



John 7:20-24

What is the Sabbath For?

20 The people answered and said, "You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?"

21 Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel.

22 "Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.

23 "If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?

24 "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

What is the Lord's Day, Sunday, the Christian Sabbath, for? For centuries Christians treated it as a special day, a holy day set apart from all the others and primarily intended to be spent in the blessings of rest for the body and worship for the soul.

Today of course, it has for the most part become another day almost indistinguishable from all the other days of the week. It used to be that throughout the United States on Sunday the stores and restaurants were closed, there were no sporting events, and people didn't travel. As an example of that John Whitecross tells an anecdote from the life of President Washington. He was traveling through the state of Connecticut on a Saturday and because the roads were terrible, he was unable to get to the Inn at which he had planned to rest on Sunday. At daybreak on Sunday he was still traveling and his coach was soon overtaken by an officer of the state who asked the coachman for whether he had an urgent reason for breaking the Sabbath laws of the state of Connecticut. Whitecross writes, **"The General, instead of resenting this as impertinent rudeness, ordered the driver to stop, and with great civility explained the circumstances to the officer, commended him for his fidelity, and assured him that nothing was farther from his intention than to treat with disrespect the laws and usages of Connecticut, relative to the Sabbath, which met with his most cordial approbation."** You can just imagine the man's face when he discovered he had just "pulled over" the President of the United States!

But today, instead of defending the sanctity of the Sabbath, by and large American Christians are not even aware of it, and if they are they view any attempt to keep it as legalism, they see no need for it. But it has been my experience that when you ask them what the Sabbath is or was for, the view it in much the same way the Pharisees did, as day for not doing things. It is a day of burden and chains, and straining at gnats. Of course from the Pharisees point of view, man served the Sabbath day, but Christ, who is called the Lord of the Sabbath in all three gospels (*and incidentally, if you think the Sabbath has gone away, not only do you think there are no 9 commandments, but logically you think Jesus has lost one of His titles*) tells us the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

So of course it was inevitable that with their very different views of the Sabbath, that the Pharisees and Christ were going to come into conflict. Ultimately of course the main issue of contention between

them was, not the Sabbath, it was Christ's claim to be the Messiah, the Son of God, which they utterly rejected. But the Sabbath was yet another point where the failure of Christ and His Apostles to observe *their traditions* made the Pharisees furiously, murderously angry.

The issue that John highlights for us here is that of Christ's practice of healing people on the Sabbath. It was Christ's healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (John 5:1-9) that Jesus is referring to as "the one work" in verse 21. From their point of view, the healing was a Sabbath violation, Jesus was working on the Sabbath day. And for them it is all part of the supposed evidence that Jesus is demon possessed.

No less than four times in the gospel of John, the Jewish leaders or the people who followed them accuse Jesus of having a demon because of what he does and teaches, in the other gospels we find their accusation that the miracles Jesus did were done by the power of Beelzebub - an Aramaic title meaning *Lord of the Flies* – a name for Satan the ruler of the demons.

Why do they make that accusation that what Jesus taught and did was demonic? Well the Pharisees understand all too well that all true miracle working power comes from God. A miracle, they know, is an awesome display of supernatural power in the natural world and it authenticates the one who displays it as a man of God. The words of Moses to Pharaoh were *authenticated* as being the words of God by the fact that he did miracles that none of Pharaoh's magicians could duplicate. The false prophets might make false prophecies and tell the people what they wanted to hear, but only true prophets like Elijah and Elisha could call down fire from heaven, make axe heads float, cure lepers, and so on.

So the Pharisees knew that if all true miracle working power comes from God the Father and He would never give someone the power to do something sinful that went *against* His commands, if the miracles, the works that Jesus was doing came from God, then they were in keeping with God's commands. So if it was the power of God that had healed that man on the Sabbath, then healing people on the Sabbath, was not a violation of the Sabbath. But you see if that was true, then what Jesus is teaching is true, and all this mass of man-made Rabbinic tradition they were teaching and which they were such experts in was false.

They know the equation, there are only two ways it could be: either Jesus is doing these things by the power of God and therefore they are dreadfully wrong or He is a deceiver, who does these things by the power of the Devil, and they are right.

Now many of the people saw the fatal flaw in their argument, since when does the devil really help anybody or speak God's truth? His agenda is uniformly lie, twist, deceive, and harm. It is not in his nature to do anything *really* good.

So in ***John 10:19 Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings.***

20 And many of them said, "He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?"

21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Now you just have to know that some who continued to oppose Christ, were being pricked in their consciences all this time. They couldn't answer his arguments, and their argument that the devil was going around feeding and healing people must have sounded lame even to their own ears. That

experience, I know all too well, as a past hater of the Christian faith. I can remember hating, disrespecting and arguing against people in College I would have admired if they hadn't been Christians. So why did they continue like that?

Well the answer was in two parts, first their hearts. Their hearts were dark and stoney, and they hated Christ and had he declared the sky to be blue they would have argued against Him just on principle. And second their status. Everything they were was locked up in the unbiblical system of works righteousness they taught, their status, their ability to teach all depended upon the Rabbinic traditions. If they are all wrong, then all aspects of their lives are undone. We may be Blind Guides, but we're out in front and the people are following us!

Incidentally, this aspect makes arguing with people caught up in cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses particularly difficult [cult=life, explain]

Jesus though tries yet one more time to show them that the healing He had done on the Sabbath was simply the work of father and was not a violation of the Sabbath. He uses the example of circumcision. He says look, consider circumcision. That is not only part of the law given by God to Moses, but the sign of the covenant promises God made to our fathers. Now according to the instruction of God you do the work of circumcision on the eighth day, even if it falls on the Sabbath. Because it is a command of God and a perfecting work. It is a ritual that symbolizes the taking away of uncleanness. Now, says Jesus, if you do this minor act of perfecting surgery all the time every Sabbath, are you really angry with me because on that one occasion I made a man completely well?

But yes, they were angry with Him because they were fervently concerned not with the truth, but with defending their system of traditions. Even though that system of tradition had taken the blessing of the Sabbath and made it into a joyless and heavy burden for men's backs.

If only they could have stopped judging him the wrong way they would have seen the truth. But unfortunately, they inclination of their hearts made them incontrovertibly opposed. They saw a poor carpenters son from Nazareth, someone not brought up in the schools of the Rabbis, someone who didn't follow their false traditions, and said their real problem was their self-righteousness and the sinfulness of their own hearts and not the Roman occupation and they said *THIS CAN'T BE THE MESSIAH!* Nothing Jesus said or did would persuade them. The world does the same thing today with Christians. With some people all you need to say is I'm an evangelical, and the debate on any topic is over. Your opinion on any given subject cannot possibly be correct.

They just couldn't judge Jesus the righteous way God does:

1 Sam. 16:7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Now please note: Jesus doesn't say *don't judge at all*, He says *stop judging the wrong way* and JUDGE WITH RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT.

There should be verses you keep in your pocket so to speak, and this should be one of them. Because it used to be the one verse everyone knew was John 3:16 now its Matthew 7:1 even though the vast majority of people couldn't find it in the bible – "Judge not, that you be not judged"

It is ripped entirely out of context, actual context is the unrighteous judgment of Pharisees who had planks in their eyes – which speaks to their own sins that they wouldn't address. Jesus said to them first take the plank out of your own eye before you go looking for specks in other peoples. So when you hear that verse thrown out, you can turn this into witnessing opportunity. *I agree with that but have you ever looked at the full context of that verse:*

Matthew 7:13 " Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

14 "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

So when you hear Matthew 7:1 throw out you can use the immortal words of Inigo Montoya, “**I do not think it means what you think it means. ...**”

So, let me make two final applications – first regarding the Sabbath, what is it to you? The Pharisees made it a burden, God had intended it to be a day of rest, of refreshment, and a day for worship. But he never intended it to be a day when we didn't do works of necessity or mercy.

The Sabbath is not like something that must be kept under lock and key, lest it be abused, rather it is something to be enjoyed. And what a blessing it really is to those who know its true meaning in their hearts, because it is here that the Sabbath is really kept or broken:

A.B. Bruce summed up the differences in the two views of the Sabbath this way: *“This difference between Christ’s mode of regarding the Sabbath and the Pharisaic involves of necessity a corresponding difference in the spirit and the details of its observance. Take Christ’s view, and your principle becomes: That is the best way of observing the Sabbath which is most conducive to man’s physical and spiritual well-being — in other words, which is best for his body and for his soul; and in the light of this principle, you will keep the holy day in a spirit of intelligent joy and thankfulness to God the Creator for His gracious consideration towards His creatures. Take the Pharisaic view, and your principle of observance becomes: He best keeps the Sabbath who goes greatest lengths in mere abstinence from any thing that can be construed into labor, irrespective of the effect of this abstinence either on his own well-being or on that of others.”*

Unfortunately most people never enjoy the Sabbath, because they see it in the same way as the Pharisees

2) Your view of the Sabbath will inevitably be tied to your view of Jesus. I'll put it this way, you cannot keep the Sabbath holy, and you will never love it or enjoy it as a blessing, until you love the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath speaks to Christians of Christ's work of Redemption and Resurrection: *It was said that Philip Henry, the father of the famous bible expositor Matthew Henry, used to call the Lord's-day the queen of days, the pearl of the week, and observed it accordingly. His common salutation of his family or friends on the Lord's-Day in the morning, was that of the primitive Christians—'The Lord is risen, He is risen indeed—' making it his chief business, on that day, to celebrate the memory of Christ's resurrection; and he would say sometimes, 'Every Lord's-day is a true Christian's Easter day.'”*

He cured that man to make him physically well, but He died on the cross and rose again to make us spiritually well.