must be observed, but it isn't a cold taskmaster
1. God allows certain behaviors that do not violate the essence of the Sabbath.
 2. Behavior that falls in the realm of necessity and mercy is permitted
 Spurgeon's Catechism:
Question 51: How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?
Answer: The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days, and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is taken up in the works of necessity and mercy."

3. The 1689 Baptist Confession

"The Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering their common affairs aforehand, do not only observe an holy day rest all day from their own works, words and thoughts, about their worldly employment and recreations, but are also taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy."

D. Was Jesus' healing on the Sabbath a legal act or was it illegal?

1. With Pharisaical theology they insisted it was illegal.

- a. Jesus was breaking the Sabbath by doing the healing, which they saw as unapproved activity.
- b. The paralytic was breaking the law by carrying his bed, which they saw as work. The Law did forbid labor for gain on the Sabbath. But this is hardly the case with the paralytic. The Pharisees were misapplying the intent of the Law.
- c. Instead of rejoicing in the healing of this man from the suffering he had experienced his whole life all they could see was "You can't do that on the Sabbath."

2. Jesus' healing was a wonderful act of mercy. Mercy is always permitted on the Sabbath.

Notice the question of the Pharisees in **Verse 12** – "Who told you to pick up your pallet and walk?" They were uninterested in who performed this wonderful act upon this man. They were only interested in the legal requirements of the Law.

3. Acts of necessity are also permitted on the Sabbath

- a. Necessity would include things unexpected.
Carrying the pallet was a necessity. Being found unexpectedly healed, he picked up his pallet to carry it home. And it was the command of Christ.
Normally we prepare in advance to keep the Sabbath
- b. There are times, however, when things happen unexpectedly
Illus: the time I came home and discovered a broken water pipe
- c. There are certain occupations that demand activity on the Sabbath
Police and fire, medical professionals, certain infrastructure positions such as electric company employees.
Pastors work on the Sabbath. Making possible the worship by God's people demands that some be permitted to abandon the regulation of a Sabbath rest.

Matthew 12:5 NAU - "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?"

Conclusion:

1. God loves mercy.
Psalms 89:14 KJV - "Justice and judgment *are* the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face."
2. May God grant us to be lovers of mercy.
3. May God also grant us to be lovers of His Law. Most people despise the Sabbath because it keeps them from claiming autonomy over the day so they can do what they want to do. May God grant us to be lovers of the Sabbath.
Isaiah 58:13-14 NAU - "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And shall honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, From seeking your *own* pleasure, And speaking *your own* word, ¹⁴ Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."