

Evening sermon: 16 January

Thinking about time rightly (Part 2)

(Sermon Summary)

Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8)

In the first part of this message, we heard how the fourth commandment enables us to be ‘first commandment people’, putting the Lord first throughout the week. We now look in more detail at how the Lord Jesus Christ honoured the Sabbath Day, and how we can follow His example rather than that of the Pharisees.

One size fits all?

It’s clear from Scripture (e.g. Nehemiah 13:15-22) that the Sabbath is not a day for self-interest, self-indulgent pleasure or money-making. But is everyone obliged to observe it in exactly the same way? If we have a non-Christian spouse or children, or we work in essential services such as healthcare, we will need to allow more ‘give and take’.

The Pharisees devised a complex set of rules that had to be meticulously followed, placing a heavy burden on the people. Their emphasis was on outward conformity, which fails to impress God. The Lord, though, taught that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”. He is the Lord of the Sabbath so we must listen to Him.

The Pharisees had a harsh and judgmental attitude towards those who failed to keep their rules, including the Lord! They used the Sabbath rules as a means to accuse Him and condemn Him to death (for example, when he healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath). The Lord used the Sabbath to do good and save life, and in challenging the Pharisees, addressed their lack of humanity and compassion.

When the Pharisees accused the disciples of ‘working’ on the Sabbath by picking a few ears of grain, the Lord reminded them of how David ate the shewbread in the tabernacle. This did not displease God, because David’s men were starving.

In Luke 13 the Lord Jesus healed a woman who had been bent double for 18 long years. This woman glorified God - a good use of the Sabbath! The synagogue ruler's indignation showed he was a hypocrite, and the Lord challenged him to reflect on his lack of compassion towards this woman's suffering.

Very often we look for rules, as they are an easy alternative to thinking carefully about what God really wants. Some people want rules because they are fearful of getting it wrong, not really trusting that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. We have liberty of conscience and are answerable to the Lord, not the rules of other people.

While the Sabbath is not a day to indulge in trivial pleasures, there are legitimate recreations such as walks, conversations and family time which can strengthen and stimulate us, reinforcing what we have learned from the Bible. Some non-Christian books have much to teach us about human nature. We should not waste the day in needless agitation about whether or not we are obeying rules.

Not your day, but His

On this 'day of sacred rest' we cease from other things so that we can seek communion with the Lord. The Sabbath is a pointer to our future life in Heaven, and where we fail to observe it properly now, we will succeed then. In the meantime, Christ has kept the law perfectly on our behalf, and when we fail, we rest in Him.

The Sabbath is not a day of inactivity but a busy day for the soul! On this day we are looking to sorrow for our sin, leave behind the world and be doers of the Word. We should search our souls, comparing ourselves with the Lord Jesus and reflecting on the ways in which we need to think and act differently. We should use the day to destroy idols such as inhumanity, pride, fear, and unbelief. If we are called on to (for example) give lifts, we should make sure that we still have enough time for this quiet reflection. If we have been with the Lord on the Sabbath Day, it will make a difference to the people we are during the rest of the week.

Isaiah 58 calls us not to spend the day in miserable affliction (v5), but to help the oppressed (v6), like the Lord did. What good can we do through the day? Rather than looking on the Sabbath as a weary day which we resent, we should call it a delight (v9). As you meet with God, you will delight yourself in Him. You will

see more of His love to sinners, and He will give you a new perspective so you can rise above trials, “riding on the heights”, like Jacob did (v14).

God challenges you look for Him on this day: expect more, and He won't disappoint you!