

Grace Evangelical Church
Pastor Paul Bawden
Sunday, January 31
"The True Sabbath"
Mark 2:21-28

I remember when I got my first electric train for Christmas, many years ago now. I was so excited. – a brand new train. I could hardly believe it. I put the track together with the transformer. I placed the engine with the cars on the track hooking them together, and wow it really worked. I played with the train on that first day and many days afterwards. In fact, I still have that train, and it still works as I have had it out for our grandchildren when they have come to visit. It runs a little slower, but it still goes around the track.

Yes, it is fun to get something new, a new car, new clothes, shoes, a new computer, etc. New things that we buy, however, get old, like my train, and they may not look as good or work as good as they once did.

The biblical God is also in the business of newness. Of course, His newness does not wear out or get old. In fact, He is in the business of making all things new eventually. That's why when Jesus carried out His ministry on earth, He challenged the rules and traditions that the religious leaders in His day had added to what God had already given.

This is seen clearly in Mark 2:22 when He taught that new wine is not put into the old wineskins, which could come apart. Rather one puts new wine into new wineskins.

Jesus was teaching that His message and work could not be mixed with the old Mosaic system. He was coming to establish something entirely new.

One of those areas of newness that Jesus was referring to is described for us in Mark 2:23-28.

Let's read the text.

And it happened that He was passing through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?"

Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Rather, He was coming not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, and to establish an entirely new way to God through His death, burial and bodily resurrection. He was the living tabernacle and would be the end of righteousness for everyone who accepted Him as personal Savior.

What is Jesus teaching us here about newness concerning the Sabbath.

I. The law (law of Moses) was not being broken.

1. The situation.

As the text tells us, on the Sabbath day, Jesus along with His disciples were walking through the grain fields and since they were hungry, started to eat some of the grain. They evidently took the heads of grain, rubbed it in their hands, blew out the chaff, and ate the grain or wheat.

2. The charge.

The Pharisees, who were walking along with Jesus and His disciples, were quick to condemn them because they were doing this on the Sabbath day, which to them was breaking the law of Moses.

3. The clarification.

But was this action of Jesus' disciples breaking the law of Moses?

Deuteronomy 23:25 tells us: "When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain."

The disciples knew the teaching of the Law of Moses – it was entirely okay to pick grain from another's field to satisfy hunger, but they also knew that they should do no regular work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10). The Pharisees knew that Law as well.

The charge of the Pharisees was that the disciples were doing regular work on the Sabbath day. Of course this is not what the disciples were doing. The Pharisees were trying to make the law something that it was not.

Why were the Pharisees making this charge against Jesus and His disciples?

II. Additions had been made to the Sabbath Law – the law of Moses.

To understand what is happening here in Jesus' day, we need to go back in history, yes, back to when God created the heavens and earth and look at the origin of the Sabbath Day and how it was given in time to the nation of Israel to keep.

1. The origin of the Sabbath day.

It is well to keep in mind that the Sabbath day goes all the way back to Genesis 2:2-3 when God, after six days of creation, completed His work. Then it says that God on the seventh day rested from all His work that He had done (verse 2). Then in verse 3, we are told that God sanctified, or set apart that day, because in it He rested from all His work He had created and made.

In those two verses in Genesis 2, the word Sabbath is not used. The Hebrew word for Sabbath is found in the word, rested, which actually **means, ceased, implying no weariness whatsoever in God's activity of creating the world and all that is in it in six literal days.** The biblical God neither becomes weary or tired (Isaiah 40:28), nor does He need sleep (Psalm 121:4).

The word Sabbath, then, means to cease from normal activity.

2. The establishing of the Sabbath day for the nation of Israel.

1. Exodus 16:23.

The first occurrence of the word, Sabbath, meaning cessation, is found in Exodus 16:23. Having come out of Egypt and now in the wilderness the Israelites were told to on the sixth day of the week to gather twice as much manna for on the seventh day, the Sabbath there would be no manna, or bread. They were to do their cooking on the sixth day, and then they would have food for the Sabbath, on which there would be no manna. It happened just that way as Exodus 16:23-30. The manna didn't spoil that was kept for the Sabbath as it did if it was kept on the other days of the week. A true miracle of the Lord.

2. Exodus 20:8-10.

That the Sabbath day was to be kept holy was included in the Ten Commandments as the fourth commandment. The nation of Israel was told that six days the people should labor but the seventh day was a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

God then used the principle of His ceasing from labor on the seventh day of creation to be the basis upon which He directed the nation of Israel to cease from its normal labor on the seventh day.

3. Exodus 31:13-17.

In this passage of Scripture, God told the nation of Israel that the **Sabbath Day was a sign of His covenant** relationship with His people Israel. Keeping the Sabbath Day was an evidence that Israel belonged to the Lord.

That's why the keeping of the Sabbath day was an indication of the spiritual condition of God's people (Jeremiah 17:19-27; Ezekiel 20:12-24).

That's why it has been suggested that the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath Day holy is in the middle of the Ten Commandments as God's seal on the commandments that He made that law covenant, that Mosaic Covenant with His people. Keeping the Sabbath Day by the nation of Israel, was evidence to Him that their heart was being obedient to the LORD.

3. Some stipulations included for the Sabbath Day for the nation of Israel.

- (1) No kindling fire for cooking on the Sabbath Day (Exodus 35:3).
- (2) No fuel could be gathered on the Sabbath Day (Numbers 156:32).
- (3) No carrying of burdens on the Sabbath Day (Jeremiah 17:21ff).
- (4) No transacting of business on the Sabbath Day (Nehemiah 10:3).
- (5) To break the Sabbath Day meant death (Exodus 31:14-17).

4. Additions to the Sabbath Laws.

By the time of Jesus some 39 acts had been added to the Sabbath Laws prohibiting various behavior.

- (1) A person could only walk so far – That's why it says in Acts 2:12 that after Jesus ascended into heaven, they returned to Jerusalem a Sabbath Day's journey, which was about a half a mile, the journey the Rabbis allowed the Jews to travel on the Sabbath Day.
- (2) Fingernails couldn't be cut.
- (3) Only one letter was to be written.
- (4) A bucket could be tied to a belt but not a rope.
- (5) As long as there was no danger to life, healing should be postponed to the next day – why Jesus got in trouble with healing on the Sabbath as happened in the next incident in Jesus' life in Mark 3:1-6.
- (6) In our text in Mark 2 the Pharisees were trying to pin on Jesus and His disciples that picking heads of grain on the Sabbath was working – thusly breaking the Sabbath.

III. The teaching that's needed regarding the Sabbath Law.

1. Jesus teaching (Mark 2:25-28).

(1) Example from the Old Testament.

To counteract the thinking and accusation of the Pharisees, Jesus used an example from the Old Testament concerning David when Abiathar (son of Ahimelech) was the High Priest (cf. I Samuel 21:1-6).

King David and his hungry men were in need of bread and David came to the priest asking for bread. The priest gave David holy bread from the tabernacle which was only supposed to be eaten by the priest according to Leviticus 24:5-9. This was actually the old bread, not the bread of the day. The bread was replaced every Sabbath Day.

(2) Explanation of the example

Jesus was teaching the Pharisees that compassion for someone in need is more pleasing to God than external conformity to the ritual and ceremony of the law.

Matthew gives us a fuller description of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 12:3-8- where He states that even the priests work on the Sabbath day are not blamed for breaking the Sabbath.

Then in Matthew 12:6-7 Christ says, "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion and not a sacrifice (Hosea 6:6), you would not have condemned the innocent.'" For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

That's why Jesus ends His teaching in Mark 2:27-28 with "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Then, "So the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus was not advocating His freedom to break the Sabbath law, which He came to fulfill, but as Lord of the Sabbath, He was saying that He was qualified to interpret that law.

(3) Application of the example.

Jesus was rebuking the Pharisees for making the Sabbath Day something that it was not. It was a day to be refreshed and focus on the Lord in worship.

They had added all kinds of stipulations which were not part of God's Sabbath Day. In so doing they had so burdened the Jewish people of that day that there was no real joy and purpose in their lives.

In fact Christ signaled to the Pharisees and to His disciples that something new was coming in regard to the Sabbath Day.

I read it from Matthew 12:6, but let me repeat it again – the words of Jesus – **"But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here." As John tells us He is the tabernacle, the living tabernacle" (John 1:14).**

What did Jesus mean by that. Yes, He was Lord of the Sabbath. But something more was in the offing.

2. The full Scriptural teaching (regarding the Sabbath).

There is more teaching for God's revelation in the Bible is progressive. It comes to us a bit at a time until we have the completed revelation of God to us.

(1) Jesus said that He came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17).

Did Christ fulfill the Law?

(2) Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:4).

What does that mean? Christ was born under the Mosaic law system. In His life on earth, He fulfilled that law system completely and perfectly. Something which no one could ever do, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death. Since we can't provide ourselves forgiveness for breaking God's law, Christ was willing to be our representative before God to pay the penalty for our breaking God's law which is death. Being God and perfect man, He could satisfy the righteous demands of the holy God in His death, pay the penalty for our breaking God's law in His death, and then demonstrate that forgiveness and eternal life were available to all through His bodily resurrection.

The law could never produce God's righteousness. The law could never save anyone. No one can be justified by the law (Romans 3:20). That's why Christ came to fulfill the law of God, so that now we who accept Christ as Savior are declared righteous before God, having the very righteousness of the Law fulfilled in us through faith in Christ as we live in the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-11).

Thusly good works by trying to keep even the Ten Commandments do not gain one forgiveness and eternal life before God for all our good works are like polluted garments before the Lord because they are tainted with our sin.

(3) Trust must be put solely in Jesus for salvation.

Come with me to Hebrews 4:9-10.

In this fourth chapter of Hebrews the writer is talking about the fact that not even Joshua was able to lead the people into their rest of living in the promised land due to their unbelief.

But then notice Hebrews 4:9 –"So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered into His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His."

What's being said here is that the real Sabbath is Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 12:6 "Something greater than the temple is here."

The one who accepts Jesus Christ as personal Savior has ceased from his works, which are not acceptable to God, but has placed His faith in Jesus Christ finished and eternal work for forgiveness and eternal life. This is a picture of what God did in creating the world. He ceased from His works. We cease from our spiritual works when we accept Christ as personal Savior.

That's why Jesus in Matthew 11:28 said, "Come to Me all who are weary (spent with labor spiritually from trying to do good works on one's own) and heavy laden (with sins and faults) and I will give you rest."

In the light of the burdensome spiritual laws that had been placed on the people in His day, Jesus was offering Himself to them as the true Sabbath. Come to Me! Rest yourselves spiritually in MY REST – My completed salvation for you. That’s why Christ on the cross spoke those eternal words, “It Is Finished.” The work for your eternal redemption is complete. Now come and cease from your striving and reasoning, and rest in my rest for you. Let me be your SABBATH.

But there is more here.

(4) Keep trusting daily in Jesus as His follower.

Note the writer of Hebrews 4:11.

“Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.”

Believers in Christ rest in Jesus for their salvation, but they must also live by faith in His promises (REST IN HIM), in His Word, and not slip into living by sight, or unbelief, as the nation of Israel did.

This means as we have spiritual rest in Jesus through faith in Him, then, as believers in HIM, we must continually grow in that rest in our relationship with the LORD.

How is that done?

Let’s go back to Jesus’ words in Matthew 11, this time verse 29 – 30.

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

“Take” (once for all action) My (Jesus’) yoke (cross bar - picture here of an mature oxen yoked to the younger oxen learning to work in the field) learn from Me, for I am gentle (kind and forgiving, but also I want you to learn of me), and humble (no pride – know who I am and will approach you that way to give you the encouragement you need). And you will continually find rest (repose, refreshment) for your souls (lives).

For My yoke (cross bar) is easy (useful, profitable) and my burden is light (contrasted with the heavy burden that people have in Matthew 11:28).

John writes in I John 5:3 – “ the commandments of the LORD are not burdensome.” Through the power of the Holy Spirit obeyed in our lives the Word of God comes alive to give us wisdom, direction, what to put on in our lives spiritually and what to put off in our spiritual lives.

Resting in Christ for our salvation, and resting in Him each day, trusting in His Word to guide and direct us in the power of the Holy Spirit we experience daily that He is OUR SABBATH.

That means that the Sabbath Day which was given to Israel as a nation, we as followers of Christ are not under that law today. That’s why Paul wrote to the Colossians 2:16, “Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day, things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Christ is our Sabbath today for salvation, sanctification and eventually glorification. That’s why after Christ ascended to heaven and the Holy Spirit came in the Book of Acts, the people assembled on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). That is resurrection day. The entire Mosaic system has been fulfilled by Christ. That’s why we are here on the first day of the week to worship – This is resurrection day. We worship the risen Christ and celebrate the new resurrection life He has given us through faith in Him.

Now the teaching of the Scripture for commemorating days is found in Romans 14:4ff:

Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or fails; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he

who eats does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God."

If a person wants to keep Saturday as a Sabbath for him or her that is fine. If one wants to have a Sabbath on another day that is fine too. My Sabbath is usually Monday unless something else comes along. One's Sabbath can also be Sunday, but it is a working day for me.

Believers in Christ are not under the Mosaic system any more. Christ has fulfilled all of that and established a new way to God through His own death, burial and bodily resurrection. In fact today in Jesus we are under the law of Christ (I Corinthians 9:21), which includes the teachings of the epistles, principles from the life of Christ and the Old Testament. All of the Scripture is written for our learning and encouragement. We have liberty in Christ in the Holy Spirit's power to do the will of God for His glory.

Psalm 37 summarizes our Lord as our TRUE SABBATH.

Trust in the LORD, and do good.

Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the LORD.

Trust in HIM, and He will do it.

Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him.

Do not fret because of Him who prospers in the way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evil doing.

How does all of this happen as we know the TRUE SABBATH, JESUS, BY FAITH?

Psalm 37:7 – Rest in the LORD. Wait patiently for Him! Let Him be YOUR SABBATH.

I believe it was Corrie Ten Boom who told us not to wrestle with the Lord but to nestle in Him, rest in Him as our daily Sabbath.

But we should also have a SABBATH Day in our lives each week for physical, emotional, and spiritual refreshment.

According to a Greek legend, in ancient Athens a man noticed the great storyteller Aesop playing childish games with some little boys. He laughed and jeered at Aesop, asking him why he wasted his time in such frivolous activity.

Aesop responded by picking up a bow, loosening its string, and placing it on the ground. Then he said to the critical Athenian, "Now, answer the riddle, if you can. Tell us what the unstrung bows implies."

The man looked at it for several moments but had no idea what point Aesop was trying to make.

Aesop explained, "If you keep a bow always bent, it will break eventually; but if you let it go slack, it will be more fit for use when you want it."

Yes we need Jesus for our daily SABBATH in our spiritual lives, to rest in Him and act on His promises to us.

But Jesus also knows we need a change of pace in life, a SABBATH DAY for our lives physically, emotionally and spiritually to be refreshed. That's why Jesus took the disciples aside after a time of ministry.

We need a SABBATH DAY each week to loosen the bow in our lives so we can be our best for our Lord, our SABBATH, each day!!

May it be so for each of this week!!

