

“Necessity and Mercy”
1 Samuel 21:1-6
(Preached at Trinity, October 8, 2017)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I've pointed out before, David stands before us as a man of strong faith in the power of God to preserve him.
 - A. He demonstrated mighty faith as he stood before Goliath:
1 Samuel 17:46 NAU - "This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,"
 - B. It was David who would write the stirring words of faith:
Psalms 27:1 NAU - "The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?"
 - C. But David was but a man, and as men we can be beaten down to the point that our faith is weakened and our hearts fall into fear and doubt.
Such was the condition of David in these chapters. He cried out to Jonathan in **Chapter 20:3** - "there is hardly a step between me and death."
 - D. David's chief problem in these chapters is he isn't crying out to God. Instead he is relying upon the carnal ground of human reason. He had completely dismissed that he was God's anointed. Was God not able to preserve his life?
2. As we enter **Chapter 21** David has fled to Nob and has come before the priest, Ahimelech. And once again, he uses the tactic of deception. Ahimelech listens to David and trusts his word. David had come to Ahimelech seeking provisions. Ahimelech explained that he only had consecrated bread, which by Divine law, could only be consumed by the priests. But due to David's current state of need, he was given the provision.
3. This is a difficult passage to understand. Nowhere is Ahimelech's holiness as a priest called into question. Yet, he does that which is forbidden. He gave David consecrated bread.
Ahimelech's actions provide an important principle to us regarding the keeping of the Sabbath. Jesus referred to this passage while engaged in a dispute with the Pharisees regarding His disciples picking grain on the Sabbath.
Mark 2:23-28 NAU - "And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; ²⁶ how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for

anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷ Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

4. Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man. It was to be a day of rest, a day of spiritual refreshment, a day of joy, a day of delight.
The Pharisees had robbed the Sabbath of joy and delight. In an attempt to protect the law, they actually buried it deep beneath the traditions of men.
They had developed more than 1500 rules attached to the Sabbath Day.
The Sabbath prohibits work but the Scribes and Pharisees had incorporated a complex set of regulations that had become an impossible burden.
5. Even today, there are complex rules to be followed. Many things are prohibited because of their connection to things prohibited. For example:
 - Adding fresh water to a vase of cut flowers (sowing—any activity that causes or furthers plant growth).
 - Making a bouquet of flowers (making a sheaf).
 - Separating good fruit from spoiled fruit (winnowing, selecting, sifting).
 - Brushing dried mud from boots or clothes (grinding).
 - Cutting hair or nails (shearing sheep—removing outer covering of a human or animal).
 - Applying makeup (dyeing).
 - Braiding hair (weaving).
 - Drawing blood for a blood test (slaughtering).
 - Rubbing soap to make lather, applying face cream, polishing shoes, using scouring powder for utensils or other surfaces (scraping—smoothing the surface of any material by grinding, rubbing, or polishing).
 - Sharpening a pencil (cutting to shape—altering the size or shape of an item to make it better for human use).
 - Painting, drawing, typing (writing, making durable marks on a durable material).
 - Tearing through lettering on a package (erasing).
 - Opening an umbrella or unfolding a screen (building).
 - Smoking a cigarette, using the telephone (kindling a fire).
 - Switching off an electric light (extinguishing a fire).
 - Setting or winding a clock or watch (finishing off).
 - Wearing eyeglasses not permanently required (carrying from private to public domain and vice versa).
6. Jesus set the Sabbath free from these rules and regulations that had been attached to it. Rather than destroy the Sabbath, Jesus came to affirm it and enforce it. But He also came to restore it to its grand design as God's gracious gift to man.
7. On Sunday nights during Discipleship Training we've been looking at some of the principles for keeping the Sabbath. Tonight, I want to summarize some of these principles. This text provides for us important instruction regarding the place of necessity and mercy as applied to the observance of the Sabbath.

I. Necessity may overrule the Sabbath

- A. Jesus called to mind David eating the Showbread - **Mark 2:25-28**
Mark 2:25-28 NAU - "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; ²⁶ how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar *the* high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for *anyone* to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷ Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."
1. The Showbread or bread of presence was of a special recipe – it lasted a week without becoming stale or moldy. Each piece had a particular shape. They were large, weighing almost 11lbs each.
 2. It was placed as a token of gratitude symbolizing the presence of God among His people and His rich provision. Of course, Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this Bread of Presence – He is the Bread of Life. Every Sabbath the bread was exchanged for fresh loaves and only the priests were allowed to eat the old bread
 3. It was not lawful for just anybody to eat the bread. It was consecrated or set apart as being holy and only the priests could partake of it. This may not seem important to us. Too many in our day have become cavalier regarding the law of God, finding it too easy to dismiss God’s Law when it suits our needs.
Leviticus 24:5-9 NAU - "Then you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths *of an ephah* shall be *in* each cake. ⁶ "You shall set them *in* two rows, six *to* a row, on the pure *gold* table before the LORD. ⁷ "You shall put pure frankincense on each row that it may be a memorial portion for the bread, *even* an offering by fire to the LORD. ⁸ "Every sabbath day he shall set it in order before the LORD continually; it is an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel. ⁹ "It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD'S offerings by fire, *his* portion forever."
 4. Jesus describes David’s need as a point of necessity. It was the only bread available.
1 Samuel 21:4 NAU - "There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread"
 5. David’s need did not abrogate or take away God’s command. Ahimelech merely recognized David’s need would not violate the essence of what the bread symbolized. The showbread represented the 12 tribes of Israel and the consecration of the nation. Only the consecrated priests could consume it. Ahimelech maintained the necessity of the consecration.
1 Samuel 21:4 NAU - "There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women."
 6. The Fourth Commandment has the purpose of declaring one day in seven as set apart for God’s worship. God allows acts of necessity to govern the observance of the Sabbath for they are not contrary to the spirit of worship.

7. Jesus gave other examples of necessities that would not violate the heart of the Sabbath

Luke 13:14-16 NAU - "But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, *began* saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." ¹⁵ But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water *him*? ¹⁶ "And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

B. Practical application for today

1. Necessity would include things unexpected
 - a. Normally we prepare in advance to keep the Sabbath
LBC – Chapter 22:8
“The sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering their common affairs aforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day, from their own works, words and thoughts, about their worldly employment and recreations, but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.”
 - b. There are times, however, when things happen unexpectedly
Illus: the time I came home and discovered a broken water pipe. There have been countless times I have arrived at the church on Sunday morning and find an AC or heating unit not working.
Luke 14:5 – “And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?”
2. There are certain occupations that demand activity on the Sabbath
Police and fire, medical professionals, certain infrastructure positions such as electric company employees.
3. Making possible the worship by God’s people demands that some be permitted to abandon the regulation of a Sabbath rest.
Matthew 12:3-5 NAU - "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, ⁴ how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? ⁵ "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?"

- II. Works of mercy also allow for an adjustment in how we observe the Sabbath
- A. Ahimelech also saw providing for David's need an act of mercy
1. The Pharisees were strict in obedience to the Law but they lacked pity and kindness.
 2. They condemned Jesus and His disciples for gleaning food on the Sabbath. Although the Pharisees saw these men in need of food they had no desire to help.
 3. They also condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. There was no compassion and no joy in the healing of this afflicted man.
- B. The Sabbath was given as a day of mercy.
1. God graciously provided a day of rest
Exodus. 23:12 NAU - "Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease *from labor* so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves."
 - a. The word for cease is שָׁבַת (shabath) – this is a form of the word Sabbath. The Sabbath is a ceasing of our normal activities. Most translations translate it “rest”
Exodus. 23:12 ESV - "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest"
 - b. All would rest from the servants to the animals
 2. God could have demanded toil every day of our life. He has blessed us with a day of rest.
It is similar to the tithe. God could have demanded one half, or three fourths of our increase, but only demands one tenth.
 3. God has appointed a day where we can be refreshed physically, mentally, and spiritually. God taught this at creation
Exodus 31:17 – “It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.”
- C. In this passage Jesus is teaching that it is permissible for you to do good and show mercy on the Sabbath. In fact you *must* do good and show mercy on the Sabbath.
1. For example it is good for you to go and help your neighbor remove a tree that has fallen on his home?
 2. It is good to stop and help someone change their tire even though you may labor hard and work up a sweat and get dirty.
 3. Employers should be merciful to their employees – how many are robbing their workers of this day? When Israel was in Egypt they never had a day of rest. The mercy of the Sabbath demands it.
 - a. Employers today might remind us that their workers get off another day
But God has appointed THIS day.
 - b. One reason we avoid commerce on the Sabbath is because of our desire to allow others to rest on this day. You may say, Well they are working anyway. Perhaps, but the sin rests upon their employer and those who support his greed. You must not contribute to their sin and thus make it your sin.

4. Mercy is always permitted on the Sabbath. God loves mercy
 LBC – Chapter 22:8
 “The sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering their common affairs aforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day, from their own works, words and thoughts, about their worldly employment and recreations,³⁰ but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.”

Conclusion:

1. Ahimelech showed David mercy without violating God’s Law.
2. May God grant us to be lovers of mercy. May He grant us to be lovers of His Law. May He grant us to be lovers of the Sabbath
NAS **Isaiah 58:13-14** "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, And shall honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, From seeking your *own* pleasure, And speaking *your own* word, ¹⁴ Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."