

# One day in seven (1)

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[0:00] ...defeat of legislation. Well, it's not difficult because it's on the church diary.! Now, you may think that is pretty minor sort of legislation compared to all the things that go on.

And indeed, in a way, it is. But it actually affected many things in this country. Some of the consequences that Sunday has become like every other day in the week.

There are few constraints on what can be done. The 24-7 world is truly with us, isn't it? You really sense that in this city? There are choices, but actually there are more constraints because of the patterns of working that are now forced upon many people as a result of the fact that Sunday has to be serviced like every other day of the week.

And, of course, one man's freedom is at the expense of another's restrictions. So it has changed things. It was warned that that would happen. It has happened.

And it's got consequences for all of us because this is the society in which we live. This is the world in which we live. We can't escape it. It's the atmosphere all around us.

[1:41] And I don't think there's any denying that Sunday is no longer the special day that it might have been. I do remember days when it was possible to come in a measure of quietness to a church.

That's not the same, is it now? It's quite different. It has consequences for the church. Sunday was the accepted day of Christian meeting and the whole day was special.

I mean, you probably have to go back 100 years or so, but even people who didn't have a particular heart knowledge of Christian things would never realize the specialness of the day.

And in the very energetic and keen churches, there was activity all through the day when Christian people met.

So they would have prayer meetings in the morning and a morning meeting and maybe two Sunday schools in the afternoon and then an evening meeting and maybe an open air service afterwards.

And some churches still do that.

[2:37] That just was the way it was. And in the homes, it was the case that certain things were not done. Of course, they wouldn't have had a TV 100 years ago, but there were other things.

And the picture, sort of a stereotype picture is of children playing with Noah's Ark in the afternoon. The family Bible may be coming out. Now we're living in a changed environment.

And there are many personal and different choices. And because we do live in an age where people are quite individual and they make their own decisions, Christians do the same thing.

And there's quite a lot of confusion in that matter and uncertainty. And they make their own personal and different choices about the use of this particular day. There's little discussion about this, let alone agreement about what should be done.

If anything, probably for fear of treading on people's toes and making them uncomfortable with their behaviours and so forth. This matters.

[3:41] Not because we're losing traditions, because traditions always need to be challenged, whether they're good ones or not. But because the Bible has something to say on this matter.

And that's what we're going to be looking at today. What does the Bible have to say about this? Well, here's the problem, because there are many different interpretations. Good gospel people have come to different conclusions of what the Bible is actually saying on this subject.

And you will have heard the words, Sabbath, Sunday, Lord's Day, Christian Sabbath. These are variously used to describe and express the spectrum of understanding that different people have

about that.

So there would be those who come from the position of saying that the great amount of evidence that we have in the Old Testament is still valid, relevant, important for today.

And there will be others who say, actually, there's not very much in the New Testament about Sabbath. So perhaps the whole thing has moved to the side. And there are people who would say, on the one hand, we should keep one day in seven.

[4:58] And there are those who say, because we're in Christ, every day is special. Seven days out of seven. And there were those who would say, we should keep the seventh day special.

So they would keep Saturday as a special day. And there were those who say, no, it's been changed quite evidently from the New Testament. So it's now the first day of the week. And we keep Sunday. How have we got to these positions?

Well, we're going to try to look at this over two weeks. And what I would want to say here is that we're not going to come to conclusions today.

You're going to have to wait till next week or even conclusions might be rather tentative to say that. We'll only get so far. We're going to cover the Old Testament passages this morning and need next Sunday to look at the gospel record, notably what Jesus has to say by his words and behavior and how this is applied to the early church and therefore applies to us.

Please don't preempt in your thoughts where we might be going on this too much. I mean, we all sit with certain preconceptions or traditions which are very strong and personal and precious to us.

[6:13] And I just want us together as a church to look at this material in the Bible, see what the Bible has to say. And we all need to submit to the Bible.

I've wrestled with this subject for a long time. For a long time. And I'm not saying I even feel completely comfortable with everything.

Because, as I said before, there's a lot of controversy and difference of opinion on these points. But we believe that the word of God is sufficient to help us to come to places of peaceful conviction. And wouldn't it be a wonderful thing as a church whether we could unitedly come to as much clarity as we possibly can? Let's ask the help of the Holy Spirit now.

Holy Spirit, please help us as we open the word this morning. We thank you so much that you've given us enough. And we pray for your illumination and your help.

[7:15] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to start with the passage that Jack read to us earlier.

And in particular, to look at chapter 2 and verses 1 to 3 of Genesis. I don't know if you noticed when we went through that reading how often the word day is mentioned.

Day, day, day. There was a very clear division of days. And a week is spelled out for us in Genesis chapter 1 where God does his creating work.

His creating work. What marvellous work. I love that. There's one of the verses. It says, and he also made the stars. You see? He also made the stars. And we don't know how many stars there are. Billions of stars, aren't there? And it's an extraordinary thing that made the stars. The climax of the work of God on the sixth day is the making of man and so God created man in his own image and the image of God he created it.

[8:30] Male and female he created them. It is truly the pinnacle of God's creating work. Now we come to Genesis chapter 2 verses 1 to 3.

Then, thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. It's extraordinary, isn't it? completed, completed, filled, finished.

And by the seventh day God had finished the work he'd been doing so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Now here's an important point.

We're going to be picking up little points as we go through these Old Testament passages. Rested. What do you think that implies? God's been hard at work for six days. Does he need a rest?

Well, he doesn't need a rest in terms of physical energy or all he's expended for that. The word actually means he stops. He ceases.

[9:36] The work of creation has been done. So he stops and there's a pause. Now that's a helpful thought for us just to remember that because this passage is actually sort of seminal to our understanding of the

whole meaning of a day of rest.

It is not fundamentally about having a good sleep. It's about stopping what you've been doing and doing something different. And we read on.

God blessed the day, the seventh day, and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

And these two words, blessed and holy, are absolutely fundamental to understanding the specialness of this day. The whole day was set apart and God blessed the day.

How could he bless a day? How could he bless a day? Well, it's inanimate. It's just something on a calendar, isn't it? It doesn't mean that.

[10:47] It means bless the use of the day if it's well done. It's for man. God blessed that day for mankind. They were to enjoy it. I might also say that well, it's big.

Bless the day. Made it holy. Holy means sanctified, set apart, made special. It's for God to decide how this day is to be spent.

So here's something which is a blessing for man on the one hand and it's also for God. God and man. So we need to be clear about this point because the true expression and usefulness of this day is about things which are a blessing to man but they're only made a blessing when they're also holy to God.

And another point which we should notice here is that this day, this blessed and holy day is given to Adam and Eve as the representatives of the whole of the human race.

this is before the fall of man. This is before all that was damaged as we find in Genesis chapter 3. And it's a pattern for everybody.

[12:12] So here's another seed thought that this special day is not just for people who belong to God in a covenant relationship but it's to be enjoyed and experienced by all.

There are blessings attached to this day. this was the battle that was fought back in 1994. People saying yeah this is good for people to have this special day.

It's good for them to be able to come out of their work situations. It's good for them to be doing something different. And through the centuries really this has been demonstrated pragmatically that to have a day of rest this day apart is actually a complete blessing.

students I want to talk I want to talk to any students here today I would really encourage you to take this matter very seriously to think of this as a whole day rather than just something where you just sort of squeeze in a bit of church and then the rest of it is something to do with your studies and so forth.

well here we are right back to the days of creation this is a special day and it's a pattern for everybody and whoever you are God will bless you as a student as a studier if you keep this day special and different.

[13:35] I found that to be my experience when I first became a Christian I made it a deliberate policy that I wouldn't actually do study work on the special day.

and God looked after me and God provided I didn't get a first that doesn't matter but what I did get was closeness to Jesus Christ which was a blessing but I say it's a pattern for everybody I'd encourage every student in this city to actually consider the day of rest I think it's an enormous shame when everybody has to be handing in things first thing on Monday morning you're just going to have to finish your work on Saturday this passage is beautiful and it's significant and it should never be disregarded this is the first mention of this special day so before we sort of dive into the Jewish version of this we have the big picture portrayed before us this is the way God has set it out of all the things that he's said and done it's remarkable we just find this being mentioned now he could have mentioned many other things but this is the day he set apart what was God doing on that day

I think he was admiring the work of his hands I think he was saying this is very good I think he was looking back upon that week of creation and saying this is marvellous this is splendid rejoicing in the work of his hands and there is a significance for us in this as well that when we come to the end of our week even though we know we've got another week of work ahead and another week of work after that that it's right and good for us to be able to look back with gratitude and thankfulness upon

and reflection upon the week that we've had and if you don't have that day you're not going to have that opportunity but Christian people this is a splendid thing isn't it that we should be able to look back with seriousness about the week that we've just enjoyed and to see how God has been very kind to us and good to us and to recognise also where we may have gone astray ourselves but it's a day for reflection and all of us should be able to look back upon our weeks and say how good God has been how kind he's been how he's looked after me it's a pattern there's an interesting degree of I wouldn't quite call it silence but there's not much said about what happens between creation and the time of Moses and the exodus there are hints because every so often the number seven crops up in various ways but we're going to look at one passage now which is very interesting because it is one of those which actually says something about what happened between the creation and the time when Israel came out of Egypt so exodus chapter 16 verses 21 to 30 this is the chapter about God's provision for the people as they were in the desert and God provided for them by a heavenly bread we don't know what it consisted of it just fell from the skies and it was to be gathered by the people off the ground and it was for them a daily bread this was called manna each morning verse 21 everyone gathered as much as he needed and when the sun grew hot it melted away on the sixth day they gathered twice as much to omas which if you look in the footnote about 4.5 litres for each person and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses this is quite interesting so on the sixth day there was obviously enough of this stuff on the ground that they could gather it up well as we find as we read on there was more than enough days provision there was two days provision for them and this was curious enough for the leaders to report it to

Moses he said to them this is what the Lord commanded tomorrow is to be a day of rest a holy sabbath to the Lord and sabbath is the word for rest that's what it means ceasing just remember that again ceasing a holy ceasing to the Lord so bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil save whatever is left and keep it until morning so they saved it until morning as Moses commanded and it did not stink or get maggots in it eat it today Moses said because today is a sabbath to the Lord you will not find any of it on the ground today six days you're to gather it but on the seventh day the sabbath there will not be any nevertheless some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it but they found none then the Lord said to Moses how long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions bear in mind that the Lord has given you the sabbath that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread enough for two days everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day no one's to go out so the people rested on the seventh day and here we see in this rather homely tale there's a memory of that first week of creation so I think although it's not expressed here in the

[19:49] Bible between Genesis and Exodus there was a memory of what God had intended from Genesis chapter 2 that there should be this day of rest occurring and it's being picked up here in a very practical way in this storyline and God will provide that's the lesson of this story here isn't it God's blessing and provision there'll be enough for you on the sixth day pick up take it home you can use it for Sunday not Sunday sorry Saturday the Sabbath day but at the same time we see here a problem because people didn't trust that route and being rather greedy they went out and tried to get some more on the seventh day stock their shelves nothing there well I could make all sorts of parallels with what happens today in the same way people think oh we're going to be better off if we actually have to work seven days if we do all we can seven days and so forth and this is in a way what was going on here the people were just saying well we can get more if we just use that seventh day in the same way

God's saying I'm not going to lie there's going to be a problem and there wasn't there wasn't anything provided for them because God had said you need to do what you need to do in the six days and the seventh is a day for day for ceasing we move on to the fourth of God's ten words what's often called the ten commandments but actually the phrase in Hebrew is words so please turn to Exodus chapter 20 our particular section is verses 8 to 11 but we are going to read now from verse 1 of Exodus chapter 20 so this is where Moses goes on to Mount Horeb at Sinai and he receives from God ten specific words or commands which are to characterize the people that God

has called out of

Egypt called to be his own called to be part of his family and these are the things which are to characterize these covenant people Exodus 20 and God spoke all these words I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt and out of the land of slavery please notice that this is the starting point not just I am the Lord your God I brought you out of Egypt and out of the land of slavery I have redeemed you I have rescued you you shall have no other gods before me you shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below you shall not bow down to them or worship them for I the Lord your God am a jealous God punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments you shall not misuse the name of the

Lord your God for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy six days you shall labor and do all your work but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God on it you shall not do any work neither you nor your son or daughter nor your manservant or maidservant nor your animals nor the alien within your gates alien or stranger foreigner for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth the sea and all that is in them but he rested on the seventh day therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy so this fourth word this fourth commandment in verse eight starts with the word remember remember so this is partly a reminding of people saying to people think back of the words that have already spoken from creation time this is something that they were probably doing in a measure but now it's really spelled out to them in greater detail what they should be about they've known this before there been hints now they are to seriously engage with this and remember also because we forget and we don't have a proper understanding because of our sinfulness that we try and skate past the commandments of God we don't do the things he wants us to do and this is one of the things he wanted the people to do and as we shall see in other passages there this is one of the things they kept on messing up not getting it right notice that this is a very positive command people can have very negative views about the use of this day and feel he just gets in the way of doing what

I want to do I wish I had more time to do other things as well but it's a positive thing that we should do and it's an extensive sign of God's covenant with his people this is what they were going to do the other nations didn't do this but this is what this!

[25:46] nation was going to do they were going to spend this day in a special way and people were going to look at it and say it's a bit odd why are these Israelites behaving in this way we don't live like that why are they doing it in that way so it would prompt a question and when they saw the blessing that came upon that community as we described before the way God provided for them so there was enough for them on this rest day they were only working six days the other nations were working seven and they were still a successful nation how is that possible what does it mean the question would be raised and it would be a testimony it be a light it be a significance to people as they saw this happening and may it be true that when people see they rather puzzled by bus car walk whatever you do to get here why are you doing this why are you spending your time in this way when you could be doing lots of other things it prompts a question and it was to be a sign to the nations because

God had given this provision for all people to enjoy so in a way we're saying come join in come and embrace this joy what God has done and then we have the added ingredient of redemption chapter 20 verses 1 and 2 the people are to rest not just to admire the work of their hands as it were and to rejoice in the God he provided but also to remember that they were a redeemed people and on this day we remember redemption redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ and it's still a blessing for non Jews because if you look in that passage there you will see that the alien within your gates the stranger the people who were living in the land they were also not to be working on that day it was to be a blessing for them as well even though they were not part of the covenant people they were to be blessed by the day and it spelled out in some detail now

I want us to move on to another passage which gives another hint of how we may profit from this day is Leviticus 23 and verse 3 there are six days when you may work but the seventh day is a

sabbath of rest a day of sacred assembly you're not to do any work wherever you live it is a sabbath to the lord so sabbath remember again means ceasing you stop your work and it's a day of sacred assembly what does that mean it means you don't just stay at home you come together with the people of god you assemble as people this is what the church does together therefore here again we can make some quick application of this the Israelites did not stay in their tents they didn't just stay in their family units as precious as that was they were encouraged to come together in an assembly and in the assembly they would do the things that we read about in psalm 92 they would praise god there would be music on the ten string lyre

I haven't got one of those here today but that would happen there would be that blessing of the joyfulness of god's people coming together and together giving their praises to god for all his mercies and kindness for his redemptive work and great praise arising to god from that they would assemble that's why we assemble on this special day we do so because god has encouraged us to do that he loves to see that he loves to see the gathering the diversity the richness of his work in people's lives all represented as we gather together in this manner it's personal as well so we do spend time in this day and it's right for us to spend time in this day in personal reflection personal thanksgiving to god but it's also important that we should assemble together and churches have tried to work this out through the centuries in different ways and perhaps some people have gone over the top and some people have gone the other extreme as well but in this very individualistic way it's very unhealthy for people to stay at home and to listen to sermons on the internet on this day it's really unhealthy to do that we need to make the effort to assemble and it is an effort if you had yesterday's weather today

I think you know we'd all be struggling blown here and there wouldn't we but it's great to make the effort and when you hear stories from other countries you see the way people make enormous sacrifices to be together travel long distances with great hardship and even in fear of their lives because gathering together may be illegal but still they want to do it in the time of the covenanters in the 1500s in Scotland they used to meet in their twos and threes in really secluded places because the authorities were after them and they would have been killed if they'd been found assembling in that fashion there but they still had an urgent desire to assemble I love to read the stories of people on this special day gathering together for prayer before the sun rises because this is the day the Lord has made and they want to rejoice and be glad in it people making that extra energy and effort just do that don't you feel blessed don't you know what a blessing it is when you do make that effort

[32:03] I'm not saying there's always a direct connection but I do feel that there are times when you just feel it's hard to get out of bed you know really tired the bus is late etc etc still come don't turn back you just come because you need to be with God's people that's the assembly that took place and this is what God wanted to happen every seventh day it should take place so what happened next in the storyline because there are many hundreds of years to go through in the storyline of the Israelite people and I'm just going to pick up on Isaiah chapter 58 although they're actual very similar references in the books of Amos Jeremiah and Ezekiel so we're talking of the period of time sort of oh 600 BC somewhere like that before Christ so what was happening so let's read Isaiah 58 verses 13 and 14 well the context here is that the people have departed from the Lord in fact all these prophets here had to address situations where there was a sort of gross sinfulness going on in the land in particular they had bad leaders bad priests and they were not led in a good way and Isaiah has a particular theme about injustice there was so much injustice in the land which he which he is personally clearly very stirred up about and the people are just going through the form so in verse 6 we read about fasting if they do fasting is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen says Isaiah with the words the Lord has given him to loose the chains of injustice and tie the cords of the yoke to set the oppressed free and break every yoke and he goes on about needing to clothe the naked and the blessings that would be attached if they came did what they should be doing with their hearts and not just with their bodies and so here are some salutary but also encouraging words in a

sense in verses 13 and 14 if you keep your feet from breaking the sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day if you call the sabbath a delight and the lord's holy day honourable and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words then you will find your joy in the lord and i will cause you to ride on the heights of the land to feast on the inheritance of your father jacob the mouth of the lord has spoken i love this passage it feels like new testament it feels like end times actually it's glorious it's rich because on the one hand it's pointing out the things that people are doing wrong and god is still promising to them clear that out get rid of it sort your life out and start doing these things in a wholehearted fashion for my praise and glory the sabbath was abused they were going where they wanted you notice that if you keep your feet from breaking the sabbath instead of going to the assembly some of them were just diving out of that they were doing as they pleased did you see that verse 13 from doing as you please on my holy day what an up to date picture of us who should know better doing as

we pleased well what do I want to do today freedom I can do what I like oh god says that's not real freedom real freedom is following what god says and enjoying the benefit and the blessing of doing the things that he says that is real freedom not doing as you please but as god pleases is it the Thessalonians which says find out what pleases the lord what pleases the lord well that's here here in verse 13 I'm pleased when you come together I'm pleased when you honour me by keeping the special day if you call the sabbath a delight and the lord's holy day honourable if you mean that from your heart you're saying you know I wouldn't miss it for the world I really look forward to this day it's the queen of days it's the best of days but they were speaking idle words they weren't speaking in that sort of language at all they were speaking in the days one to six type language and there are penalties for ignoring and abuse and we see that in a way because what's going on here is that they're not riding on the heights of the land they're not feasting on the inheritance things are wasting away the land is in a state of decay

God says don't do that you'll be blessed you'll be blessed if this day is kept as is intended to be kept there's great blessing for joyful use of the day in the way God intended it is a real sadness if people feel that a special day like this is just a drain and a drag and I ask you to search your own heart about it look around this assembly and I have gladness in my spirit because I know that the vast bulk of you want to be!

the Lord's people you want to be in assembly you want to be praising God you want to be turning from your sin and repenting and that's exactly what God delights to see that really pleases him and that's what we're about isn't it how do we please God and right up to the final book of the revelation before the coming of Jesus we turn to Malachi chapter 4 and verse 4 Malachi just says remember the law of my servant Moses the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel so we're winding back the centuries to that day when on the mountain God gave this word to his covenant people remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy remember the law of my servant Moses the decrees and laws

I gave him at Horeb for all Israel no exception and for all so to summarize this is a blessing from God this special day from God for all people but it's only substantially so when recognized as being holy set apart by God for the purposes he intends it had special significance for the Jewish people it was a sign of God's covenant and God spelled out to them what pleasing him looked like and what blessing would look like as well like all the laws of God it was accompanied by blessing and by penalty blessing for obedience and penalty by disobedience and as much guidance given to the God's covenant people as to how the day should be spent and how it should not be spent don't please yourself don't walk in your own ways don't fill yourself with idle chatter but come in assembly remember his blessings thank him for them and remember that you're a redeemed people and this mattered then so how much should it matter to us now well there's the question because we've only come part way and those are some of the thoughts that we can have from the material that we already looked at but what is as we come next week we're going to be seeing what

[40:31] Jesus does and says on this subject that's quite challenging and how did the apostles apply Jesus teaching in setting the pattern for

church behaviour and what principles should we be applying today I hope you've gathered something from that I hope you've gained some encouragement but we're only halfway through we're only halfway through but it's good you now have six days to be able to consider these things and perhaps to look at some of the other passages like the Amos Jeremiah and Ezekiel that'll be up on the website as PDFs so you can refer to all these verses again and just go through that we all need to be receiving God's truth on this matter what an important thing it is because it actually one way or another it affects one day out of seven of our lives one day out of seven that's quite a lot big percentage isn't it we want to find out what pleases the Lord not just resting on traditions but finding out what his word has to say what is what is what what is is