

## GIVING HELP TO MAN IS OBSERVING THE TRUE SABBATH

A sermon for June 3, 2018, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba  
Second Sunday after Pentecost

Gospel: **Mark 2:23 - 3:6**

*'One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'*

*Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.'*

What is the Sabbath? Many people understand the Sabbath to be the Jewish day of rest and worship. Yes, the Sabbath was instituted by God at creation according to Genesis 2:2 (*'And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.'*) The Books of Leviticus and Numbers give numerous stipulations for Sabbath observances including the need for the individual to rest. According to Exodus 31:14 (*'You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people.'*), violating the Sabbath observance deserved capital punishment.

The observance of the Sabbath (meaning 'the seventh day') does not end there. Every Seventh year the Jews observed a 'Sabbatical' Year by refraining from tilling the land -- the land was to be put to rest. The Hebrews even counted in sevens.

Christians do not observe the Sabbath day on the seventh day. Christians observe their Sabbath on the first day of the Jewish week (Sunday) because it was the day on which Jesus was raised from the dead. Only the Seventh Day Adventist denomination keeps the seventh day as an essential moral obligation in imitation of the Jewish tradition.

Jesus teaches that the Sabbath is not about rules and regulations.

- Walking a long distance was unacceptable of the Sabbath. But Jesus passed through a corn field to go to worship.

- Any kind of work was breaking the Sabbath Law and plucking corn was 'work' (cooking was also unacceptable on the Sabbath). Because they had not eaten breakfast, the disciples plucked and ate some corn as they went to worship.
- Fasting was observed on the Sabbath. The religious leaders questioned the plucking of corn on the Sabbath to ease their hunger even as the disciples ate.

According to the extreme views of religious 'purists' and the Pharisees, the disciples had broken multiple ceremonial laws of the Sabbath.

Jesus did not correct the disciples for plucking the corn on the Sabbath. He was not concerned about walking some distance to worship. Jesus did not judge or rebuke the disciples. According to Jesus (who is the Lord of the Sabbath), the Sabbath was made for man.

My friends, some things must take precedence. Some things are more important than rules and regulations -- even Sabbath regulations. Why is this so? Because the Sabbath, or Sunday, was given to help people, not to be a burden.

Jesus gave examples to prove his point:

1. David and his men got hungry while fleeing from Saul. They went into the temple and requested some food from the priests but there was none. So, they helped themselves to the '*showbread*' (Communion Bread) that was forbidden to be eaten by anyone except priests. Why? Because they were in dire need. Need transcended Sabbath Law. David, a great man of God, a man after God's own heart, knowingly broke the ceremonial law because he and his men were in need. His action was justified.

2. Scripture quotes Jesus on the subject.

The Sabbath, like Sunday is to serve man not to master man. In Mark 2:23-27, Jesus says, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'. Whatever serves the needs of man may be done on the Sabbath, keeping in mind the greatest human needs are to rest and to worship God. Both of these things bring physical, spiritual as well as mental fulfillment and renewal.

However, we must put things in perspective. The command to rest on the seventh day was a command, not a suggestion, handed down by God through Moses (Exodus 34: 17). No man is allowed to break the law. We do not have license to break the law by not worshipping on Sunday. We cannot break the law for selfish reasons or for the flesh or for commercial pleasure. Jesus is not talking about bending the law. Man's rest and worship may be temporarily interrupted if there is need.

3. The Book of Hebrews says, "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--- as you see the day of Lord*

*approaching.*” (Hebrews 10:25). Certainly, we ought to come to Church for worship on Sundays.

The Sabbath is governed by the Son of Man, Jesus. He instituted the Sabbath as one with the father and the Spirit. He is the Lord of the Sabbath. He is the true Messiah and Son of the living God. We are to do what Jesus says we should do on the Sabbath. Jesus is the Prince of Peace and Savior who “has put all things under his feet.”

Human need takes precedence over worship in today’s Scripture. Jesus entered the synagogue for worship but once inside he was confronted by the man who had been born with a withered hand. This man had a dire need, a need that required immediate care. But the overseers of ceremonial law, the religious purists and the Pharisees, opposed Jesus’ decision to heal on the Sabbath.

The text says, “... *they watched him (Jesus), whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day that they might accuse him.*” (Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7) Jesus was faced with a situation that called for a ‘faith choice’. What must Jesus do? Stand his ground, save the needy man and break the Sabbath Law -- or not? Is restoring the man with a withered hand a good thing or an evil thing?

There is another story in Matthew 12:9-13, of a stone mason who was injured and could no longer provide for himself. He beseeched Jesus to heal him, on the Sabbath, so that he would not have to bear the shame of a life of begging. Jesus asked himself: Which is more important, the man or the religious observance? Yes, of course! Doing good for the man supersedes the religious rule. Jesus puts the man and his need before religious rules -- man is greater!

In both cases, Jesus did the right thing. He met the greater need. His act of generosity and love *WAS AN ACT OF WORSHIP* ... on the Sabbath ... in the Synagogue.

We sit in church, watching and picking out ‘wrong’ in others so that we might accuse them! We weave gossip that is capable of destroying the life and character of another. Unkind acts done, perhaps, in the name of ‘keeping the tradition’ of the Church.

Church is a place for worship and a place for ministering to those in need. Man ranks higher than any other creature on earth. Is church not a place to minister to the needs of the needy? The men wanted help. Jesus gave it.

True religion is a willingness to stand firm for the truth, no matter what. Whether we need or whether we are able to give. The men in the two stories had to stand up to religious authority **to ask for help** on the Sabbath -- no matter what. Jesus had to reach out, in spite of the prevailing religious authority, **to heal** on the Sabbath, no matter what.

Will you stand for what is right?

True religion restores. True religion is does good. Every believer is confronted with the choice -- to change direction and do what is right and necessary or . . . not.

Amen. AMEN!