

“Living the Sabbath Rest”

– Luke 6:1-11

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers church
in Menomonie, Wisconsin
on February 14th, 2016



Luke 6:1-11 *Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the*

heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands. 2 And some of the Pharisees said to them, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" 3 But Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 "how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?" 5 And He said to them, "The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." 6 Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered. 7 So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him. 8 But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, "Arise and stand here." And he arose and stood. 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?" 10 And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. 11 But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

From our childhood sitting in the pews of church services and the little chairs in our Sunday School classes, we have heard the ten commandments. Most often we have held them up in reverence and esteem, and certainly we should, but our oft misapplication and warrior attitude on this subject certainly reflect our ignorance as well as an often distraction on the ‘minors.’ We must learn and thus encompass a greater understanding than we generally have today concerning the law and the Ten Commandments specifically if we seek to not mislead or misrepresent! And this issue matters because Jesus was repeatedly hit with this one...continually hammered about not “honoring” the Sabbath day, number 4 on the ‘big 10’ list.

Today we tend to be detached from the Ten Commandments and write them off as “mere” Old Testament law. We revere them but only with a proud historical value...plaque material for our walls. However, we are quick to disregard their personal and practical application with the quick dismissal “we’re not under the law anymore.” But I will have to differ with you on that today. In a way *I* can say *I* am not under the *requirements* of the law anymore, but I can’t say for sure the same about you!

For the law, according to Paul, is still in affect...doing what it always has done and in fact really meant to do from its inception; *and that is to reflect the righteousness and holiness of God and the standard for which we must meet in order to ever stand in his presence and live to tell the story. It clearly expresses the obvious shortcoming in all of us to ever attain to such a standard.* The idea is that these ten...and ever so much more that is detailed in the whole of the Old Testament law, is what you would effectively have to be and to do to stand right before God. Of course if that standard isn’t problematic enough, there is the impossibility of ridding ourselves of the past shortcomings as well as the fallen nature that is sure to keep us from such a goal.

In Galatians 3 and 4, Paul details this phenomenon and encompasses it all with the idea that the law...which includes the Ten Commandments, is still in play and doing what it was ultimately designed to do. He tells us that the law is our “schoolmaster”...our restraint and our guide, to keep us on the ‘straight and narrow.’ To ‘rack our knuckles with the rod’ when we stepped out of line. So when I say that I am no longer under the law, it is because Christ has fulfilled the requirements of that law and I stand positionally righteous because of Him and His actions on the cross and in my life.

Jesus Himself also failed to give us all a universal ‘pass’ on the Ten Commandments, explicitly expressing the fact that our obedience must include them. In Matthew 19, a gentleman came to Jesus and said ‘*Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*’ Jesus then answered him saying, ‘*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.*’ The man replied ‘*Which ones?*’

Jesus then gives the man the ‘Cliff Notes’ version of the law and then a short summary statement:

- “You shall not murder.”
- “You shall not commit adultery.”
- “You shall not steal.”
- “You shall not bear false witness.”
- “Honor your father and your mother.”
- “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:16-19)

Jesus went on to say in Matthew 5:17-19 that “*Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*” So obedience to God and His directives do indeed matter, but the story is actually more damning than even this! For our obedience must extend well beyond just the physical keeping of the Ten Commandments, even the keeping of the totality of the law altogether. Christ spoke of our thought life and the intentions of our heart trumping even what we do physically, thus effectively condemning us all!

Jesus also said: “*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill* [from the Greek *pleroo*, meaning to ‘fill to the full’]. *For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled* [from a different Greek word, *ginomai*, used in the sense of ‘come to pass’].

Sin is disregarding, refusing to do, what God tells us to do. Jesus tells us He had no intention of annulling or abolishing God’s commands and that anyone who presumes to teach that He does is in grave spiritual danger! But scripture also makes it very clear that you are never going to be completely successful in such obedience, so if you are basing your heavenly standing on your personal adherence, you are also very much in trouble! See, it’s like this: This is the level of holiness that is demanded for one to be in the presence and right standing with God. You will ultimately fail to attain it...but Jesus in you positionally fulfills all of those requirements before God (He sees Jesus’ purity and not yours).

However, such *practically* does not absolve you from holy living. In our born again state, Jesus not only “squares things with the house” but He changes you and gives you a desire...a passion even,(albeit an imperfect one in our fallen state) as well as a power to be and to do what is holy and pleases Him. Philippians 2:13 says “*For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*”

So as we step into this matter, let us not write it off for it *was* and *is* an issue! Thus it appeared that Jesus was breaking the rules! Rules that He Himself exalted and re-enforced, and rules that God the Father gave! One can easily take the position that people were more important than rules, and that Jesus was simply lovingly and compassionately placing people over the law. But it is again, not that simple! We know that the end does not justify the means, or chaos would reign! And God says Himself that He is a ‘God of order.’ We know that in scriptural history, more than once God “left the house” or punished someone, not because they failed to *do* but failed to follow His guidelines on just *how it ought to be done*.

When it came to the issue of Sabbath, it seems that such was designed to be more than anything else a day for which man could serve, worship and honor God. Such is and can be done in reflection, prayer, meditation, fellowship, serving each other, worship, and...well, just stopping our perpetual forward motion that obsesses us for the other 5 or 6 days! So when the issue of secular work arose and rises even yet today, the point wasn’t and isn’t that some guy was out of line because he wasn’t chillin’ on a hammock somewhere...because one persons ‘rest’ fails to be another’s! But rather the issue was that God was asking for one day out of seven...just as in His creation, just like with our tithe, to be set aside for the glorification of the Creator. To be “all about God,” even in the midst of a week where we all should indeed be always and forever “seeking first the kingdom of God.” But this ‘Sabbath’ was specifically and uniquely set aside to honor God and the creation of everything.

The Pharisees didn’t ‘get it.’ They thought it was about them. “Well,” *you might say*, “didn’t Jesus say the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath?” Indeed! But so many read that to mean that it is therefore our day to ski, to watch football, to go “up north to the cabin”, etc. I do believe that if that is your thinking then you are missing the point. If that was the intent of Jesus concerning the Sabbath, then why wasn’t HE ‘up north at the cabin’ on the Sabbath instead of healing these people?

Now if you are a guy that happens to have a “cabin up north,” I do not mean to single you out as especially guilty. There is no emphatic and overt sin in such. But we have slowly slid into a new social construct within Christendom, which sees our Sabbath as a “free day”...like a second Saturday each week, in which we can “seek first the kingdom of *me*.” Even when we attend church on a regular basis, we often find it frankly easier to “take off” a Sunday than it is to take off from our secular workplace. We generally find it an easy thing to “take the weekend off from church” for our personal R and R.

The flaws in this thinking are many. Not just in our misunderstanding concerning what the Sabbath actually is and is intended to be, but such misadventure skews our grasp of the body life of the believer, the responsibility of each of us to take our place and serve that body, the setting aside of such a day for worship and serving others and a focused glorification of our king, *something that we will always struggle with Monday through Friday in our secular workplace*. So when we read that the Sabbath is a ‘day of rest’ we assume that such means we affectively get to chill out and take a pass on any responsibilities and effort! But the ‘rest’ that is spoken of here is not rest from Christ-centered living but rather rest from our “work” in this world.

After all, for what was Jesus...our supreme example...being both accused of and condemned for? Was it for taking the weekend off (including the Sabbath) to do a little fishing or hunting? No, it was for not following the painfully detailed rules...*man made rules*, for just how the Sabbath should be honored. Jesus wasn’t being badgered for ignoring the Sabbath, but for how He chose to honor His Father on the Sabbath. For Jesus, He was herein being condemning for eating...*which in this case was rolled together with ‘harvesting’ grain, which was work*, and for healing a man, *which was apparently not on their short list of acceptable practices on the Sabbath*.

I know that the ‘battle is on’ when it comes to this issue, because the world doesn’t stop on Sundays, and many workplace situations demand shifts that fall on Sunday. There are those who advocate a “Sabbath” on some other day other than Sunday because of the secular environment that we live in. But the problem with that idea is the issue of *‘body life.’* How can there be a real participation with the greater church body if there is not participation in an agreed upon corporate gathering where we all can take our place in that body and serve each other accordingly? For it is all but impossible to live the biblical Christian life outside of such a dynamic though many claim to be doing it.

Our passage says that Christ is “also the Lord of the Sabbath.” And if we grasp the meaning of “Lord” and the ramifications of that title, we gather that even on the Sabbath He is the boss and dictating our behavior on that day as well as all others. Therefore we cannot see our lives with Him to be on a 40 hour a week scenario, or that He is like our earthly employer and we get to “check out” over the weekend!

Now, the danger of talking about this issue is people tend to bristle in what they see as a pastoral condemnation or an attempt to restrict their freedom of movement. I assure you that such is not my attempt. I am however attempting to honestly deal with this subject without bias or cultural norms. I am not wanting to point my finger at any one individual, but rather for us as a church to embrace scripture in its fullness without attempting to avoid the words of Christ, even when they are uncomfortable. This is not an issue of being a new Pharisee with new and specific guidelines to throw down as New Testament law. It IS however an attempt to understand what Jesus wants from us on this matter.

We cannot argue that in our imperfect and fallen world, problems do not take a day off on Sundays. Cars don’t start, sickness prevails, there is a crisis at work, and sometimes our “ox is in the ditch” and we need to immediately get it out. (Luke 14:5) I cannot and will not start to mandate church attendance, for I do not believe that is my place to do so. Col 2:16 instructs us clearly: “*So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths ...*”

On the other hand, I as a pastor do not get the luxury to avoid uncomfortable challenges to our living faith. I must meet them head on, and this is my attempt to do so. I cannot say I have never missed a Sunday for vacation, but the example that Christ gave was one where He held the Sabbath in high regard, and it would be a real ‘spiritual dance’ to claim that the Sabbath doesn’t matter, or that it is just another day. Jesus never insinuated that it was a day to watch football and if we have time maybe we should catch a church service! He did however quote the ten commandments, which included the “keep the Sabbath day holy”, and Jesus himself found himself regularly in the temple gatherings even though he found them somewhat corrupted by men.

In Leviticus 23:3, God told the Israelites that Sabbath was “a day of sacred assembly.” Both Jesus (Luke 4:16) and the apostles (Acts 13:13, 14; 13:42-44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4) made a habit of going to the synagogue or worshipping together on Sabbath. Church is an opportunity to worship that “Lord” in a place designed for worship, to learn more of Him through the study of His Word, and to serve each other and receive encouragement from a community of fellow believers. Paul exhorted, “*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching*” (Hebrews 10:25).

*“If you watch your step on the Sabbath and don’t use my holy day for personal advantage,
If you treat the Sabbath as a day of joy, GOD’s holy day as a celebration,
If you honor it by refusing ‘business as usual,’ making money, running here and there—
Then you’ll be free to enjoy GOD!” (Isaiah 58:13-14 ‘The Message’ version)*

(More on this subject at <http://www.sabbathtruth.com/free-resources/article-library/id/919/how-should-i-honor-it>)