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Jesus said, “The Sabbath was created for human, not humans for the Sabbath.  
So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Mark 2:27-28

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How does your day begin? For many people, the alarm clock screams, beginning the day. There is weariness even before people get out of bed, thinking about what lies before them. The weariness might come because the workplace is such, it seeps into ones soul. The weariness comes because the challenges and demands of family (and family conflict and family sins) are such, one wonders how one will cope. The weariness comes because of the ache and pain in the body is such, one wonders how one will cope. The weariness comes from the heartache of grief and loss, and each moment of every day is a reminder of a person who is no longer here on this earth. The weariness comes from the sea of haunted memories from the pains that others from the past have inflicted. And for some, this weariness is masked in frenetic activity, trying to mask the sense of ‘nothingness’ in the soul.

Of course, there are others who never seem to be weary and life seems always to go well – albeit many people are left scrambling around them trying to cope with the wreckage left behind. The weariness is not of body or soul, but of spirit, in that there are those whose moral compass seems so astray they can never really find true rest within.

Are there days and times when you are totally exhausted, and you wish to find a place away from everyone to have a rest – without anyone actually realising it? Do you wish that somehow you could simply ‘hide away’ from all your troubles, hide away from that restlessness of the soul? What does the Psalmist say? He says (Psalm 139:7): “Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence?”

You and I know that God has said we are to ‘Keep His Sabbath Day holy’. We are called to rest. But what does that mean for us? Is it as simple as taking one day every week to ‘do nothing’? Or is it something else, something far more profound than ceasing to ‘do things’?

The Hebrew word “sha-bat,” from which “Sabbath” comes, means to stop. The Sabbath day was commanded by God as a weekly day of rest and worship. Originally the seventh, or last, day of the week, the day we call Saturday, the early Christian church shifted the focus to Sunday, in remembrance of Jesus’ resurrection.

As you know, this ‘rest’ goes back to the beginning of creation itself. We read that ‘On the seventh day God rested’. And so the commandment to ‘keep the Sabbath holy’ is grounded in creation. Exodus 20:11 states: “For in six days the

LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

But what was God doing here? Did He need to go back into His ‘man-cave’ after a busy week? In Genesis 2:1-3, we have a summary of the first Sabbath on which God rested from his work of creation. His rest was not one of inactivity, for he was still engaged in his works of providence; nor was not the rest of indifference, as if he was not interested in his creation; and it was not the rest of exhaustion, as if he had stretched his powers to the limits. Instead God’s rest included rejoicing in the finished work of creation. God takes great pleasure in his actions because they are perfect.

And so this is why the ‘rest’ of the Sabbath Day is also anchored in our redemption. Deuteronomy 5:15 states, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

When Jesus entered a grainfield on a Sabbath He already had confronted religious leaders about the Sabbath (John 5, which occurs before Mark 2). Here Jesus had established His attitude toward the Sabbath in the healing of a man who had been ill for 38 years. John 5 is the first Sabbath confrontation, and the Lord does not back down. In fact, in verse 18 it says they were seeking all the more to kill Him because He was making Himself equal with God. It is after this that Jesus returns to Galilee. And He's going to confront that same issue in Galilee, verse 23. “It happened that He was passing through the grain fields on the Sabbath and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain.”

The Pharisees were saying to Him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? God had said ‘Keep this day holy’, and so the Pharisees and scribes had developed all kinds of regulations so one could ‘cease from work’. You could not bathe for fear when the water fell off of you it might wash the floor. If a candle was lit, you couldn't put it out. If it wasn't lit, you couldn't light it. Chairs couldn't be moved because they might make a rut. Women couldn't look in a glass or they might find a white hair and be tempted to pull it out. It goes on and on.

But note that the Sabbath is integrated into the weekly rhythms of Jesus. He was always in Synagogues ‘on the Sabbath’. And it was then that He healed people.

Jesus referred back to the creation itself, and how ‘rest’ is part of God’s plan for us – even in the Garden of Eden before ‘The Fall’.

But Jesus also speaks of His own identity when He says, “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” To claim then to be Lord of the Sabbath was

essentially to claim to be God. And anyone who does that is either God or a blasphemer.

Mark says (literally) that Jesus' disciples were "making a way" through the grainfields (2:23). That reminds us of the "way" theme in Mark's Gospel. Jesus is on the "way of the LORD" (1:2-3) and His disciples are following Him on that way. As they went, they picked grain and ate it (Deut. 23:25). The Pharisees saw this as a violation of the Law forbidding harvesting on the Sabbath (Ex. 34:21). The Sabbath was a symbol of Jewish identity. True Jews kept the Sabbath; false Jews didn't. But Jesus' disciples aren't. Jesus responds by pointing to David (1 Sam. 21). Like Jesus, David was anointed as king but wasn't on the throne yet. He asked Ahimelech the high priest for bread. In the Law, soldiers in camp are similar to priests (e.g., Deut. 23:9-14), and so Ahimelech gave him the showbread which only priests could eat (Lev. 24). Jesus is identifying Himself as the new David, the king of Israel.

Where can we find rest in this world? Only in Jesus! Only Jesus the Lord of Sabbath has the power of salvation, the power of forgiveness and the power to free those enslaved under the yoke of sin

Where is your rest? Colossians 2:16-17 – “So let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance of Christ.” Romans 14:5-6 – “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it in the Lord.

The focus is to be ‘on the Lord’. Jesus is Lord, even of the Sabbath. What does it truly mean to ‘rest’ in God’s presence? First, we simply ‘rest’ in the fact that God is God, and He has brought His incredible love to us in Jesus! Second, we can rest in His amazing love for us.

Sabbath wasn't just a day not to work, but a day of remembering God's creation and His redemption of Israel. This is what being a disciple of Jesus is all about: sitting at His feet and rejoicing in the grace He gives whereby we know He saved us from our sins.

That's why church services are a blessing for us. They may not meet some of our perceived needs for entertainment or excitement or foot-stomping music or intellectual stimulation or a how-to-manual for fixing life's problems. But they meet our real need. They bring us Jesus. They bring us Jesus, not as a shadow, but as flesh and blood, the incarnate God, our crucified and risen Saviour. He comes to you through His Word and Sacraments. He holds before you His nail-pierced hands so that you know you are forgiven. That's our greatest need.

We are called to keep it holy. But the “sanctifying” that God speaks of in His Word is not a result of what we do on the Sabbath. It is the other way around.

Sanctifying the Sabbath is what God does in us through His life-giving, proclaimed, taught, and living Word. "I am the Lord who sanctifies you" (Leviticus 22:32).

For Jesus, Sabbath is about God's grace, and a time of healing. In the New Testament, Jesus says he comes not to destroy the law but to fulfil it (Matthew 5). One of those laws was the Sabbath law. Jesus fulfils the Sabbath law by opening the way for us (through His death and resurrection) to enter God's Sabbath (rest) by enabling us to have a restored relationship with God. Those who are Christian are in God's Sabbath now and always, so there is now no need for one special day each week. In fact, in a sense, every day is now a Sabbath day to be kept holy.

"The law says, 'Do this,' and it is never done. Grace says, 'Believe in this, and everything is already done.'" Everything necessary for our eternal salvation has already been done. As Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished." This is the reality of the Sabbath rest. The rest from Jesus comes because He kept every commandment. When Jesus went to Calvary's cross, bleeding and dying under the curse of God, that was Jesus paying the price for sin. Jesus made good on every promise of God. And because He did, true rest, spiritual rest, eternal rest is ours

Sabbath is more than downtime. Psalm 62 states, "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him." There is no doubt that God made us to receive certain amounts of rest in life. But, more importantly, God made us to have spiritual rest. He has sent His Son to carry the burden of all our sins and die for them. Now, our living Saviour offers eternal rest and powerfully invites us to come to Him by faith, to rest in His forgiveness, and to walk, yoked with Him, to eternal life! Jesus is our rest. We live in Him. He is our peace and rest! Amen.