

Sabbath: From Shadow to Substance

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[0 : 00] All right, well, this morning we come to one of the more challenging sermons that I may ever preach. And we are compelled to go here because as we've been working our way through the story of Jesus and the Gospel of Luke, we see this come up again and again.

We're talking today about the issue of the Sabbath. And last Sunday we began to dig into this issue. I explained how the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, counted from Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown.

And we read the commandment that was given at Sinai about how the Israelites were to keep that seventh day of the week holy and do no work. From there we talked about how Israel went from blatant disregard for that commandment into a hyper-legalistic, man-made religion of their own, adding on countless rules and regulations which truly burdened the people on the day that God intended for their burdens to be alleviated.

We saw in Luke chapter 6, verse 1 to 5, how Jesus was walking along with his disciples and they were going through the grain fields on the Sabbath day and he and his disciples were rebuked by the Pharisees for gleaning and eating some of the wheat on their way by.

They charged Jesus and his disciples with breaking the law on the Sabbath. And we looked at each of the Gospel accounts of that encounter and saw how Jesus responded.

[1 : 38] They were not guilty as far as the Old Testament commandment was concerned. Jesus said they were innocent. And he said also on that occasion that the Sabbath was made for the benefit of people, not people for the benefit of the Sabbath.

And then we ended with Jesus' jaw-dropping claim to be the Lord of the Sabbath, the one who is in charge of it, and therefore the one to judge what was and wasn't a violation of the commandment. Well, as we continue on through the Gospel of Luke, we're going to see Jesus come into conflict with the Pharisees three more times on this issue of Sabbath. But before we go on to these passages, I want to take a message here to speak about how these passages on the Sabbath apply to us as followers of Jesus today.

These are the questions that we ended with last Sunday. Must we as followers of Jesus keep the Sabbath? And if so, how?

Is Sunday now to be our Sabbath day? Or was the Sabbath commandment only fit to the Old Covenant?

[2 : 56] This has been a point of division among followers of Jesus since the earliest days of the church. Men and women who love Jesus and who love the Word of God have come to different answers on these questions.

We could skip over these passages or just not try to apply them for unity's sake, but I think it's better to grapple with them head on. And so I want to begin this morning with two, what I'll call North Star passages.

These are the passages we should keep before us on this issue of the Sabbath. And I believe they are clear enough and strong enough to help us find our way through this issue without dividing over it.

So North Star passage number one is found in Colossians chapter two, verse 16. This is the Apostle Paul writing to the church at Colossae.

And he says, Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day.

[4 : 14] These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, the reality, however, is found in Christ. Whatever conclusion you come to from the Bible about the Sabbath day, no one has any right to judge you or condemn you for how you do or don't observe the Sabbath.

Isn't that what he's saying? Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day.

Whatever conclusion you come to from the Bible about the Sabbath day, no one has any right to judge you or condemn you for how you do or don't observe the Sabbath.

That Paul can make a statement like this about something as significant as the fourth commandment should be enough to let us know that with the coming of Christ, things have changed big time for those who have faith in Jesus.

In the past, it was the responsibility of the leaders and elders in Israel to deal with sin in the camp, which included the sin of breaking the fourth commandment.

[5 : 48] Let's remember, I know I read it last Sunday, but for those of you who were not here last Sunday, let's remember just what the Lord commanded when he gave the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

This is from Exodus chapter 20 verse 8. The Lord said, 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 male or female servant nor your animals nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

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.

Now let's read about what happened on one occasion not too long after this command was given when a man deliberately disregarded the Sabbath day and went out to work on it.

[6 : 57] From Numbers chapter 15 verse 32. While the Israelites were in the wilderness, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly and they kept him in custody because it was not clear what should be done to him.

Then the Lord said to Moses, the man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.

So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death as the Lord commanded Moses. What we see here is that defying God, disobeying his commandments is a serious, serious thing.

It was serious enough that God himself said, this man deserves to die. This is one of about six incidents in the Old Testament, some before and even some after the exile when the people of Israel were clearly liable to judgment because of a failure to keep the Sabbath day holy as God had commanded.

Well, with the coming of Christ and his church, there are also imperatives given to us about dealing with sin in the church.

[8 : 29] We are called to correct and rebuke one another. We're called to confront a brother or sister who is sinning. Sin is still serious and yet when it comes to Sabbath it would seem that we may not correct or rebuke one another.

As Paul says, do not let anyone judge you with regard to a Sabbath day. If working on the Sabbath is a sin, how can Paul say this?

And if we look carefully at this we see that Paul does two things here. First, he lumps the Sabbath in with three other things that were commanded in the Old Testament and nearly all Christians agree that we do not need to keep the commands in the law for these first three things in the list.

The first one is, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink. We do not need to obey the commands given to Israel regarding food and drink or eating what is unclean or clean.

Jesus himself declared all foods clean. That's found in Mark chapter 7 verse 18 where Jesus says, don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them?

[9 : 56] For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach and then out of the body. In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.

With the coming of Christ, there's a massive change in God's relationship with man. The old garment is to be set aside and the new garment to be worn instead.

We do not need to obey those old commands given to Israel pertaining to food and drink. Neither do we need to observe the annual religious festivals.

The festivals were deeply connected with journeying up to the temple in Jerusalem and with the special sacrifices which were to be offered there on those occasions. We heard last week Jesus say in Matthew chapter 12 verse 6, I tell you something greater than the temple is here.

Jesus would then foretell how the city of Jerusalem and the temple would soon be destroyed and the good news of Jesus would be proclaimed all over the world so that even the Gentiles might be included in Christ as well.

[11 : 10] And so naturally the temple sacrifices that were commanded and the annual festivals in Jerusalem that were commanded would no longer be required to be observed for the churches that were arising all over the world.

The third thing he mentions is the new moon celebration. This is actually a reference to the monthly sacrifices that were commanded to be offered by the priests. this is found in Numbers 28 verse 11. And I think we all kind of just intuitively know that this is not something that we are required to do as followers of Jesus today. And so on these three things we can all agree that we do not need to observe what God commanded in the Old Testament law.

We easily recognize them as pertaining to the Old Covenant. but Paul lumps in with these three Sabbath days.

This is our signal from the word of God that the Sabbath commandment itself is of the same sort of stuff as the food and drink laws, the religious festivals, and the monthly sacrifices.

[12 : 26] Not only does Paul lump the Sabbath in with those other things but second, he states that the Sabbath was merely a shadow which points to Christ, the substance or the reality.

We were meant to see the shadows and truly the Israelites were meant to keep these shadows. It was a matter of obedience and disobedience for them. But the shadows were given so that ultimately we would follow the shadow to the substance.

Christ. And with him having come, it doesn't make sense to cling to the shadow. We need to cling to the one the shadows point to, to Jesus.

This metaphor of shadow and substance is also used by the author of Hebrews to describe how the old and temporary must give way to the new reality.

Look at Hebrews chapter 10 verse 1. The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves.

[13 : 39] He will then go on in this passage to describe how the sacrifices commanded in the old covenant law were fulfilled and made unnecessary forever by Christ's once for all sacrifice which inaugurated the new covenant.

And so we are meant to move off from the shadows to the reality, to Christ and his sacrifice, the substance.

Similarly with the Sabbath, the Sabbath, says Paul, just like the ceremonial food laws and festivals is a shadow of things to come, the reality, the substance is found in Christ.

Let's think about that for a moment. What does that mean? How is the Sabbath, a shadow, pointing to Christ, the ultimate reality?

Well, what was the Sabbath all about? The Sabbath was all about rest. It was about ceasing our strivings and finding rest in the Lord.

[14 : 49] Paul is saying that Christ himself is the reality, that Sabbath was pointing to. Jesus is our ultimate rest.

Not a day of the week, but a person and a relationship with him. He is the one who truly brings an end to all of our toil and all of our strivings.

What did Jesus say? Matthew 11, 28. He said, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. So that's North Star passage number one, Colossians 2, 16 and 17.

[15 : 57] Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come.

The reality, however, is found in Christ. If we can't even judge a brother or sister's keeping of the Sabbath anymore, then surely the commandment was only binding under the old covenant with Israel.

Paul speaks of the Sabbath among other old covenant things that we know we're not beholden to, and he tells us that the Sabbath's ultimate reality has come, and that Jesus is the reality. North Star passage number two, Romans chapter 14, verse 1 to 6. Really just 5 and 6, but we'll read from 1 to 6 to kind of get the context.

This is Paul again writing to the church at Rome. He says, accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.

[17:06] One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another whose faith is weak eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master's servants stand or fall, and they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

One person considers one day more sacred than another. Another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.

Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God, and whoever abstains does so to the Lord, and gives thanks to God.

So Paul, again, this time, writing to the church in Rome, and this church was a mixture of Jewish and Gentile believers, some coming from a background of having observed the Sabbath day all their lives, and some having never.

[18:30] He writes to them about how to handle what he terms disputable matters. Matters of food and drink, and specifically the issue of how we consider days in relation to each other.

First, let's notice the imperative of Paul in verse 1. accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.

And so right off the top, how this is going to end up, how it should end up, is clear. We're not to break fellowship with one another over these things. We are to accept one another, even if there are differences among us over matters of food and drink, or days of the week.

we are to accept as brothers and sisters those who hold the view that's different from ours. And we're to do so, he says, without quarreling, without fighting over these things.

But now look at what Paul says with regard to the days of the week here in verse 5 and 6. One person considers one day more sacred than another. Another considers every day alike.

[19:47] Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Notice how Paul does not condemn the person who considers every day alike.

If Christ expected us to keep the Sabbath commandment just as they did long ago in Israel, this would have been the perfect opportunity to say it. He could have said, one person considers one day more sacred than another.

Another considers every day alike, but that person considering every day alike is clearly not keeping the Sabbath day holy. They need to be considering that one day, this one day, as special to the Lord.

Keep it holy to the Lord. But no, Paul doesn't say that. Neither does he condemn the one who regards one day of the week over the others, because he does it to the Lord.

So the point here is that Sabbath keeping is no longer a covenant obligation for those who are in Christ. Rather, it is now in the arena of Christian freedom.

[21:01] You may observe a day as special to the Lord, like the Israelites did long ago, or you may consider every day alike.

A precious gift of God to be lived in worshipful relationship to him. As with what Paul said in the previous passage, it's almost impossible to believe that the fourth commandment, to keep the Sabbath day holy, is binding on all believers everywhere.

How could it be when Paul validates the one who considers every day alike, rather than calling that attitude out as immoral? or sin?

And so these are my two North Star passages when it comes to the issue of the Sabbath. I think that taken together, these are clear enough to help us see that the fourth commandment, as weighty as it was for Israel, was not carried forward by God into the new covenant as an obligation. And as we've seen, we're not to judge one another in regard to the Sabbath, we're not to quarrel over it. It's a disputable matter, and we are to accept those who come to a different conclusion than we do.

[22 : 20] That's really the bulk of my message for this morning, but there's so many extra things that we could talk about here, so just some additional thoughts in no particular order.

The Sabbath commandment was the one ceremonial commandment of the ten. Sometimes we may struggle, how could one of the ten not be carried over? Well, the other nine things, they commanded things that were inherently good or prohibited things that were inherently evil.

The Sabbath was not like that. Murder, for instance, was evil long before the Ten Commandments were given. We see that all through the book of Genesis. But working on the seventh day of the week was not immoral.

Those who worked on the seventh day of the week before the commandment was even given were not sinning. They were not doing something wicked. This was a ceremonial commandment and a societal religious ordinance intended only for Israel until Christ came and fulfilled it.

Another thing to keep in mind is that we often confuse the Sabbath with Sunday. Sunday. And I think it's an innocent mistake. Honestly, I grew up thinking Sunday was the Sabbath day and that those who worked on Sunday were disregarding that.

[23 : 48] We're simply trying to read and apply all that the Bible says about the Sabbath to our lives as followers of Jesus. But the weekly Sabbath day in the Bible was always the seventh day of the week, marked as the Jews marked days from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday.

Many of the early churches and followers of Jesus began to meet for fellowship and worship on the first day of the week, which was Sunday. Yet both in Israel and throughout the Roman Empire, the first day of the week, Sunday, was a work day.

And so what that means is that when the church gathered, when Christians gathered, they either met early in the morning and then went to work, or they went to work and then gathered together in the evening after work.

It wasn't until the fourth century that Sunday was legally declared to be a day of rest for city dwellers, magistrates, and craftsmen under Emperor Constantine.

Furthermore, the Bible says nothing about the Sabbath day being moved to Sunday, or shifted from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week.

[25 : 08] The commandment as stated in Exodus 20 is not that we are to take one day in seven to rest, but that we are specifically to rest on the seventh day, which means that for most of us as Christians, we've never kept the Sabbath day commandment, except maybe unintentionally.

There are only two places in the entire New Testament where it's even mentioned about the church gathering on the first day of the week, and this is after the resurrection of Jesus.

One is in the narrative of Acts chapter 20 verse 7 and refers to, did I lose it there? It refers to the gathering of the church which Paul stopped by for the night that Eutychus fell out of the window. They met on the first day of the week that time. And the other is in Paul's letter to the Corinthian church where he tells them to put aside money on the first day of the week to get ready for the collection that Paul was going to make for the Jerusalem gift.

So there's hardly a prescription or a mandate in the scriptures for gathering to worship on the first day of the week. These are maybe two glimmers in the Bible of the tradition that emerged.

[26 : 28] There's also the mention in Revelation by the Apostle John of the Lord's day. On the Lord's day I was in the spirit he said. Most agree that this came to be a Christian reference to the first day of the week since that's the day that Jesus rose from the dead and that's the day that the church began to gather on for worship.

But again there's nothing saying that the Sabbath became the Lord's day. One of the reasons why Paul likely taught what he did about the Sabbath in these two North Star passages is because Sabbath observance actually continued amongst Jewish believers in Israel.

It was part of the culture. Everything in Israel ground to a halt on Friday at sundown. And so it seems the Jewish Christians, the Jewish church there just continued doing what they always did. They took it as a day to rest. But churches elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world didn't all do this. Some of them saw Sabbath as distinctly Jewish. And they just met for fellowship and worship after work on Sunday evening.

In fact, there's even more to it than this. For a time in certain regions, Sabbath observance seems to have become popular among Gentile Christians. For one, there was a certain attractiveness to it.

[27 : 50] We've been working seven days a week. Take a day off every week to rest? Yes. But then there was also the influence of the Jews and even the Judaizers which sought to compel

Christians to keep the Sabbath along with the other old covenant commandments.

And so in some churches they became very opposed to the Sabbath gathering, to the Sabbath ordinance, I mean. And it was important to them that we worship Christ on the Lord's day, but we don't do what the Judaizers are teaching or what the Jews are trying to force us to do on the seventh day.

Meanwhile, in Israel, some of the Christians there, it seems, were likely to do both. They would observe the Sabbath day and then they would gather for Christian worship on the first day of the week.

And so in this context, as things kind of developed and the church grew and spread, it's understandable why Paul wrote what he did about the Sabbath. And it's also evident that the Sabbath day and the Lord's day were never conceived of as the same thing by the early church. The point of all this is to see clearly that keeping the Sabbath is not a covenant obligation for Christians today. And yet, as Jesus said, the Sabbath was made for man.

[29 : 18] As in for the benefit of man. It's not an obligation, but it is still something that we may choose to do. It was a gift to a people who had just come out of slavery and working non-stop day after day.

In Christ, we have the freedom to consider one day a week special to the Lord. Just as Paul said some in the church at Rome were doing.

And if it was God's idea to give a weekly day of rest to his people as a gift and for their benefit, perhaps we shouldn't be so quick to just throw out the principle, the principle of Sabbath as merely an old covenant thing.

Here's a reality that we probably all know. People who work seven full days a week, often burn out. They find themselves in an awful state.

And so for Christians who choose to practice the principle of weekly Sabbath on any day of the week, it can be such a life-giving and refreshing thing and is truly a gift from God.

[30 : 32] So long as we don't turn it back into a religious rules, do's and don'ts, which puts us back under the law that Christ has set us free from.

Here's something you can try if you wish. You have the freedom in Christ to do this. Experiment. Try for one week sometime here, observing the Sabbath the way some of our Christian brothers and sisters in the first century may have.

Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown. Do all your yard work and your meal prep and your errands either before or after, but take a full 24 hours to be at home as a family or with friends and just rest.

Spend some time in family worship. Enjoy your backyard if you have one. I'm not saying do this every week. I'm saying as a one time thing to try to experience something of what God wanted to give to his people one day every week.

Maybe the gift of Sabbath in principle is what you or your family are really in need of. Maybe you and your family have been going a million miles an hour and traveling here and there and everywhere for work, sports, family gatherings, meetings.

[32 : 00] things. Maybe what you and your family really truly need is a day at home with each other each week where nothing is planned, where it's not just a home and yard work day but a chance to spend time together.

Maybe play a favorite game, maybe throw the football or the frisbee. And with the freedom that we have in Christ on this matter, there's nothing saying you have to stay home.

What do you find restful? What is truly restful? Take a day out at the lake or at the mineral spa or whatever it is for you. Maybe in the city.

Whatever truly meets that need for you and your family. Here's a question. If you don't take a day to rest each week, when do you rest?

Maybe the benefit of a full 24 hours every week is the needed part of the Sabbath principle that you've been missing. Maybe that's what would make all the difference to your exhausted and burnt out state.

[33 : 15] We don't have to keep the Sabbath commandment anymore, but the Sabbath was made for man to meet a need we all have. ironically, for practical considerations, for those of us who choose to receive the Sabbath in principle as a gift and take a day to rest, and because of the way that our society is still set up today, Saturday and Sunday still end up being the logical choice for

many to take for themselves a Sabbath-like day of rest.

Of course, on those days, there's no school, and gathering for worship like we are right now, here on Sunday morning, it's a life-giving thing. It brings spiritual renewal and refreshment to us in the Lord.

Those of us who work Monday to Friday, we still need at least one day a week to do the home stuff and the yard stuff, the gardening, all that stuff, and so that often ends up being Saturday, and so Sunday ends up being the day that we practice Sabbath rest if we choose to.

Unless maybe you do it the other way around. Maybe you take your Saturday to rest and recreate. Come to church on Sunday morning and then do all your yard work and all that stuff after church today.

Whatever you choose, know that you have the freedom in Christ to do so. Let no one judge you with regard to the Sabbath, and accept those who think and do differently than you without quarreling over disputable matters.

[34 : 56] The reality that the shadow was pointing to is here. Jesus has come, and he is now and forever our ultimate, true, deepest, and most needed rest.

rest. And so if you're weary, if you're burdened, if you're exhausted or tired, come to me, says Jesus, and I will give you rest for your soul.

let's pray. Father in heaven, we want to say thank you that you have got us out from under the law, and that you have put now in charge of us a new master who is Jesus, the one who gives us a light burden, an easy yoke, the one who gives us that peace deep down inside that we all need with you. And I pray that we would all cling to him. I pray that you would guide us and give us wisdom when it comes to this in our own lives, in our own families. We may end up walking away from here all choosing to do some little bit different things for our family, but I pray that you would give us wisdom and guide us into the thing that best meets that need, and that we would do those things as unto you for your honor and your glory.

in Jesus name we pray Amen