

Concerning the Sabbath

Mark 3:1-6 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

He entered a synagogue again; and a man was there whose hand was withered. ² And they were watching Him closely to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. ³ He *said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" ⁴ And He *said to them, "**Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?**" But they kept silent. ⁵ After looking around at them **with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart**, He *said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they **might put Him to death**.

Introduction

This morning, I invite you to think with me about the Sabbath, a.k.a. the day of rest, or to some of us, as the Lord's Day. Here is one piece of information to help you. The Sabbath is the day of rest, but technically it is not same as the Lord's Day. They are two different days.

Here's why. The Sabbath in the Bible is the last day of the week, Saturday. The Lord's Day is the first day of the week, Sunday, and is the day after the Sabbath. The word 'Sabbath' appears more than 150 times in the Bible, yet 'the Lord's Day' appears only once in Revelation 1:10: *I was in the Spirit on **the Lord's day***. Two more cases where 'the first day of the week' appears: Acts 20:7: *On **the first day of the week**, when we were gathered together to break bread,...* and 1 Corinthians 16:2.

In the first century, Jewish believers observed them both: the Sabbath as the day of rest and they gathered on the following day to celebrate Christ's resurrection, to worship and fellowship. Today, many churches and believers interchangeably use the Lord's Day and the Sabbath. Are we required to keep the Sabbath on Saturday? No, we are not under the Law. We keep the Lord's Day holy instead.

Let's talk about the Sabbath, the day of rest, in the Bible.

Content

The Origin of Sabbath: The history of Sabbath is as old as the creation of the universe. Who did start keeping the Sabbath? The LORD God Himself. **Sabbath (שַׁבָּת)**, as verb means, 'to cease, desist, rest, or cut off.' As noun, it is 'the day of rest of heart and body.'

The LORD practiced Sabbath from the beginning. After each day's work, He rested for six nights and consecrated the seventh day as the day of full rest. Listen to Genesis 2:3: "Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He **rested from all His work** which God had created and made." Rest from all His work for the whole day---that's Sabbath.

Many years later, the same LORD made the Sabbath into the Fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments and commanded His people to keep it holy. Listen to the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:8-11: ⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ For six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

Let me walk you through the history of the Sabbath from Moses to Jesus.

History: Moses-Jeremiah-Ezekiel-Nehemiah-Jesus-Us

Moses (1,500 B.C.): As much as He commanded His people to keep the Sabbath holy, the Lord Himself rested from His work. Here's one example. During the forty years of wilderness, the Lord provided manna to the Exodus generation without missing one single day. However, He didn't give manna on Saturday. Instead, He gave twice on Friday and none on the Sabbath. **Exodus 16:22-30.** ²² Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread... for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³ then he said to them, "This is what the Lord meant: Tomorrow is a Sabbath observance, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning." ²⁴ So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not stink nor was there a maggot in it. ²⁵ Then Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. ²⁶ Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none." ²⁷ Yet it came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸ Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?"

²⁹ See, the Lord has given you the Sabbath; for that reason He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain, everyone, in his place; **no one is to leave his place on the seventh day.** ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

Those who violated the Sabbath were put to death. Numbers 15:32-36: ³² Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found **a man gathering wood** on the Sabbath day. ³³ And those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation; ³⁴ and they placed him in custody, because it had not been decided what should be done to him. ³⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, "**The man must be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.**" ³⁶ So all the congregation brought

him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Now let's move the time 900 years forward. We go to Prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah (600 B.C.): The Fourth commandment still remains the same even after 900 years. Jeremiah 17:21: *"This is what the Lord says: "Take care for yourselves, and **do not carry any load on the Sabbath day** or bring anything in through the gates of Jerusalem." Let me take you to another prophet named Ezekiel who was Jeremiah's contemporary.*

Ezekiel (580 B.C.): In **Ezekiel 20:20-21, 24**, the Lord explained Ezekiel how his ancestors failed to keep the Sabbath. The Lord commanded the Exodus generation saying: *Sanctify My **Sabbaths**; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, so that you may know that I am the Lord your God.' But the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to follow My ordinances which, if a person follows them, then he will live by them; they **profaned My Sabbaths**. So I resolved to pour out **My wrath on them**, to use up **My anger against them** in the wilderness. V. 24. because they had not complied with My ordinances, but had rejected My statutes and had **profaned My Sabbaths**, and their eyes were on the idols of their fathers. The Lord points out that violating the Ten Commandments brought forth divine anger and wrath on his ancestors.*

The LORD continues in **Ezekiel 22:26**: *Her (Israel---kc) **priests** have done violence to My Law and have profaned My holy things; they have **made no distinction between the holy and the common, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have closed their eyes from My Sabbaths, and I am defiled among them.** Folks, this verse taught me, a pastor, about the pastoral duties to make a distinction between the holy and the common, to teach God's people the difference between the unclean and the clean, and to open the eyes of God's people to God's Sabbaths so as not to defile the Lord among us.*

Now, I am introducing you to

Nehemiah (445 B.C.): the Governor of Judea 150 years after Jeremiah. After returning to their homeland from Babylon, Nehemiah was working hard to rebuild the nation, Israel. He witnessed that God's people were not keeping the Sabbath holy, so he commanded them not to buy wares or any grain on the Sabbath day (Nehemiah 10:31: *"As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the **Sabbath** day to sell, we will not buy from them on the **Sabbath** or on any holy day;"*)

He also admonished folks for treading wine presses on the Sabbath, bringing sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs, and every kind of load. When he saw people of Tyre (gentiles) import fish and all kinds of merchandise to sell to the sons of Judah on the Sabbath, even in Jerusalem, he *"reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day?"*¹⁸ Did

*your fathers not do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to **the wrath against Israel** by profaning the Sabbath."* (Nehemiah 13:15-18). Once again, he attributes God's wrath against Israel to the profaning the Sabbath day. Now, we go to Jesus.

Jesus (30 A.D.): 500 years forward. By this time, people were fully aware what to do and what not to do on the day of Sabbath. For instance, things that were 'OK' to do on the Sabbath: **Circumcision** (John 7:22--- *For this reason Moses has given you circumcision... and even on a Sabbath you circumcise a man*"). And a "**½ mile walk**" (Acts 1:12: *"Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away."*)

Things that were not OK on the Sabbath day: **Cooking** (Exodus 35:3: *You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day.*"). **Work** (Leviticus 23:3: *'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings).*

All His life, Jesus kept such Sabbath rules faithfully. He even kept the Sabbath on His death and resurrection (He didn't rise on the Sabbath). For instance, during His public ministry, every Sabbath Jesus faithfully went to the synagogue. What for? To worship, to teach, and to heal the sick. Now, the first two things went well with the religious leaders, however, not with the third one, because they considered the healing as work. One instance is found in **John 9:14**: *Now it was a Sabbath on the day that Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.* Another instance in John 5:10: *"So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, "It is a Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet."*

So they vehemently opposed Jesus and, of course, Jesus wouldn't flinch. He kept healing the sick in front of the leaders, sometimes intentionally, so much so that they wanted to put Him to death. That's what we read in today's text. Let me say it again.

The Bone of Contention between Jesus and then religious leaders was healing on the day of Sabbath that was considered work. Confronting the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus offended and humiliated them by calling them 'hypocrites.' Here's one example. **Luke 13:10-17**: ¹⁰ *Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.* ¹¹ *And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent over double, and could not straighten up at all.* ¹² *When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness."* ¹³ *And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she stood up straight again, and began glorifying God.* ¹⁴ *But the synagogue leader, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days during which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day."* ¹⁵ *But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does each of you on the Sabbath not untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it away to water it?"* ¹⁶ *And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for*

eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this restraint on the Sabbath day?" ¹⁷ *And as He said this, **all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing** over all the glorious things being done by Him.*

In today's text, Jesus shows us that it is OK to do good and save a life on the day of Sabbath (v. 4).

The Yardstick: You may have a question: *Would I break the Sabbath if I worked on the day of Sabbath?* It all depends. If you had done good and saved a life on the Sabbath, then it is lawful. If you worked to support your family, it is lawful. If you worked as EMT to save people, you didn't break the Fourth commandment. However, if the activity is purely for individual fun and pleasure, then it is unlawful. E.g., Priests, Levites, and gatekeepers who work on the Sabbath do not violate God's law (2 Chronicles 23:4). Driving a bus or train on Sunday for the public is lawful. To drive 100 miles for sightseeing is not good. Working in the ER on the Sabbath is lawful. To work on your yard isn't. No shopping on the day of Sabbath, either. So, you get the general idea.

Question: *Do we still need to keep the Sabbath holy in this fast-paced world?* The answer is Yes, because it is the Fourth Commandment. If Jesus had kept it holy, how much more should we, right? It is also good for us, because it provides a balanced structure in our weekly schedule, work and rest. Nowadays, many believers do not observe the Sabbath nor worry about being stoned. But we get what we sow.

The Sabbath, the day of rest, is a must for our daily survival. God knows that everyone needs a full day of rest every week. As for me and my house, we will keep the Sabbath holy until we die, because it benefits us and people around us, even animals and environments. Let me say it again: Keeping the Sabbath holy is God's command. It is not only doable but also beneficial to all of us. Otherwise, why would God command us to keep it in the first place?

Benefits/Rewards: You may ask, tell me what's the benefit of keeping the Sabbath holy. In two ways: **Physical and spiritual.** Recently I counseled a young lady who was overwhelmed with her work so much so that her stress disturbed her sleep pattern and made her gain weight (not getting enough sleep and not having enough rest does that!) I advised her to keep the Sabbath, to find a time of rest from work to recover and be refreshed physically and mentally. Proper Sabbath reduces stress. The less stress means the less temptation to eat, which will bring her weight under control. I hope she will take my advice.

The spiritual benefit is even greater than that of physical. Sabbath gives us **true rest** in our spirit. This is what I mean by spiritual rest. As we keep the Sabbath holy, our soul resting, we focus on God the Father and our relationship with Him. In return, the Lord blesses us and refreshes and renews our mind and heart. Here's God's promise on the

benefit of waiting on the Lord on the day of Sabbath: “Yet those who wait for the Lord will **gain new strength**; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary” (Isaiah 40:31).

Right Attitude toward the Sabbath: 1. *No legalistic view:* keeping the Sabbath holy is not the necessary condition for salvation. However, it is still good and honorable to keep the Sabbath holy, because it strengthens our relationship with our Father. Finally, let me tell you how to keep the Sabbath holy.

How to Keep the Sabbath Holy? First, treat the Sabbath **as holy**: Deuteronomy 5:12: “**Keep the Sabbath day to treat it as holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.**” Sabbath is a God-thing. To treat the Sabbath day holy means that we remember our covenant relationship with our God on the day of Sabbath. We focus on God our loving heavenly Father and how much He loves us.

Secondly, **celebrate it with rejoicing**. Consider the Sabbath as your joy and pleasure, rather than a burden, then the Lord will bless you: **Exodus 31:16:** *So the sons of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to **celebrate** the **Sabbath** throughout their generations **as a permanent covenant.*** **Isaiah 58:13-14:** “*If, because of the Sabbath, you restrain your foot From doing as you wish on My holy day, And **call the Sabbath a pleasure**, and the holy day of the Lord honorable, And **honor** it, desisting from your own ways, From seeking your own pleasure And speaking your own word, 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.””*

Conclusion

In Mark 2:27, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath.*” Jesus didn’t cancel the Fourth Commandment. Instead, He completed it with extra grace and mercy. It is good to do good work and save a life on the Lord’s Day. Keep it holy for your own benefits.

Amen.