

The Gospel According to
Luke

“You Should Celebrate the Sabbath”
Chapter 6:1-11

Introduction

You really should celebrate the Sabbath. The Sabbath was given by God to mankind at the beginning of creation and it has *never* been revoked.

Are we a day late as we gather to worship on Sunday? Did we blow it yesterday by going to work? Or by working around the house?

Not at all! The Sabbath is much bigger, and much better, than a set of rules and regulations, do’s and don’ts, prohibitions and penalties, about what happens from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. You can celebrate the Sabbath **any day**; in fact, you should celebrate the Sabbath **every day**.

In our text, “**the Sabbath**” meant Saturday – the one day in seven in which you were to do no work. The Pharisees and their scribes had created thirty-nine categories to define ‘work’ on the Sabbath. Each category had many subdivisions, making for many thousands of meticulous rules. The Pharisees and their scribes were all about what we might call *precepts*. A precept is a very specific rule, prescribing or prohibiting certain actions under certain circumstances.

Jesus established that the Sabbath was not about precepts, and that it was *never* about precepts. It was and is about the **Person Who gave** it, and about the **principles** that **govern** it.

We’ll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Celebrate The Sabbath By Following The Person Who Gave It, and #2 You Celebrate The Sabbath By Finding The Principles That Govern It.

#1 You Celebrate The Sabbath
By Following The Person Who Gave It
(v1-5)

The Sabbath remains a complex, confusing, and condemning subject. Seventh-day groups, like the Adventists, are adamant about 'keeping' the Sabbath. Some Christian denominations believe that Sunday is the new Saturday, and that we should therefore 'keep' Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. The rest of us have a sense that all of this is not quite right... But sometimes we do secretly wonder if we are breaking the Fourth Commandment.

Long before the Fourth Commandment was given in Exodus, God established the Sabbath. Listen to the original day seven:

Genesis 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.

Genesis 2:2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Genesis 2:3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

What did God really intend by "resting on the seventh day?"

Commenting on the original day seven, the inspired writer of the Book of Hebrews tells you what it was originally meant to show:

Hebrews 4:10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.

God's "rest" is something God wants you to "enter" and experience for yourself. It is something that has been available to mankind from the time the creation was finished.

What is it? Is it one day off in seven? No, it's much more than that! The "rest" of God is meant to be a picture of the spiritual salvation God offers to mankind. At the end of the first week of creation God entered into a rest when He ceased His work. **You** enter God's rest when you cease from your own works.

How do you cease from your own works? You're told, in Hebrews 4:3, "For we who have **believed** do enter that rest..."

If you believe God for salvation, you've entered His spiritual rest for your soul. You've ceased from works of righteousness that you thought could save you, and you have instead received Christ's work on the Cross. Furthermore, you can remain at rest by daily trusting in God to enable and empower you as you walk through this world.

Day seven in Genesis was a physical, tangible example of the invisible, spiritual experience of knowing and trusting God. That's why, in Genesis, no commandments or rules were given; no precepts were laid down. God didn't tell Adam and Eve to 'keep' the seventh day, or to cease from their work. He gave it to them as a picture of saving and sustaining faith. Believe God and you enter and can experience the spiritual rest of His salvation everyday of your life.

Search through the Old Testament and you will find zero people observing the seventh day as a special day on which no work was done... Until you get to the nation of Israel. When you get to Israel, God gives them – *and them alone* – the covenant and commandment to keep the Sabbath as a day in seven on which they cease from work. In Exodus 31:13-17, **no less than three times** the Lord said that the particular observance of the Sabbath by ceasing from work was between Him and Israel throughout all **their** generations. When God gave Israel the Sabbath covenant and commandment, it was to help them look back at Genesis and realize that salvation was by grace through faith and not by works. It was to give them a physical example of the spiritual rest of salvation.

The Sabbath is bigger than trying to take one day off a week. It is realizing that salvation is by grace, through faith; it is resting in God everyday, and every moment of everyday.

You are still going to get hammered by people who say either that you must worship on Saturday, or that Sunday is the new Saturday.

1. You are **not** required to worship on Saturday. It is permissible to regard any day as special, but it is wrong to make it a moral duty for oneself or others. Looking back on the weekly Sabbath Day, the New Testament says the following: "**One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the**

day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it... Let us not therefore judge one another any more" (Romans 14:5-6, 13). "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

2. Sunday is **not** the new Saturday. Christians are to be faithful to local church meetings whenever they are held (Hebrews 10:25), and any day is appropriate for a spiritual observance (Romans 14:5-6). From the earliest times, Christians have usually conducted their main worship services on Sunday. Early believers chose the day of Christ's resurrection to emphasize that they were not under the old covenant, which the Sabbath symbolized, but under the new covenant, which His resurrection instituted. Thus the believers at Troas met on the first day of the week for worship (Acts 20:7), and Paul instructed the Corinthians to collect offerings on the first day (First Corinthians 16:2). John was "*in the Spirit on the Lord's day*" when Jesus appeared to him in a vision (Revelation 1:10). Jesus Himself established the precedent of meeting on the first day. Not only did He first appear to His assembled disciples on the evening of His resurrection day (John 20:19), but His next appearance to the group was on the same day one week later (John 20:26). And the Holy Spirit fell on the assembled disciples on Pentecost Sunday. Sunday was a normal work day in the pagan Roman Empire, so Christians usually met on that day in the early morning or in the evening. After Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal and then began supporting it, he proclaimed Sunday an official holiday. He did not originate Sunday worship but merely legalized and facilitated the existing practice. **There is no teaching anywhere in the New Testament that makes Sunday the Christian Sabbath Day.**

It's not a matter of 'keeping' or 'observing' one day out of seven. **You and I are to celebrate the Sabbath by resting in God 24-7.**

Because of the thousands of man-made restrictions regarding it, the Sabbath was more tiresome than the six days devoted to one's occupation. *It was harder to "rest" than to earn a living.* With regards to our incident in Luke Chapter Six, the man-made rules stated,

“If a person rolls wheat to remove the husks, it is [harvesting]. If he rubs the heads of wheat, it is threshing. If he cleans off the side..., it is sifting. If he bruises the ears, it is grinding. And if he throws it up in his hand, it is winnowing.”

If you think this was ridiculous... *You're right!* But so is any approach to the Sabbath that is based on precepts. Instead, you celebrate the Sabbath by following a **Person**. Let's see how it unfolds in our verses.

Luke 6:1 Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate *them*, rubbing *them* in *their* hands.

Luke 6:2 And some of the Pharisees said to them, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”

The Pharisees were following Jesus, but not followers of Jesus. There are a lot of people who seem outwardly spiritual by their keeping of certain precepts; but they don't know the Person.

These guys were following Jesus to find ways to accuse Him. They may have been counting His steps – *since there were precepts regarding how far you could walk on the Sabbath!*

We read, “*on the second Sabbath after the first.*” This might mean that a special day followed right after Saturday and was observed as a Sabbath. It is interesting to note that there were other “Sabbaths” besides Saturday. And not just days; there were Sabbath years. Every seventh year was to be observed as a special Sabbath year. And every fiftieth year, which would be the year following seven times seven years, was to be the Year of Jubilee – again, a special Sabbath year. As far as I know, those who insist that you ‘keep’ the Sabbath ignore these other Sabbaths!

It was lawful to glean from the edges of the fields. The thing that the Pharisees said was “*not lawful*” was their own interpretation of the Sabbath. What the disciples were doing constituted the ‘work’ of harvesting, threshing, sifting, grinding, and winnowing.

Luke 6:3 But Jesus answering them said, “*Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him:*

Luke 6:4 how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?"

This Old Testament story is found in First Samuel Chapter Twenty-one. David and his men were fleeing from wicked King Saul. The "showbread" refers to twelve loaves of consecrated bread that were in the Holy Place of the Jewish Tabernacle. God Himself, in Scripture, had said only the priests were allowed to eat that bread. David quite literally broke God's law by eating the bread. Even though he broke God's law, he was held in esteem by the Jews. After all, *he was David!* He was the man after God's own heart.

Jesus and His disciples were not breaking God's law – only violating the man-made rules. If the Pharisees could excuse David for actually breaking God's law, how could they find fault with Jesus and His disciples for only breaking their arbitrary laws?

By His question Jesus underlined an important truth: There are occasions in which you might be allowed to break the letter of God's law in order to keep its spirit. God's law regarding the showbread was never meant to allow anyone to starve to death!

Luke 6:5 And He said to them, "The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

If you are "Lord of the Sabbath," then you are the One Who gave mankind the Sabbath in the beginning. Jesus was claiming to be there, back in Exodus, at the giving of the Ten Commandments; and back further, in Genesis, when He rested from His work of creation.

Not only that... There is a sense in which Jesus was claiming to be the fulfillment of the Sabbath. The Sabbath, you remember, is the picture God gave to mankind of resting in Him for salvation. When He is your Lord, He is the Lord of the Sabbath-rest God promised you. Your salvation, your spiritual rest, is found in a daily, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

You can't 'keep' the Sabbath by any set of precepts that tell you what to do or not to do on Saturday or on Sunday. The Sabbath is following the Person Who gave it to you. You can (and should)

celebrate the Sabbath **everyday** by resting in the Person of Jesus as your Lord.

OK, I understand that much... But how do I live as a person resting in Jesus everyday?

#2 You Celebrate The Sabbath
By Finding The Principles That Govern It
(v6-11)

The healing in verses six through eleven fill-out our perspective on the Sabbath and tell us how we celebrate it everyday.

Luke 6:6 Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered.
Luke 6:7 So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him.

Religion always leads to this kind of contradiction. Religion looks for ways to condemn; Jesus looks for ways to express God's compassion.

There is speculation among scholars that the Pharisees 'planted' this guy to tempt Jesus to heal so they might accuse Him. I don't know about that... But I do know that you should not use God's people to achieve your own goals – even if they seem to be godly goals.

Luke 6:8 But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, "**Arise and stand here.**" And he arose and stood.
Luke 6:9 Then Jesus said to them, "**I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?"**
Luke 6:10 And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, "**Stretch out your hand.**" And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

How could the man comply? Didn't Jesus ask him to do the very thing he was not able to do? It is a stunning and dramatic illustration of something we say all the time: **God's command are His enablings.** Anything God tells **you** to do, you are also enabled to do.

To put it another way: It is a picture of what it means to rest in Jesus. The man put forth no effort, but was empowered to do the impossible.

Luke 6:11 But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Sabbath-keeping by precept resulted – and still results – in religious bondage.

Their precepts limited the amount of medical help you could offer a person on the Sabbath. Jesus did something in His question: He established that **principles** are more important than **precepts**. We said a precept was a very specific rule, prescribing or prohibiting certain actions under certain circumstances. A principle is a general guideline intended to recommend different actions under a variety of circumstances.

You see right away that you are doomed if you want to live by a strict set of precepts. *You cannot have a rule or regulation for every possible circumstance!* Every time you establish a new rule, there will be a new wrinkle to consider. All you do is add burden upon burden.

If, on the other hand, your principle is to “do good” and to “save life...” Well, ***then you always know how to respond!***

The Sabbath is not a matter of setting aside one day in seven to rest and worship God. It's not a matter of deciding whether that day is still Saturday, or if it is Sunday. It is not a matter of defining what constitutes ‘work’ and what constitutes ‘worship.’

The true Sabbath is the spiritual rest that Jesus promised. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," He invited, "and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Conclusion

The Sabbath is celebrating your salvation **everyday** by resting in the Person of Jesus and living moment-by-moment according to the principles you discover in His Word.

Speaking of His Person and His principles: Always remember that any principles you think you discover in the Bible must harmonize with the Person of Jesus. Principles can become just as burdensome as precepts unless they reflect the love, joy, hope, and peace that are yours to experience in the Person of Jesus Christ.