

One day in seven (2)

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[0 : 00] After the event, how many of you take notes as you go along?! How many do that? One, two, three, four.! That's quite interesting. I've never asked that question before.

! Six people, seven, maybe. Good. Just to know. We're thinking about...

I'll start with the word Sunday. So Sunday, we began this thought last week, and it was just how Sundays become like every other day of the week. Now, many of you won't even realise that, but for some of us at a certain age, we can remember when it was very quiet in the streets because the shops weren't open, and people walked around and said hello to each other, and the cars went whizzing around, and the only day of the year that I can think of is at all like that now, is early on Good Friday and early on Christmas Day, when all you see is little people on tricycles and so forth, and people walking their dogs and so forth.

But generally speaking, Sunday's like every other day, isn't it? That's just the reality of it. There's no constraints on what can be done, nothing that I can see anyhow. The 24-7 world is present on a Sunday as it is on any other day of the week.

And people say at the time, oh, it just gives more choices to people. They've got another day they can do their shopping and so forth. But of course, one person's choice is somebody else's constraint, isn't it?

[1 : 32] You know, if I want to go and shop, someone's got to serve me on the other side of the counter. And so they're brought into some constraint. One man's freedom at the expense of another's restrictions.

Now, you might say that's all out there, but it isn't just out there. It's also in here, because it's really affected the way churches function. And churches have responded in different kinds of ways.

And some people say, well, we can't really meet on a Sunday morning, because actually parents are busy chaperoning their children, going to play football. So actually the biggest opportunity might be at 3.30 on a Sunday afternoon.

Well, that's quite a big change for many people to do that. And all kinds of adaptation has taken place as a result of that. And we personally affected, not just churches, we personally affected. So I'm absolutely confident that if you're an older person, you probably do things on Sunday now that you wouldn't have done 20 years ago. We didn't shop on Sundays.

[2 : 40] You can't believe that. We didn't shop on Sundays. We didn't go out for meals in restaurants on Sundays. You stayed at home and did that. And there are lots of things.

As is quite often with church culture, you kind of follow what the world has been doing about 10 or 15 years behind. And we are in a peer group situation as well.

So our behaviours influence others. If they see us doing certain things, they think, oh, that seems to be all right. So Christian people would not have dreamt of going to the cinema on a Sunday in the past.

They do now. This has changed. I'm not making any value judgement about those things. I'm just saying that's a reality. We are affected by the society in which we live.

Does it matter? Has it got any significance? Well, this teaching is not about trying to recover traditions.

[3 : 45] It's not about nostalgia. It's not about saying how good the old times were. But it is like saying, well, let's just unravel this a bit. Let's just think about what the Bible might have to say on the subject of keeping one day special.

Which Sunday was. How do we get to that place in the first instance? And what does the Bible have to say? So last week, we were looking at some significant Bible passages.

And the first one is this. It's Genesis chapter 2, verses 1 to 3. So let's just look at that again because it's such a powerful, strong and helpful collection of verses.

Genesis chapter 2, verses 1 to 3. So on six days, the Lord God made the heavens and the earth and all that there is was made in six days.

And it says in Genesis 2, 1. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. What a magnificent thing. They were completed in all their vast array.

[4 : 51] And by the seventh day, God had finished the work that he'd been doing. So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. And we thought about that word rested.

Do you remember what we said about... What does that word rested mean? What does rest mean? Stop. It was stopping. It's not because he's tired. But he's stopping.

And he's stopping. He's putting a pause upon his activity. The Lord God is putting a pause on his activity. We might say, why is he doing that?

And it appears that he's doing that in order that he might admire the work of his hands. He might reflect upon the things that he has done. He might consider that the creating work just stops at this point.

And that he should take stock of what has happened. And he rested from all his work. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

[5 : 57] Because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. He made that day rather special. It was a day when he could look back. And it is a pattern.

It is a pattern. That day is blessed. He enjoys that day. But it is given to mankind to be enjoyed as well.

God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. And there are two aspects we should pick out from here. God blessed the seventh day. And the blessing is for man.

And secondly, it is a holy day. It is made special. It is set apart. And it is so because God's fingerprint is on it.

And he is to be acknowledged on this day. As the Lord, the creator. So there we find something before the fall.

[7 : 00] And it is given to the whole of mankind. So we could say there is actually something very good about this day. We could trumpet this. We could talk about this day.

And we could say to our friends and neighbours. You know what? This is a real blessing. You would be so blessed if you were able to keep this day special. That is true.

I do not know how many of you felt you proven that. But I feel very enthusiastic about this day. I do not feel it is in a little box marked religion. But I think it is just a blessing for everyone to enjoy this day.

And I would say to people in the mental health industry. It is so important that people actually enjoy the blessing of one day in seven. It is not good for people to be working 24-7.

Slave will go round. I spoke to students last week, didn't I? Students. Moses. Students. Said to all your students and anyone who is listening online.

[8 : 00] This is a good day to keep it a special way. Put your books to one side. You don't need to think about that. This is a day just to be... To stop.

To take stock of what's happened in the week that's preceded. And to just have this as a separate day when you do something completely different. Do that.

Look, we're all in that place. Now it's a temptation to get involved with things that we do during the week on a Sunday. We think, oh, how are we going to spend this day?

We'll come on to the question of how you spend the day. But I think the principle holds good. That this day should be kept special. It should be different. And God has blessed it.

And he's put a significance upon it. It's a pattern for everybody. Given to all. Because we are all under the headship of Adam. Because we're all Adam's seed. Then there appears to be quite a lot of quiet in the Bible.

[8 : 59] Between creation and the time of the Exodus. But it's not completely quiet. Because there are references to sevens. In terms of time. And we looked at one particular story last time.

Which we won't go into detail. But I'll give you the verses again. It's Exodus chapter 16. Verses 21 to 30. And Exodus 16.

21 to 30. And this is the time when the people of Israel. God's people. God's people. He's brought them together as a family.

And he's taking them to the promised land. But you remember. Because their disobedience. Their grumbling. And their. General. Sinfulness.

This isn't a matter of days. It's going to take years and years. In fact 40 years. It's going to take. How are they going to be looked after in the desert? Well.

[10:01] God provides water out of a rock. And he provides bread from heaven. And the bread from heaven. Is coming down. Every day. And it's a wonderful thing. This manna.

Which is coming down. Bread from heaven. Is coming down. Every day. But. Here's. God's reminder to the people. That.

There is one day. Which is to be kept separate. And not to do work on that day. So. This bread from heaven. Comes down. On Monday. Tuesday. Wednesday. Thursday. Friday. And on Saturday. Twice as much as given. So they've got enough. To enjoy. For the next day. I muddled up the date. Friday. When they had. Double the amount.

And it was Saturday. The Sabbath. When they were just able to enjoy it. And the wonderful thing was. They found out. That actually. The whole thing went mouldy. After one day. But not on the Friday bread.

[10:59] The stuff they needed. For the Saturday. The Sabbath. Was absolutely. Tip top condition. And it was just a reminder. It is a reminder. To all of us. That. God provides.

God provides. You're always going to be. Under that sort of pressure. Someone could say to you. You can't afford. Just to be stepping back. On a. On a Sunday. And not doing stuff.

God provides. In a wonderful way. And. He provides. God's blessing. And provision. That word. Blessing and provision. Is going to crop up. Throughout. Throughout our consideration. It was. After that. That God gave. Ten words. On the. Mount Horeb.

And the fourth. Of God's. Ten words. Was. Given. And recorded. For us. In Exodus. Chapter 20. Verses. Eight to eleven. Commonly known.

[11:56] As the ten commandments. And this is one of the. Longest. Passages. Of a commandment. Verses. Eight to eleven. Remember the Sabbath day. By keeping it. Holy.

So. It's like. Something they've known about. Before. But now it's being enshrined. They're. They're being formed. As a new nation. And it was important. That this should be established.

So. It's chiseled on. A slab of stone. And given to the people. As a marker. As a reflection. Of the sign. Of the covenant. That God is making.

With his people. For. Although. This day. Has been given. To all people. To enjoy. He's marking out. The Israelites. The Jewish people. At this point.

And he's saying. You of all people. You're going to keep this day. This is what I want you to do. And. This is going to be a marker. For you. To distinguish you. It's a positive marker.

[12:53] Because. Actually. The intention is. That as they keep this day. In the way that God wants them. To keep it. The other nations. Are going to be rather blessed by. They're going to say. This is really interesting.

These people flourish. In spite of the fact. That they keep this one day. Apart and separate. I was talking to someone yesterday. And they were. Reminding me. About.

The Jewish nation. Now. Since 1948. When the Sabbath. Is actually kept. By many people. In a way. And there's hardly.

Any nation upon earth. That has been so prosperous. They've been under a lot of pressure. But they've actually been. A very prosperous nation. As well. So God. In his mercy. Has actually looked after.

That people. And. It's in this particular passage. That. There's an added ingredient. Which is given to us. In Exodus 20. Verses 1 and 2.

[13:49] Where God spoke. And he said. I am the Lord your God. Who brought you out of Egypt. Out of the land. Of. Slavery. I've done that. I've redeemed you. You were slaves.

And you're now free. Creation. Redemption. Creation. Redemption. And those are themes. That are to be picked up.

On the Sabbath. That God has given to them. And there's still blessing. To people who are not Jews. So in Exodus 20. Verse 10. It says. On it. You shall not do any work.

Neither you. Nor your servant. Or daughter. Nor your man servant. Or maid servant. Nor your animals. Nor the alien. That means the stranger. Within your gates.

It's not just something. Which is given to you. And then the rest. Can just go. Go and work their socks off. No. It's very important. For the alien. The person from another country.

[14:45] The person who's not a Jew. Is also to enjoy. That day of rest. The day of stopping. As well. And the Jewish people. Had a big responsibility.

To care. For those who were not Jewish. In their community. That they should enjoy that day. I wonder what the application. Of that might be for us. I'm just thinking.

To the top of my head. I'm just thinking. Oh well. How can we encourage. Our families. To be able to have this. As a special day. Even though they're not Christians. Interesting wouldn't it.

Move on to. Another passage. Which is. Sort of buried away. But it's there. It's Leviticus chapter 23. Verse 3.

It's on page 126. On the church bible. There are six days.

[15:48] When you may work. But the seventh day. Is a Sabbath. Of rest. A day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work. Wherever you live. It is Sabbath. To the Lord.

I draw your attention. To. The phrase. A day of sacred. Assembling. It was not a day. Where they were. Just to spend.

In their own tents. Or in. Quiet meditation. But they were to. Assemble. On that day. That's not insignificant. That's a real pointer.

That's something. Very important. For. Jewish people. Then. Christian people. Now. That we should. Assemble. On a special day. Well.

What happened next. We looked. At a passage. In Isaiah. Then. Isaiah 58. Verses 13. And 14. And that's on page. 747. And this is.

[16:46] One of many passages. That could be. Taken. Because the prophet. Spoke extensively. About. This subject.

So. Amos. Jeremiah. And Ezekiel. All have something. To say. Isaiah. Isaiah. Who lived. In a time. Of declension. In the. In the land. Talks about.

The Sabbath. Being abused. And he's. Some memorable. Words. In. Isaiah. Which. Feel as if. They were. Minted yesterday. If you keep.

Your feet. From breaking. The Sabbath. From doing. As you please. On my holy day. If you call.

The Sabbath. A delight. And the Lord's. Holy day. Honorable. And if you honor it.

By not going. Your own way. Not doing. As you please. Or speaking. Idle words. And then he goes on. To talk about. The blessing. That will be there. As enormous blessing. But this was. Always the challenge.

[17:43] For the people. The people. Who didn't actually. Enjoy the day at all. They just. Moked. Until it was. Monday. Or Sunday. I'm going to. Keep muddling. My weeks up.

But. They said. Oh. Oh. This day was over. Don't like this day at all. Let's get back to normality. And God says. That's really sad.

Your heart's in the wrong place. There's something very wrong. Because this is the day. That's for your blessing. And it's for you to have. Fellowship with me. If you don't want.

Either of those things. Well. You're in a bad place. And they were. They were rebuked. And punished. For their disobedience. In this way.

And for their attitude. And Isaiah is saying to them. There's another way. Embrace this. Get close to God. Clear up your accounts with him.

[18:39] And this pattern of disobedience. And not obeying God's command. In this matter.

It goes right the way through. The Old Testament period. So we come to the book of Malachi. We won't look at it. But the very. Almost the very last verse. In the Old Testament. The record is given. Where people are told. To remember the words. That God gave them on Mount Sinai. Remember the words. Because they just keep forgetting. Not necessarily just forgetting.

It just comes out of their memory. But it's in the back of their priorities. They don't want to do it. So you're saying. You need to remember. In your own self-interest.

Right. So here was a summary. Firstly. This Sabbath. Which means rest. is a blessing from God. For all people. Two. But it's only substantially so. When recognized.

[19:35] As being holy. Set apart by God. For the purposes. He intends. Thirdly. There was special significance. For the Jewish people. It was a sign of God's covenant. Like all the laws of God.

Accompanied by both blessing. And penalty. Fourthly. There is much guidance. Given to the God's covenant people. As to how the day should be spent. And how it should not be spent. And fifthly. This mattered then. So how much should it matter to us now. That's where we got to. And today. We're just going to look. At this now. Through the lens of the New Testament. And ask the following questions. What does Jesus do. And say on this subject. He is a Jew. He's born into a Jewish community. He knows about synagogue. He goes to synagogue every Sabbath. Well. What does Jesus do. And say on this subject. Secondly. [20 : 35] How did the apostles apply Jesus teaching. In setting the pattern. For church behavior. And thirdly. How should we apply this today. Now.

Our first passage. Is in Matthew chapter 5. Verses 17 to 20. Page 969. Matthew 5. 17 to 20. Matthew 5. This is such an important passage.

Because it's sort of. Sandwiched in the middle of the Beatitudes. So often we. We are. Sort of. Richly held.

At the beginning point. Of Matthew 5. With all the. Blessed of the poor in spirit. Blessed of those in mourning. So forth. Wonderful territory. But this is so. This is such a fundamental passage.

To think about. Jesus attitude. To God's law. His father's law. Do not think.

[21 : 49] That I have come. To abolish. The law. Or the prophets. I have not come. To abolish them. But to. Fulfill them. I tell you the truth. Until heaven and earth.

Disappear. Not the smallest letter. Not the least stroke. Of a pen. Will by any means. Disappear from the law. Until everything. Is accomplished. Anyone who breaks.

One of the least. Of these commandments. And teaches others. To do the same. Will be called least. In the kingdom of heaven. But whoever practices. And teaches these commands. Will be called great.

In the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you. That unless your righteousness. Surpasses that of the Pharisees. And the teachers of the law. You will certainly. Not enter.

The kingdom of heaven. Now you read that. You read that. What is Jesus attitude. To law. Is he against the law.

[22 : 43] Not against the law. Is he? It's his father's law. The law is good. It's a beautiful thing. You can't read that passage.

And try and put a big division. Between the law. And Jesus. And to suggest. That he is somehow against that. The law was something. In the past. But now. Jesus is bringing something.

Completely different. Into being. God's law has many purposes. It definitely tells us.

A great deal about. God's character. We find out from God's law. The things that please him. And the things that do not. How would we know that? Unless he told us.

God's law is. To bless us. Well that's a thought.

[23 : 40] Isn't it? Our sinful natures say. God's law is very restrictive. Absolutely not. It's there to bless us.

You are a blessed person. If you. Have only the Lord God. As your God. And you don't have idols.

You're a blessed person. If you don't swear falsely. You're a blessed person.

If you keep this day. You're a blessed person. If you honour your father and mother. You're a

blessed person. If you do not steal. If you do not murder. If you do not commit adultery.

If you do not bear false witness. If you do not cover. You are blessed. You're not restricted are you?

You're blessed. but of course it also warns us because if we dabble in the things that are displeasing to God if we break his will in a way in what he's expressed to us it just creates problem it's a problem for us it's a problem for our relationship with God it's a problem for our relationship with other people and we see the evidence of that all around us don't we in the society in which we live as God's law is thwarted and flouted and ignored and so forth we just see problems that is the way the world is wired up and that's the way things have been formed so the law also reveals our sinfulness

James says somewhere I wouldn't have known unless God's law had said that I wouldn't have understood so you're so blessed we're so blessed to hear God's law to hear it to know it not to be giving our own mind to it but just hearing what God says it's a great blessing for us but at the same time we recognise how far short we fall of God's standards because we don't keep the law of God perfectly and in one place the Bible says if you fail in just one point you're guilty of breaking the

whole commandment whoa that's such a high standard yeah but it's God's standards because he's perfect so we're all proven demonstrated to be sinful people because we all fall short of the glory of God and that's what the law does and that's what speaking about the law does and it's only when people realise their sinfulness they should have any recognition of their need for someone to deal with their sinfulness they need a saviour we all need a saviour we all need a saviour because we've all broken the law of God and we're therefore under God's judgement under his wrath and we are ripe candidates for his judgement to be upon us the judgement that will only be revealed when the judge of all the Lord Jesus Christ comes again and every one of us has to stand before him and give account for our lives so there's the law written on the tablets of stone but we need to properly understand it and that's what Jesus did by his teaching and what he demonstrated by his perfect obedience and enjoyment of God's law and that helps us so much when we come to think about the passage we read just now verses 17 to 20 don't think I've come to abolish the law of the prophets [27 : 48] I've not come to abolish them but to fulfil them big debate about what that really means well he certainly fulfilled them in this way that he obeyed the law of God perfectly isn't that amazing isn't that astonishing thought that the Lord Jesus Christ obeyed God's law perfectly from a baby to his death in every circumstance of life he never said a wrong thing he never looked lustfully upon a woman he never coveted any person's goods the Lord God was always his prime devotion and he kept the Sabbath perfectly perfectly he did it in a way that really pleased God well he did that because he needed to because we didn't do it so we need somebody who will come on our behalf with a righteousness with a law fulfilling righteousness who can stand as our substitute and there's only one person that's Jesus and that's who you need because you can't stand before God without righteousness and you haven't got any of your own but Jesus provided because he did all that perfectly it's a astonishing thought he made deliberate choices of righteousness every moment of his life so in that sense he's fulfilled the law the perfection that makes him a perfect sacrifice the perfection that offers a righteousness to ourselves but more than that he graciously gives us understanding of what the law really means because it is our temptation because we want to put the bar as low as possible to take the commandment thou shalt not kill and say

I have not killed therefore I've kept the commandment I won't have problem on judgment day on that one and Jesus says you will have problem you're bound to because if you say to somebody you fool you've broken the commandment yeah the very same commandment that we think we might have kept is the very commandment we've definitely not kept you might say I have not had sexual relationships in a marriage situation with another woman therefore I'm clear of that one on adultery and Jesus says you need to check again because if you look at a woman with lust in your heart you've broken that law that commandment now we're found out and this is Jesus' explanation nobody did that before nobody did that before the Pharisees and the teachers of the law they just they put all kinds of sort of constructions upon the law sort of practical things to sort of make it possible well it wasn't even possible even with their sort of cap-handed approaches but the one thing they didn't know because they couldn't know because their hearts were sinful was that God looks on the inside it's what comes out of the heart that matters that's where the judgment is based and this is what Jesus teaches in this longish sermon chapter 5 and 6 looking at the heart looking at the heart look at your heart I tell you the truth until heaven and earth disappear not the smallest letter not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Lord until everything is accomplished well Jesus has not come to take away the law of God and say well commandments 1 to 10 very suitable for an early generation nation now but I think we can do without one or two of these commandments we can sort of change that or add two or three more it doesn't take that approach at all he's saying what's been given to you is perfect and right and good but you need to understand it you need to understand how

God looks at it and you need to align yourself with God's attitude about this and he talks about those who take a light view of this and what a desperate position they're in anyone who breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven well it's challenging to hear that isn't it for I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven again different interpretations of that but I take it to mean this that the Pharisees were were a cut above the rest you know the way they lived their lives you know that was definitely above the rest and so forth so they were they were like the gold standard for

righteousness but Jesus is saying here oh no don't take them as a standard unless your righteousness surpasses how the

Pharisees and teach the Lord you certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven you've got a far higher standard of righteousness because it's the righteousness of the heart not just the performance but of the heart these things matter these things matter Jesus has authority to perfectly interpret the law of God God's law is fulfilled!

[34 : 14] in Christ and it's actually a friend every believer the law of God should be a friend and not an enemy oh how I love thy Lord is my meditation day and night who said that right Psalm 119 goes on and on quite boring in a way isn't it carries on because you think that's not the way I naturally think but it was the way David thought it was the way he was encouraging people to think the law is not your enemy if you're a Christian because the law has been dealt with in terms of its demands by the Lord Jesus Christ and the righteousness has been provided so the law is not finger pointing all the time as a point of condemnation but it is for us a point of celebration and gladness because it reveals God's heart and if you're a child of

God you want to follow that don't you you want to be with that you can't have enough of it tell me more about this dear father show me what this means for me that I may put it into practice in my life because I want to follow!

you so this provides I think a very!! introduction to Matthew chapter 2 verse 23 to 36 which we read earlier but please turn that up again Matthew 2 23 to 36 Mark thank you but it is in Matthew as well it's also Matthew 12 1 to 14 and Luke chapter 6 verses 1 to 11 so it's one of those gospel stories that's given in at least three of the gospel accounts so it's significant isn't it has real purpose so we read this earlier I'm not going to read this again but I will draw attention to one or two points that the other passages draw out as well just interesting so there's two stories going on here that we read the first was about going through the corn fields and the

Pharisees who are looking for some reason to accuse Jesus pick up on what is happening the disciples are going through the fields picking the ears rubbing them finding something to eat out of that Pharisees saying what's unlawful what are they doing because they're doing work they're doing work on that day they should not be doing any work they pick so that's reaping and then they're going to thresh grind just by rubbing the ears of corn you can tell how well the Lord Jesus Christ kept the Sabbath day that Pharisees are so desperate that they have to light upon this particular example in order to find a reason to blame him for breaking it in some fashion second story is probably the week after again it's on a

Sabbath day man with a shriveled hand is there it's another example of the desperation of the Pharisees that they find such cause to criticise the Lord Jesus for a work of healing look at this phrase in chapter 3 verse 5 he looked around them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts there aren't a great many occasions in the gospel records where the anger of Jesus is actually expressed but it is here they're so blind in this situation that he's deeply angered and he's deeply distressed emotionally churned by this hard heartedness on the part of the of the Pharisees and I want you to notice something which is almost like a throwaway line it's in the gospel of

[39 : 05] Matthew chapter 12 it's back to the story of the cornfields again so this is the story of David and his companions on the run from Saul they're hungry they need to get food they go into the I suppose it would be a tabernacle a tent at that time into the house of God and he and his companions eat the consecrated bread and Jesus commenting upon that and then and then Jesus says in verse 6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here it's an astonishing little phrase he just introduces where he says I'm telling you this story it's in your history you know about the record temple the wonderful place so significant only certain things can be done in that place that's the place where

God meets with his people that's the place where he is present and Jesus suddenly says in the midst of that conversation he's having with the people then he's saying I'll tell you there's one greater than the temple is here is here it's me it's me whoa that tells us two things immediately firstly he's claiming to be Yahweh God God and secondly he's claiming absolute authority to be able to interpret everything that goes on even in the holiest of places to say how it should be I love the easiness with which the Lord Jesus just displays this extraordinary reality the living

God has come to you so in that passage in book of Mark chapter two briefly this is the interpretation not lawful for people to take the bread which is given to the priest for them to enjoy and to be provided for all right that's how it seems like that was the way the law has been interpreted ah but

Jesus says David and his followers were hungry the priests saw that and they were willing to provide for them and they did no law was broken because provision was made the Sabbath day is not about prohibition but it's about provision then he said to them the Sabbath was made for man not man for the

Sabbath what an important phrase that is as the nation of God along more and more restrictions were sort of loaded onto the Sabbath day some were extrapolations of what was already in the word of God some were just inventions you weren't allowed to walk more than how far have you got any idea on a Sabbath day how far were you allowed to walk it's about three quarters of a mile some of you will be really struggling to actually get to church three quarters of a mile where's that in the Bible it's not in the Bible at all it was just an invention a fabrication put on top of everything else man being made for the Sabbath here's this sort of impossible standard to be achieved except if you're a Pharisee you live nearby you can do it can't you

Jesus says I want to tell you that's completely the wrong way around this day is not about a straitjacket it's about release it's about freedom it's about blessing the Sabbath was made for man this day was made for man for you it's absolutely beautifully designed to suit you because that's what you need and it says the son of man is lord even of the Sabbath that's a lovely phrase as well the son of man the perfect man the ideal man the template man the man for whom the Sabbath was made for he says

[44 : 42] I'm also the lord not only have I got authority to determine and to tell you and to interpret how this day should be spent but I'm the one that you should be fellowshiping with on this day I am the lord of the Sabbath this day has little or no significance unless we are worshippers of the lord Jesus Christ he is the one who's to be remembered on Sabbath day he is the one who made us he is the one who's redeemed us and so those sorts of creation and redemption beautifully encapsulated in our precious lord Jesus Christ in whom we worship on this day and any Sabbath day that is void of the worship of Jesus Christ the lord of the Sabbath is a day wasted oh it's a day for the blessing of you but it's a day for the blessing of him that he should have the highest place and we need a day to do that

Jesus is releasing this Jewish Sabbath from the shackles of narrow and merciless interpretations and added burdens laid on people by rule keeping religious leaders and I think these two stories in the gospel record are so beautiful because they tell us something of the principles of how Sabbath day should be they're not running through corn fields they're ambling along passing the time of day if you like talking to one another having friendship and fellowship and picking the ears of corn and it's just a beautiful scene isn't it it's a lovely scene of fellowship they're with the Lord Jesus Christ and he's present with them in that friendly and approachable manner and it's a day as it happens the next Sabbath probably when there's an enormous blessing occurs when a man who comes starts that

Sabbath day with a shriveled hand and Luke says it was his right hand the hand he really needed he goes away with that hand made completely whole what a blessing what a blessing what a privilege to have seen that happening what a privilege to have been that man and to have had that healing on that day and the gospel writers are very keen to point out it was on that day it was on a Sabbath day when this happened well it's a blessing the Lord of the Sabbath was present and there to bless doing good doing good is a great thing on the Sabbath day God doing good is a great thing on the Sabbath day God healing you on the Sabbath day is a great thing why not because he's the Lord of all creation and he can work miracles wonderful things well what a contrast with the Sabbath that the Jewish people had known in their history and had been enforced by their religious leaders and where Jesus comes along and blows all the cobwebs away and he reveals the true nature of how this day should be and what a blessing it should be for his people presence of Jesus hearing his authoritative voice together enjoying fellowship doing good and blessing others well that's a good Sabbath I think I'd want to be part of that and then we have some wonderful words from the gospel of Luke chapter four on the Sabbath day Luke chapter four verse 14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the spirit and news about him spread through the whole countryside he taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him he went to Nazareth where he had been brought up and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was his custom and he stood up to read the scroll of the prophet

Isaiah was handed to him I'm rolling it he found the place where it is written the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor he sent me to proclaim

freedom for the prisoners and recover his sight for the blind to release the oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour he rolled up the scroll gave it back to the attendant and sat down the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him and he began by saying to them today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing wow wonderful wonderful the Lord of the Sabbath is appearing to his people and he's taking the book of the prophet Isaiah and these strong words saying that's all being fulfilled it's all being fulfilled in me well isn't a blessing when on the Sabbath day the spirit of the Lord is present because of

[50 : 13] Jesus Christ and good news is being preached by Jesus to the poor and captives are being freed and those who are blind have their sight restored when freedom is being proclaimed well that's Sabbath day work and the Lord Jesus does his business with us each one of us now I will pass time let me say something briefly on the issue of the practice of the early church what we can say is this that it appears from a rather scanty record that the Christian people of the early church met on the first day of the week that is now called our Sunday the day after the Sabbath day so the question might be raised why did they do that and I don't think there are very clear explanations given anywhere in the New Testament on that but I will suggest a few things as to why that might have happened why they did it

I think firstly to distinguish between the Jewish practices of the Old Testament Sabbath I think the way that Sabbath had been performed in the Old Testament times and sort of limping along into the New Testament era was such a contrast to what Jesus wanted it to be but the Christians realised that and it was important to distinguish their gathering from the gathering of those who met on the Jewish Sabbath the Jewish Sabbath tended to get stuck in earthly fulfilment they looked to the promised land they were promised rest in the land they never enjoyed it but that was always a hankering it was almost like a looking back with some nostalgia and wanting that promised land but we don't look back and we don't look for an earthly place like that but we do look for a new heaven and new earth

Hebrews 4 verse 9 says there remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God our eyes are fixed upon that which is going to come the Jewish Sabbath reflected the possibilities and opportunities of a nation state they could keep the Sabbath in all its commands and so forth because they were a nation state which was in their constitution almost that's what we do that's how we behave everything closes down at dusk on Friday and gets to go again on the Saturday and you broke the law if you didn't do that and they could do that because they were a nation state we are not a nation state we are not a nation state the early Christians were not a nation state they were under the thumb of the Roman Empire who had no interest at all in the Sabbath so Christians had to be adaptable and the Lord Jesus Christ gives the freedom for that to happen adaptation inventiveness and freedom that's the hallmark of the way the early

Christians met together and they chose the day of resurrection it was the first day of the week to reflect the revealed glory of the Lord of the day the Lord of the day the Lord of Sabbath Jesus what's his most glorious moment his resurrection when he finished the work that he came to do and entered into his rest on that first day of the week interestingly the day of Pentecost was also the first day of the week 50 days after the Passover Sabbath 50 days the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out and the Gentiles in multitudes would come in when the work of Jesus Christ the finished work of Jesus Christ would be exemplified in bold and glowing colour what a day to be distinguished from the tired man centred and formulaic Sabbath keeping of the past there's only one place in the Bible where the word

Lord's day is used by John in talking about himself in Revelation 1 verse 10 he says I was in the spirit on the Lord's day some people said oh do we know it's really the first day of the week I think we're pretty sure it's the first day of the week because he writes to people who were meeting on the first day of the week and they what was the day of the Lord what was the Lord's day well for them that would have been the first day of the week so I do want to make some practical application I'll be fast on this but say this as follows I think the Bible needs to be read as a whole and we need to take the blessings of what we've just been thinking about in terms of the Lord Jesus Christ and his interpretations seriously to heart and but meld them with many of the good things that today was intended to be by God in the Old Testament times how do we work this through thoughtfulness and deliberate action is required thoughtfulness and deliberate action this is an issue!

[55 : 29] for every local church community common understanding and agreed practice so why do we meet at 11 o'clock and why do we meet at 6.30 why do we do that why do different churches

meet at different times that's just one aspect of this day what do we do in between the bits when we're not together how do we start the day how do we finish the day is it busy busy busy or is it just nothing well these and the encouragements of scripture there is individual personal level blessing on this day because it does give us a chance to step back and to stop what we're doing and to look back and I hope you can do that but this is not about choices in isolation from others we are a community and we need to try to work these things out as a community so even if someone has a bright idea and says I really would like to meet at four o'clock in the morning because

I'm always up early and so forth that might not get swinging endorsement from the church meeting because there are practicalities so we have to be realistic and practicable but praise the Lord Jesus gives us that freedom one day one day and seven stopping the work activities of the week gone by is to give thanks for past mercies and to reset our compasses for the coming week and the world to come I love the word recalibrate recalibrate do you know what that means we need to recalibrate our lives and God gives us that opportunity every seventh day fellowship with the Lord and fellowship with one another those are two key ingredients of this day if we're missing out on both of those we're in a bad place if we're missing out on one of them we're in a bad place we need to have both making deliberate choices and working hard to get the most value from this day so there may be some need for preparation you just can't fall into this day and say oh it happens to be Sunday oh I go to church on Sunday so preparation might be needed but that's good isn't it to be thoughtful about the day because you won't be able to get to the 10 o'clock prayer meeting and you might be late for the 11 o'clock meeting even though one of the latest starting morning meetings in the whole city and you might want to think about how you deal with meals on this day and you should think about very carefully about holidays a little bit would be in my body about this book a holiday nice place sort the flights get the passport ready get the visa get it all sorted where are you going to go to church on the Lord's day idea but it's a wonderful place to be it's a ski resort somewhere you know so where and so forth wonderful place to be but where are you going! fellowship with the Lord's people and with him there's great blessing if you would make preparation in that way that you would come through that door as a visitor from Aberystwyth and say you know I looked you up online I saw when you met and I've worked my holiday schedule around the fact that I wanted to be with you on this day morning and evening and I also want to come to the prayer meeting because I want to bless you I want to bless you and I really want you to encourage you to think very carefully about how you holiday so that that Lord's day becomes a very important ingredient of the holiday you will be so blessed by encouraging God's people get to habit patterns of regularity are our saviors if we do things just because we do them some people will find that sort of rather negative it's not negative at all it's brilliant you don't ever think about it just say that's what I do I get up I go to the prayer I come to the meeting I talk with people afterwards etc that's what I do if your first day of the week is that chaotic all the time so you don't really know what's going to happen at all you'll be in trouble I'm sorry I'm speaking rather bluntly but you will struggle you will struggle if you just don't know what the pattern of the Lord's day is for you that you have decided carefully and solemnly before God and then what to do about non-Christian families and relations this is a real problem for many of us so I will give testimony that it's good to set boundaries and to say to your family and your friends this is what a sort of non-negotiable in a way I go to church in the morning I go to church in the evening I don't know why you do that that's what I do and it gives you an opportunity to give reasons for saying so and so forth but you know what

[60 : 51] I'm going to bust a gut to make sure I spend a couple of hours with you on another day of the week Saturday sometime I'm going to bust a gut to make sure that so you won't be able to say you're never available I'm going to demonstrate that I love and care for you so much that I will make other provisions so that I can be with you and there are temptations and complications and particularly children's parties and sport especially week on week commitments devastating it can be devastating can't it but you just may need to say no and we need to give all God's people the opportunity to enjoy the blessings of this day so those who work in Sunday club those who've got care of children at different times they need to be able to be in the service if you're married the husband or the wife needs to be able to come to a service that's why we have not why only but we have two services we have two services on the Lord's day so that the word of God can be heard by the maximum number of people and we should give all people the opportunity to enjoy the blessing of this day so we shouldn't burden people out if they could be enjoying some of the blessings of the

Lord's day which under creation was for all people to enjoy so you might be thoughtful about issues about are we encouraging God's vision for this day or endorsing the secular interpretation of it and let's remember those who can't join with us and I was very blessed this morning at the morning prayer because those who can't be with us were remembered weren't they we remembered them by name those who are sick those who are away for various reasons because it can be a dispiriting thing to not be able to enjoy the Lord's day to be away to really miss out on that it can be very dispiriting and discouraging but then I think of I think of the Apostle John and he's in exile on Patmos so he's not meeting with a group of people he's just there by himself but the Holy Spirit came upon him that day and gave him revelation you have come to Mount Zion the city of the living God the thousands upon thousands in joyful assembly even a single Christian by him or herself can enjoy the blessing of that can't they what great things the Bible has for us here let's pray thank you dear father for your mercy and kindness to us in your word we thank you that you are you know us you know us what we need you don't give us anything that's sort of beyond the range but you are so merciful thank you lord Jesus lord how we pray that you'll be present in all the gatherings of your people and especially on this the Lord's day your day we honour and bless and praise you and we thank you together in your precious name amen amen we are finished we're done