**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 2-18-2024
Jesus and the Sabbath**

Twelve years ago, back in late January of 2012, I started seminary. I was all fired up and excited to learn. And of course, I was also kind of nervous about going back to school after more than 7 years. Would I be able to keep up with reading and papers, while also having family and everything that comes with it? Thoughts like that. But I knew for certain that God was leading me.

That first semester went well. It was the spring of 2012 when I began. I learned a lot and was blessed by the professors and other students. And before I knew it, I remember there being a sign up for summer classes being posted. Certain classmates were sharing with me about what they were planning to take.

Does anyone want to guess what I was ready to take? I was ready to take a break. I was exhausted. That first semester took a lot out of me. And not to mention our daughter Kayla was due to be born that summer as well. I knew that we would have our hands full with this new life that God has blessed us with.

And I tell you one thing, I am so glad that I chose to rest from my classes that summer. It was the right decision. I came back in the fall and I was recharged, as recharged as you can be with a newborn.

And beginning that fall I was able to take one or two classes year-round for the next few years before I took another break.

How about you? Have you ever felt exhausted? Have there been times that you chose to take a break in order to bring greater health to your life? It could be from schooling or employment or a sport or an instrument or other activity. That rest would be best?

Sometimes this break is referred to as a renewal or a Sabbatical. The word Sabbatical comes the word Sabbath. This concept of the Sabbath is a very big one in the Bible. We read even from the book of Genesis how God rested on the 7th day from all the work that He had done. We are told that He blessed the 7th day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all His work that He had done in creation.

Now when I think of God resting, I do not think that He was in the same mindset that I was after that first semester of seminary. I do not think that the Lord was just totally exhausted and in need of a break. Instead, I think that far more likely this Sabbath for God was about Him stopping to enjoy His creation, rather than being intent on making new things. It was a time for God to just celebrate and take pleasure in all that He had done. So the Sabbath was meant to be a few things. It was to be a time of rest and renewal and refreshment, but also a time to stop and enjoy life. A time to just be. A time to play and to be especially appreciative.

The concept of the Sabbath continues on from Genesis into Exodus. When we read about God rescuing Israel from slavery in Egypt, one of the most important commandments that God gave to them was to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy.

The Sabbath was meant to be one of God’s gifts to Israel. Interestingly, in Egypt there was a 10-day week with no rest day for Israel. The Israelites were slaves and there slave masters did not care about their slaves getting rest and being refreshed in body and spirit. They were viewed as objects to be exploited for whatever the Egyptians could get out of them.

But God would not only free Israel from bondage, He would also command them to reshape their calendar to now be 7 days. And of those 7 days, 1 day was to be a Sabbath. This would be a day of rest. This was meant for them to slow down and just be. It was given to help Israel remember that they were not God and that the world and its responsibilities of running the world were not meant to be on their shoulders. Every Sabbath was to be a reminder to take a break and be restored.

So in the Jewish calendar, the Sabbath would become a special day each week. In some ways, it was like a weekly holiday. Commerce would stop. Big family gatherings would take place for sharing a Sabbath meal together. And people were to be refreshed and restored in body and spirit.

Now, did this practice of Sabbath keeping always go well with the people of Israel? Many times the Sabbath was not observed. They would not observe it in order to try to make more money and gain some type of advantage in society. Their neglecting of the Sabbath was a sign that their hearts were not right with God. They were focused on themselves rather than on God. They were not stopping to rest and enjoy God. They became like the nations around them.

There were also others that distorted the Sabbath in a different way. Instead of neglecting the Sabbath, they became legalistic about how they were to observe the Sabbath. This distortion of the Sabbath was common among religious leaders, such as the Pharisees.

They came up with elaborate and complex stipulations of what was okay or not okay to do on the Sabbath.

Here is an example from a certain of the oral law, which would be these man-made traditions on what is right and wrong and fine to do or not okay to do in all different topics, including the Sabbath.

The following is what was permitted to throw on the Sabbath.

According to Shabbath 11.1-5 “11.1 If a man threw aught [/something] from a private domain to the public domain, or from the public domain to a private domain, he is culpable; but if from a private domain to another private domain with the public domain between, R. Akiba declares him culpable, but the Sages not culpable.

2. Thus if there were two balconies opposite one another [extending] into the public domain and a man stretched out or threw aught from the one to the other, he is not culpable. If they were [different private domains but on the same side of the street and] in the same story, and a man stretched aught out [from one to the other], he is culpable; but if he threw it he is not culpable . . .

3. . . . If a man threw [aught to a distance of] four cubits on the ground he is culpable; but if he threw it less than four cubits and it rolled beyond the four cubits he is not culpable. But if he threw it beyond four cubits and it rolled back with the four cubits he is culpable.

4. If a man through [aught to a distance of] four cubits into the sea he is not culpable; if it was a piece of shallow water through which passed a public path, and a man threw aught therein [to a distance of] four cubits, he is culpable. What depth counts as shallow water? Less than ten handbreadths. If into shallow water, through which passed a public path, a man threw aught [to a distance of] four cubits, he is culpable.

5. If a man threw aught from the sea to the dry land, or from the dry land to the sea, or from the sea to a ship, or from a ship to the sea, or from one ship to another, he is not culpable. If the ships were tied together [goods] may be moved from one to the other; if they were not tied together, even though they lay closely together, naught may be moved from the one to the other.

Now I don’t know about you, but I’m feeling a bit exhausted just reading this elaborate man-made rules about Sabbath-keeping. You can see how this rabbit hole of man-made tradition could get very deep, very quickly. And the sad thing is that these religious leaders believed that following these traditions on these matters was equally important, if not more important, than following the Law given by God to Moses for Israel. And they viewed anyone who did not observe all these traditions as being below them and basically unclean in God’s sight.

This was the climate that Jesus dealt with during His earthly ministry. This was the landscape of Sabbath understandings for the people of Israel when Jesus came to earth. The questions for us today are how did Jesus understand the Sabbath? And then, in light of that, how are we as Jesus’ followers today to understand Sabbath?

To help us explore this first question, I invite you to turn with me to our highlighted Scripture for today found in Luke’s gospel, chapter 6, verses 1-5.

**1One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. 2Some of the Pharisees asked, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”**

**3Jesus answered them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” 5Then Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”**

In this scene, we have an example of the growing rift between Jesus and many of the religious leaders. Many of the religious leaders were so obsessed with trying to map out every scenario and if it would or would not be a violation of keeping the Sabbath that they missed God’s heart of what the Sabbath is really all about.

On many occasions Jesus intentionally healed people on the Sabbath. This was because the Sabbath was meant to be about our neediness on God and our dependence on Him to be made whole. The Sabbath would then be an especially fitting day for Jesus to bring healing and restoration into people’s lives as a gift from God to them.

But the religious leaders by and large did not see it that way. They saw Jesus as a Sabbath breaker. They were more focused on Jesus breaking their man-made traditions than in celebrating the miracles of people being healed.

In this particular story, some of the Pharisees were accusing Jesus’ disciples of breaking the Sabbath by plucking and eating heads of grain on the Sabbath. This was not a violation of the Old Testament Law, but over time many of the Pharisees interpreted this action on the Sabbath to be a form of harvesting and thus, to be considered work.

But instead of arguing with these Pharisees about if the disciple did or did not violate the Sabbath law, Jesus decides to share an example from the Old Testament. Jesus speaks about David. David had been anointed to be the next King of Israel, but the current king, King Saul, did not want to give his throne to David. Instead, he tried several times to have David killed.

And at one point, David was on the run and he goes to the priest and asks for some of the consecrated bread that only the priests were to eat. The bread was given to him and he ate it and shared this bread with some of his companions. That was a clear violation of the Sabbath. But in God’s eyes, that was an extenuating circumstance.

Jesus told the Pharisees elsewhere, if your animal fell into pit on the Sabbath, wouldn’t you help them? In other words, there are extenuating circumstances. The right thing to do would be to help the animal.

And then comes the kicker. Jesus tells them, **The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”**

This is quite a statement. First, refers to Himself as the Son of Man. This title ‘Son of Man’ was this divine being referred to in Daniel chapter 7, whom God the Father calls all the nations to honor and worship.

But if that wasn’t enough of a claim, Jesus refers to Himself as “Lord of the Sabbath.” This means that Jesus believed Himself to be Master of the Sabbath. In other words, the Sabbath must be understood in light of Jesus.

That is a strong statement and it revealed Jesus’ identity. It was one of the many ways that Jesus conveyed the message that He is God. He is divine. And as you may know, these high claims about Himself led many of the Pharisees to reject Jesus. They did not want to submit to His authority.

So we finally come to today’s question. How are Christians to view the Sabbath?

First, as we discussed last week, the Sabbath was part of the Law of Moses that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And consequentially, this means that Christians are not expected or obligated to keep the Sabbath. Under the new covenant, keeping the Sabbath is not mandated or required. No one should be pressured to keep this commandment in order to be a true Christian.

Second, Christians need to remember that Jesus Himself is our Sabbath rest. In the New Testament letter we called Hebrews, the author is in many ways explaining how the new covenant is better than the old covenant. And chapter 4 of Hebrews begins with a very interesting sentence. We read this, **4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.**

The author is saying that there is a spiritual rest that only comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

I love how Augustine, one of the church fathers from the days of the early church, stated, **“Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him.”**

In other words, the point of the Sabbath is for rest and recovery and to practice being, rather than striving. A former pastor of mine, Barry Robison, in quoting Pastor Rick Warren from his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, reminded me once that ‘we are human beings, not human doings.”

All the religions of the world fail to offer true rest for the soul. They are all just performance treadmills – lots of striving, but no rest. All they offer are hoops to try to jump through in striving to earn favor from God.

But Christians are to understand that Jesus jumped through all the hoops that were necessary for us. We do not need to strive. Instead, our work is to enter into the rest that He offers us through Jesus Christ. Our work is to believe in the One whom God has sent into the world. This comes through faith and surrender to the savior of the world. Only He gives rest for our soul.

Jesus said, **28“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

And third and finally, while we are not legally obligated to keep the Sabbath, I believe the Lord invites us to follow the spirit of the Sabbath law through building sacred rhythms of rest into our lives. This would be a certain day that we choose to take off each week from working. I try to do this myself and I believe the Lord works through this to renew my strength physically and mentally.

The Sabbath for Christians is an invitation. It can be a spiritual discipline. It is not to be an obligation, but a gift that we can choose to receive. Observing the Sabbath in this way can be a reminder that we are not in control. The Sabbath can be a way of building play and greater wholeness into our lives.

**In summary, Christians are not under the Sabbath law and are not required to keep a Sabbath. But Christians are called to follow the spirit of the Sabbath law by finding rest for our soul through Jesus Christ and seeking to build rhythms of rest into our calendar.**

Resources:

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

New Testament Cultural Settings: Lesson on Pharisaism

The Gospel of Luke by Joel B. Green