

**Text:** Mark 2:23-28

**Date:** June 3, 2018

**Focus:** Jesus came to give us true and lasting rest.

**Function:** As Christians, we honor the Sabbath Day as we rest in Jesus.

*In Jesus Name, Amen.*

Today I want to talk to you about one of the dirty little secret sins of the Christian Church. Now, there are some sins that Christians have no problem talking about. There are certain sins that we have no problem preaching about, no problem condemning. You all can probably think of a few of those. But, then there are the sins we have a harder time addressing. Today I'd like to talk to you about one of those. It's a sin that knows no boundaries – it strikes both pastors and people. All of us struggle with this. None of us talk about it, but it's there in each of our lives. It's a sin that most of us are pretty comfortable with. Our society actually promotes and encourages it. I think a lot of us actually feel pretty proud when we commit this sin. We rarely feel guilty about it.

The sin I'd like to talk with you about today is the sin of breaking the Third Commandment. We don't talk about the Third Commandment very often, the commandment that tells us to Honor and Keep the Sabbath Day – to quit our working and our worrying for one day. Sabbath is a funny sounding word, but quite literally it means to quit. To stop. That's what God wants us to do for one day a week. And we're not good at that. But, it is just as serious of a commandment as any other. And it's not optional. It's not a nicety. It's a command. The problem is that we don't know how to stop working. I read this week that in America in 2016 there were 658 MILLION vacation days that went unused. We take pride in never taking a day off. Or we think that if stop working that the world will fall apart. We thumb our noses at people who don't work as hard as we do – we call them lazy. And that's not ok. God knows we need rest, and He wants us to set aside one day to do nothing. To simply *be*. And most of us are really bad at that. We have a Sabbath problem.

And this, by the way, is not a new problem to our generation. It's been a problem ever since the beginning – which is why God had to create the commandment in the first place – we are wired to work and worry – we don't know how to limit ourselves. We know that it was a problem in Jesus' generation too. You see, in our Gospel reading for today Jesus and His disciples were walking from town to town on the Sabbath day. And while they were walking, they got hungry. And so Jesus disciples, as they walked, began to pluck some grain from the farm fields they walked through. Which, by the way, was totally allowable by God. Deuteronomy 23:25 makes a provision for travelers to pluck grain from the fields they passed through – this wasn't stealing. They weren't breaking any commandment.

But, the Pharisees didn't see it that way. They saw it as a breaking of the Third Commandment. And that's because in their zealotry to prove their worth and protect their Law they had created all these extraneous rules around God's command. While God simply said, "Stop your working for one day", the Pharisees began to legislate how many steps were considered "working". The Pharisees had decided that if you lit a candle on the Sabbath Day, that was breaking the commandment. They decided if you looked in a mirror – that was wrong. These

religious leaders didn't know how to stop working – kind of like us. They proved their worth by how hard they WORKED to keep the Sabbath.

What the Pharisees had done was they had taken this day which was given to God's people as a gift – a gift of rest and peace – and they had turned it into a burden. It was suddenly more work to keep the Sabbath than it was to honor God the rest of the 6 days of the week! They treated the Sabbath Day like it was this Holy Object that people needed to serve, rather than how God saw it, which was as an object, a day, that was meant to serve and refresh the people! The Pharisees had completely lost sight of the original intent of the Sabbath.

And I think we have too. And so, I'd like to quickly remind you of the blessings and benefits of honoring the Sabbath – of setting aside one day to simply be.

The first blessing of keeping a Sabbath is the very practical physical, emotional, and spiritual rest, recovery and rejuvenation it gives. God knew, when He ordered our world, how much our bodies and souls needed to rest. Today there are all sorts of studies that prove this out. And so if we actually keep a Sabbath day, if we actually take one day to rest, our bodies and souls will be much better off!

The second blessing of keeping a Sabbath is the spiritual blessing. Keeping a Sabbath Day re-orientates our faith and trust towards Jesus. You see, really, the Sabbath Day is all about Jesus. God knows that taking a day of rest is good for us, but it's never enough. Even if we kept the Sabbath holy every week, we'd still be tired. True rest is not found in a day, but in a person. True rest is only found in Jesus. And the Sabbath Day points us to Him.

By taking a whole day to do NOTHING productive, we are forced to recognize that God continues working even when we quit. And we're lead to trust that He is in control and that His work never ends. And so, once a week, God wants us to stop talking so that we listen to Him. He wants us to stop working so that we can reflect on His loving work. He wants us to quit worrying, so that we can trust that He is in control. One of the spiritual blessings is that by keeping a Sabbath we recognize that were just not as crucial as we think we are. The world keeps spinning even when we're not working. God is in control. By not concerning ourselves with our work for one day, we have the time to focus on the work of JESUS. And then, when we do go back to work, we're reminded that we are only joining in on work that God has already begun and that He will see through to completion.

So, maybe your wondering, what does a SABBATH day look like? Practically speaking, how do you keep the third commandment. The first thing I want to say is that it doesn't matter what day of the week it is. What matters is that there is one day of no work. It could be Monday. It could be Sunday. Less important is when, more important is that you honor it.

Well, there are two words we can use to describe a Sabbath day. The Sabbath is a day to pray and play. On the Sabbath we pray. I don't mean that we need to spend half the day with our hands folded and eyes closed talking to God. But, we pray. For example, we come to worship. We receive God's gifts. We remember His promises. We speak to Him in prayer. The Sabbath is a day to focus on our good and gracious God and to trust in His mighty work.

It's also a day to play. Sometimes we think that playing is something that kids do, but when we're adults, we don't need it. But adults need to play to. We need to stop our working and engage in things that are completely unproductive. We need to play. We need to read books or watch movies. We need to hike or run. We need to laugh with friends and catch up with family. We need to do things that don't add tangible "value" to the world as we become less self-conscious and worried. By spending time in play we are reminded that it's not all up to me. The world isn't hanging on my shoulders. Playing allows us to simply be, with God. And to not find my value in what I can give to God, but simply in who He has made me to be.

If you don't mind, I'll share with you my own Sabbath practice. I should admit first that I am not a perfect Sabbath keeper. I am definitely still tempted to continue my working and worrying, and honoring the Sabbath is a weekly struggle. But, for me, my Sabbath is Monday. Sunday I'm serving here, with you all, and so I take Monday off. Usually, I begin my day with a cup of coffee and my Bible. I'll read a chapter and then pray. And then I run. That's my play. I'll spend a couple hours at a trail somewhere listening to music or lately, just listening to the sounds of nature. After that, I'll come home, have lunch, take a nap, and then spend a couple hours doing odd little jobs around the house. I might read a book. I'll cook dinner, which I enjoy, and that's pretty much it. I don't check my email. I don't look at my phone much. I try not to evaluate my last sermon or look forward to the next one. Just a day to pray and play.

One of the ways I know that we all have a Sabbath problem is that whenever I ask someone how they are doing, or whenever someone asks me how I am, I find that I hear AND give this response – I'll say, "How are you?" and the person will respond, "I'm good, I'm busy, but good!". And that's just kind of natural. We've heard it so many times it doesn't even strike us as wrong. In fact, being busy is almost a badge of honor in our society. And that's not ok.

So, here is my parting challenge to you – besides for taking a Sabbath Day each week. The next time someone asks you, "How are you?" tell them, "Well rested". You'll get some funny looks. People will think you're crazy – or lazy. They might say back to you, "Well then get to work!" But, that's an answer I think God would be happy with. After all, that's why Jesus lived and died and rose – to give us rest. So that we don't have to work for our forgiveness. So that we don't have to worry about where we stand with Him. So that we don't have to strive and struggle to prove our worth, but that instead we could simply rest. Jesus lived, and died, and rose so that you could be well-rested.

In Jesus Name, Amen.