

The Lord's Day

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0:00] Well, let me ask you now to turn, please, to Genesis and chapter 2, the book of Genesis, chapter 2, and we'll read the first three verses. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Now you recall that we went through the first chapter looking at the way that God describes there for us, the pattern of his ordering of the heavens and the earth, culminating and reaching its pinnacle in the creation of mankind, and how we saw that that was given such a significance, so much so that the description of the way in which the earth was formed and then furnished with all the things that God created, that that was especially for man's benefit, an environment that was suitable for man as God created him and her.

And it was my intention then to look at the related issues that flow from that, and we'll see that there are three especially, and it so happens in Providence that we come to the first of those today, which is the Sabbath day, and in the timing and providence of God, it just so happens that that's when this is an issue that's currently being discussed in our community and in council deliberations as well.

That's God's timing. But let's look at this today as it comes before us in these verses in Genesis 2, verses 1 to 3. Now there are three ordinances or three regulations, three things which regulate human life that actually flow from what God did in creating the heavens and the earth and mankind in the previous six days of the creation.

[2:10] These three ordinances of regulatory matters are, firstly, the Sabbath day as a particular day that God appointed and set apart. The second ordinance is the ordinance of marriage, because here also at the creation we find the founding of marriage and the establishing of marriage in God's way of establishing it as described here in these opening chapters of Genesis, especially the second chapter near the end of the chapter.

So we'll have to look at that because it too is what's called a creation ordinance or regulation. And the third one is one we perhaps don't regard all that much as a creation ordinance.

That's the ordinance of work or labor, because right there at the beginning, God actually established work as beneficial to man, as part of what was given to him to fulfill as God had created him.

And so these three ordinances are really significant as creation ordinances, and the principles that God enshrines in these descriptions as he established this at the creation, at the beginning of things, that is for us something in principle which carries through into the way these three ordinances are to be regarded by us and applied and worked out by us in our own life's experience.

So first of all, let's look at this ordinance of the Sabbath day, which has come through the New Testament now to be called the Lord's Day.

[3 : 53] We'll look first of all at God's appointment of the Sabbath, and secondly, God's blessing and sanctifying or setting apart as holy the Sabbath as a particular day. God's appointment of the Sabbath, first of all, and the first thing to notice there is it was appointed by him on his finishing the work of creation.

You find it described as he'd finished the whole host of the heavens and the earth, he finished them. That's the description you find in the previous six days in the first chapter. Now he comes to this seventh day.

On the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on that seventh day from all the work that he had done, so he blessed that day and made it holy or set it apart.

You notice when it was established. The Sabbath day as a day was not established after the fall of man. It wasn't established at Sinai when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses to be passed on to the people.

In other words, the Sabbath day was not established after man had become a sinner. It wasn't established to relieve the way that labor had then become a toil to him, where previous to the fall it would have been a pleasure, and there would have been no aspects of toil or drudgery attached to human labor as it was so after the fall, because it's sin that's added that dimension to our work and to our labor.

[5 : 27] It's part of the way in which sin has affected ourselves and our conditions. The Sabbath was not established after the fall, after man had become a sinner, after the giving of the law at Sinai.

There is a reference, of course, as you know, as the fourth commandment in the law to the Sabbath day, but it says remember, And that itself is a casting back of the mind to the establishing of the Sabbath at the creation.

The cycle of the six days of work and a day of rest is established in Eden, in the ideal conditions that God actually prepared for human life.

And that's so important as we look at the Sabbath as a day or the Lord's day, and look at how it is to be regarded, and how we should actually see what it's for and what it contains and what the benefits of it are, and all the other related aspects to the Lord's day as a day that we need to consider as we address the issues of our day and our generation in regard to it.

This is when it was established. And when it was established tells us that as God created it as a creation ordinance and established it when man was in Eden in his ideal conditions, it was established for mankind, not for Israel, not just for Christians.

[7 : 00] Not only did he establish it on finishing his work of creation, but secondly, God established it in relation to his work of redemption. And that's not mentioned in these few verses in Genesis, but I want you to cast your mind forward or look forward to Deuteronomy and chapter 5.

And in chapter 5 of Deuteronomy, you also find a reference to the Ten Commandments. And that's one of the Ten Commandments. It, of course, mentions the fourth commandment in relation to the Lord's day in chapter 5 of Deuteronomy.

Remember, Deuteronomy is Moses putting before the people, before they're entering the promised land. They're just about to do that. And Moses is really recasting his mind and reminding the people of their history, of God's dealings with them.

And here he relates the Ten Commandments to that. But the interesting thing is, when you come to the reference in verse 12 to the Sabbath day, it does say pretty much the same thing as in the fourth commandment that you find in Exodus 20.

But then in verse 15 it says, You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm.

[8:19] Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. And you see he's making a reference there, not just to the creation and God's six days of creation.

He's actually adding this dimension to it, as they now know it as a people having been delivered from Egypt, long, long after the days, the day in which God established the Sabbath.

But he says, The Lord delivered you. You were slaves in Egypt. He redeemed you. He led you out by his power and strength. Therefore you are to keep the Sabbath day.

Now that's not put in place of, or as a substitute for what you find in Genesis 2, but it is placed alongside it. And it gives you the second dimension to the Lord's day, and it being established as a day of rest by God.

It's not simply in relation to God finishing the work of creation, and then entering into his rest, and establishing a day of rest for mankind. It's also very closely connected to God's redemption of his people, to the provision of salvation.

[9:28] It sits alongside the Exodus emphasis and the Genesis emphasis, and it gives that a very important connection to our redemption, to our deliverance.

And you cannot therefore think in a Christian manner of the Sabbath day, or the Lord's day, as a day of rest, without keeping up that connection that it has to our redemption.

And that's so important, because for one thing we're in danger perhaps, of thinking of the Lord's day, and of the Lord's day in the Ten Commandments, which it is, and simply regard it as a commandment, in relation to our behavior and nothing else.

That has to do with law, and it's nothing to do with the gospel or with redemption. That's not the case. It has as much to do with the gospel, as it has to do with the law.

It's not simply God saying, I command you to keep the Sabbath, following the pattern of which I created, with six days of labor, and then one day of rest, and you follow my pattern, so I'm commanding you, because of that, to keep the Sabbath day.

[10:42] He is saying that, but he's saying, you will keep the Sabbath day, because in it you acknowledge my redemption. You celebrate redemption. You actually regard the deliverance of God, by God, of his people, from sin, from their slavery in sin, from their bondage.

And the Sabbath day, the Lord's day, is a day upon which we regard that as such an important dimension of what the day is about, and what the day is for, and why it should be kept, and how it should be kept.

It's a memorial to the Lord's redemption. And if you go into the New Testament, we don't have time to go into that today, but you follow it through into the New Testament, to the practice of the apostles, after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And it's obvious, that the apostles regarded, a change in the placement of the day, in relation to the other six days. In the Old Testament, it came after the six days cycle of work.

Now with the apostolic practice, we come to the view that it's now the first day of the week. That's when they met. That's when the church met. That's when they worshipped the Lord together.

[12:03] That's when they broke bread. That's when they actually came to look at the resurrection of Christ as significant in relation to this day, the day in which the Lord rose. This was the day in which the Spirit of God came, on the day of Pentecost, associated with the Sabbath day, the Lord's day.

That's why we regard it now as beginning the week, because Christ has accomplished His death and resurrection, and accomplished redemption for us in that.

And so we place the Lord's day in its timing as beginning a week of days, followed by the six days of other activities.

So the Lord's day is really for us a memorial to Christ's resurrection, to His present blessing of His people, to the future blessing that awaits in the rest of glory, the rest of heaven, the peace and the bliss of heaven, which is our eternal Sabbath, our eternal Lord's day, if you like, without end.

And that too is important, this element of redemption and its connection to the Lord's day, because you'll find people saying, well, I don't really understand why you have to have a day that's different to all the other days.

[13:21] Of course, many are approaching that from the point of view of not accepting the Bible or rejecting the Bible. But even among Christians, there may actually be this idea that the Old Testament, the Lord's day, the Sabbath day, it's really just a relic of the Old Testament and it shouldn't be carried into the New Testament at all in any sense.

Well, there are differences, but in principle, the cycle continues. And the Lord's day continues as a day that God has established in relation to his creation and redemption to be observed by his people as a day different to the other six.

And that means, really, to conclude this point about God appointing the Sabbath, that it's now, since Christ was from the dead and ascended to glory, it is, in fact, under the Lordship of Christ.

And in a very significant passage there in Mark chapter 2, verses 27 to 28, and also in Matthew's equivalent, you find him saying, the Lord, the Son of Man, is also Lord of the Sabbath.

You see, the Pharisees had clogged up the Sabbath with all their own regulations as a day that they had made wearisome for people. Why was it wearisome? Because they had added so many man-made regulations in their day and over the generations to the simple command to keep the Lord's day and to avoid unnecessary work on that day.

[14:55] They had added so many other minute details and regulations to it, and people were burdened under it. That's why the Lord elsewhere in Matthew 11 said, Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden.

We sometimes relate that to the load of sin that we carry, and that's not wrong, but in the context, the Lord was referring specifically to the way the likes of the Pharisees that made things so burdensome for people with human traditions and human regulations in addition to God's commands and God's specifications.

And Christ had come to show the need to be delivered from that. For he says, the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath. Why is the Lord's day significant for us? Well, there are so many reasons. It's a day when we come together to worship.

It's a day when we're able to rest from our activities on other days by and large. But it's also a day when we celebrate the resurrection of Christ from the dead. When we come together to acknowledge that we give thanks to God for his redemption, for the power of Christ's resurrection.

[16:18] So you see, above everything else, what should characterize our approach to the Lord's day is our devotion to Christ. Christ. That's really, in many ways, the primary thing for us in terms of how we view the Lord's day, what it is and what it's about.

The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath. And that means as he is Lord of everything else, so he's Lord of this day as well.

It's not a day for us to do with as we please. It's not a day upon which we can just make up our own minds as to what it's about. It's very clearly established by God at creation.

It's related to his work of redemption. It's been placed now under the Lordship of Christ. And so our devotion to him in many respects is what we bring to bear upon our thinking and our practice on the Lord's day.

God's appointment of the Sabbath from the creation through Sinai to redemption to the New Testament to the death and to the resurrection of Christ. It all comes together in relation to God setting apart this day as a day different to the other six.

[17:46] Secondly, God's blessing and setting apart of this Sabbath day or this Lord's day significant, isn't it, that the first thing that God is said to have sanctified or set apart in the whole reference you have in the Bible to God sanctifying things to God that means God setting them apart in a special way.

The first thing that's mentioned in the Bible about God sanctifying something is this day. It's the first thing that God set apart as holy.

He set apart this day blessed and he set it apart as holy because on it he rested from all the work of creation that he has made. It's by God's appointment that the day was actually made significant.

It wasn't that the church somehow down through the years decided that there should be a day in the cycle of days for a human week. It wasn't Adam that decided this even before he fell before he brought sin upon himself and into the world and death and all that followed on from that.

It wasn't Adam and Eve that decided between themselves wouldn't it be good to have one day out of a week as a day of rest. God sanctified it. God set it apart.

[19:06] It's the first thing that God specifically sanctified and set apart as holy to himself and when God set something apart as holy it doesn't just mean that God is designating that in a special way.

It is for himself. Yes, the Sabbath as Jesus said was made for man and not man for the Sabbath but how we view the Sabbath and how we use the Lord's day is significant and in our devotion to Christ and in our obedience to God and in our worship of God we regard the Lord's day as set apart for the Lord.

That's why it's called in the Old Testament this is the Lord's Sabbath and Isaiah and other prophets Isaiah 59 especially when you go into these passages of the Bible where you find the Lord through the prophet criticizing the people so much for having desecrated the Sabbath having gone out with the boundaries that God himself had specified and just treating it like any other day in the decline of their spiritual life in those days again and again you find it said this is the Lord's Sabbath and it's the Lord's day that's why we call it the Lord's day it's not our day though it's for our benefit it is the Lord's day it's a gospel day but it's to him and it's for him and it's unto him that we regarded as special as well as for our benefit it's a setting apart but it's also it's finally in God's blessing and sanctifying of the Sabbath it is a specific kind of rest when God rested on the seventh day after the six days of work

God wasn't idle God didn't say about himself that's it I'm doing nothing on the whole of this day God is never inactive God is always active in some way but the activity is different he's resting on the seventh day in an active rest in an active rest of satisfaction in what he has done and our rest on the Lord's day is not inactivity is not idleness it is it is something that has to be guided by the specific design and nature of the day itself and follows the pattern that God himself has set as a rest of satisfaction you see in the previous the previous chapter in Genesis chapter 1 where you find at the end of the chapter God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good that's a way of saying God took great satisfaction from what he had done from the perfection of his work from all that he had brought about by his creative power and authority and the rest that he takes is a rest relating to that satisfaction he takes delight in what he has done he takes if you like he takes time to consider with delight the accomplishment of what he has done on the previous six days that's the pattern for our

Lord's day rest that's the pattern of Sabbath rest as well as Isaiah then in that passage put it that they were to delight themselves in the Lord and in the Lord's day the Lord's day was for delight and for satisfaction on their part as well as the way that it was originally for God and how God had specified that for them in saying that they were to keep their foot from off the Sabbath in chapter 58 of Isaiah if you turn back your foot from the Sabbath from doing your pleasure on my holy day if you call the Sabbath a delight you see it's going back to God's delight if you call the Sabbath a delight the holy day of the Lord honorable if you honor it not going your own ways and seeking your own pleasure then you shall take delight in the Lord and I will feed you God is saying with the heritage of Jacob your father in other words he's saying

[23 : 32] I will fulfill my promises for you but your regard of my day and your use of my day is part of the way that God himself requires us to behave in relation to him and not just to his commands but remember although we're commanded to keep the Sabbath day as many other commands as well all of what's contained in them is a benefit and privilege for us to know we have to think of these things positively not negatively the way the world does that regards it as so wearisome and we're so fed up of this reference to the Lord's day and just take it out of the way it's no longer relevant it's just a burden it should be opened up so that people can take delight in it we do take delight in it we take delight in it because God takes delight in it we take delight in it in the way God takes delight in it we take delight in it spiritually we take delight in it because it means for us

God's redemption set forth through the resurrection of Christ we celebrate that on the Lord's day and in the passage we read in Matthew let me just refer to that before we finish it's significant that Matthew there records Jesus dealing with those who accused him and his disciples of transgressing the Lord's day and where he mentions not just that he's Lord of the Sabbath but where he also mentions the fact that it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath day in verse chapter 12 of Matthew and verse 12 how much more is it a man of value than a sheep sold is lawful to do good on the Sabbath now that's been stretched hugely by many people to say well if it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath let's open the sports center let's open the golf club let's do all of these things because they're good for people that's not what

Jesus meant Jesus defines in that very chapter what he means by doing good and there are three categories and the three categories are necessity and worship and mercy the category of necessity where the disciples plucked the ears of corn on the Sabbath which was against the law of the Pharisees but not against the spirit of the Lord's day in an act of necessity which David did when he went into the house of God into the temple and took the bread of the presence which was only to be eaten by the priests but he was hungry he was in a case of need so the Lord didn't accuse him of doing wrong necessity is to be applied to the Sabbath day and where it is a work of necessity then it is not a transgression of the Lord's day you find the same with those who actually work in the temple as he put it there or the priests in the temple profane the

Sabbath and yet are guiltless I work on the Lord's day it's my busiest day of the week is it a transgression of the Sabbath no because it's a necessity other people work in works of necessity and they're also works of mercy it's necessary for certain things to happen there are emergencies where people perhaps do what they wouldn't ordinarily do on the Sabbath day but if it's a necessity as it was for the disciples when they came in their hunger to pluck the ears of corn and to eat them then Jesus didn't accuse them of having transgressed the Sabbath the second category is that of worship the priests in the temple they profane the Sabbath as they put it but they are guiltless worship is an aspect of the Lord's day and how we keep the Lord's day it's an activity that's acceptable to God that he has specified as to take place on the first day of the week the third category is that of mercy the man with a withered hand is the example in that same chapter he wasn't going to be dead by the next day just because he had a withered hand and it wasn't actually a necessity that he had his hand cured by Jesus that it become healthy just like the other one but Jesus is saying okay it's not a necessity but it's a work of mercy it's a work specific to an act of compassion and mercy and therefore it's quite proper to do it as a good on the

Lord's day in other words when you have people working in hospitals or care homes or in the community looking after people in their need and in works of mercy that is not a transgression of the Sabbath we need our doctors and our nurses and our carers and others like that to be working on the Lord's day there are things that you have to apply to that is it possible to shut down a power station on the Lord's day possibly not not effectively anyway we all need our energy is it the same for oil platforms probably yes I don't know much about it I assume it takes days for it to be shut down and restart it again so we have to be careful as to how we think about those things and people working on those days in those categories do they fit the categories of necessity and worship and mercy if they do then they are not transgressions of the Lord's day but you can't fit the likes of the sports center into that it's not a necessity it's not a worship it's not an act of mercy there are many other categories and many other things that cannot be fitted properly into these categories so these categories remember

[29 : 38] Matthew 12 as Jesus says it is lawful to do good on the Lord's day but then he built around that these three categories of necessity and worship and mercy and within that we have a definition for us though there will always be things which are perhaps not clear not black and white you can't fit them perhaps very easily into these categories but they're a minimum mostly you can regard any activity as whether or not it fits into these categories that Jesus himself specified and he is the Lord of the Sabbath he regulates the Sabbath and the Lord's day is under his authority friends let's have these arguments to hand let's be sure ourselves that our view of the Lord's day is the view the Bible gives us it's a special day it's an important day it's a day different to the other six it's related to God's work of creation and his rest after it it's related to redemption and to the resurrection of

Christ it's related in its own way of how we observe it to matters like necessity and worship and acts of mercy but one thing in conclusion just briefly Psalm 92 that we sang and we'll sing the final part of in a minute is a song for the Lord's day for the Sabbath but it's a song that's characterized by joy by celebration by rejoicing let's not give people the idea that for us as Christians and worshippers of God the Lord's day is a day of doorness a negative day a day when we're not allowed to celebrate a day when joy is covered over celebrate the Lord's day let it be a joyous day for you contemplate the resurrection of Christ the redemption of God in him take time today as the

Lord's day to meditate for what it means to be a Christian what it means to have God as your father and as your friend what it means to be a servant of God in this world to show something of his beauty to the world around you rejoice in this day rejoice in what it contains what it means what it is designed for that's what the day is about it's no threat to the spirit of the Sabbath to have it as a day of joy a day of rejoicing may God bless his word to us we're going to conclude now by singing in Psalm 92 the same version that we had Psalm 92 a and singing the final part of it from verse 8 through to 15 but Lord you are forevermore exalted very high all evil doers will be crushed your foes will surely die you made me strong as any ox with oil anointed me

I've seen my enemies defeat and I have heard them flee like palms and cedars flourishing the righteous all will be and planted in the house of God they grow abundantly so in old age they still bear fruit they will stay fresh and strong they will proclaim the Lord is just my rock who does no wrong let's sing these verses in conclusion but Lord you are forevermore ■ury kind and family The new earth will be passed, Your foes will surely die.

You make me strong, as any of, With oil and oil in me.

[34 : 19] I sing my enemies to thee, And I have heard them flee.

Like phantoms, seeers flourishing, The righteous all will be.

And planted in the house of God Will grow up and leave.

So in all these things still bear fruit, They will speak great and strong.

They will proclaim, The Lord is just my God, Who does no wrong.

[35 : 51] I'll go to the side door here this morning. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the communion of the Holy Spirit, Be with you now and always. Amen.