

Mark - Lord Even of the Sabbaths

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the true purpose of the Sabbath as a divine gift for humanity, emphasizing that human need should take precedence over rigid interpretations of the law.

Duration: 45:36

Scripture: Matthew 12:1-14, Mark 2:23-28, Luke 6:1-11

Topics: "Sabbath"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Peter and John healing a lame man outside the temple. The preacher emphasizes the importance of having the same spirit as Peter and John, who relied on the power of Jesus to perform miracles. The preacher then shifts to discussing the actions of Jesus and his disciples on the Sabbath. The Pharisees criticize Jesus' disciples for plucking grains on the Sabbath, considering it unlawful. The preacher encourages the audience to study the biblical passages in Mark, Matthew, and Luke to gain a complete understanding of Jesus' response and how he honors the Sabbath according to God's requirements.

Transcript

Would you be kind enough to turn in your scriptures to Mark chapter 2 and the basis of our meditation this morning is found in the passage that begins with verse 23 in chapter 2 and goes on to the sixth verse of chapter 3. Now we're not going to read that passage again at this point but we shall be referring to what is there found as we go on with our exposition and our application of the Lord's Word. This passage needs very careful handling I believe in our particular context, our own cultural context today. Things have so radically changed since the day of our Lord.

Here in this particular context in Mark 2 and 3 Jesus was dealing with people who were obsessed with allegedly giving God his due on the Sabbath day. That was the motive. But in order to do that they had a myriad explanations and laws and rules and regulations which they said we must keep or the people of that day must keep in order to honor the Sabbath day.

The intention was good, there is no question about that. But they had come to see the Sabbath day as an institution that required the keeping of a myriad of countless rules and regulations that they themselves had brought into existence. Now in our contemporary situation the ethos, the atmosphere is altogether different.

Really there are very few people today, anywhere, who believe that God requires one day in seven to be specifically, exclusively his own. So that in accordance with the Word of Scripture it is set apart from the other six days. Now this is not to say that God doesn't require all that we have and all that we are on the rest of the six days of the week.

He does, we shall say something about that earlier on. He is Lord of all, but he is Lord even of the Sabbath. And apparently according to Scripture God has instituted one day in seven when he requires something extra.

He requires that whole day for himself. Now I am sometimes puzzled when I find people within the Christian church who attempting to be pious show nothing other than piousness. And if you examine your dictionary you will see what that means.

It means that there are people who attempt to be wiser than the all-wise God. If he says I sanctify one day in seven to be exclusively my own, don't let us be so arrogant as to say well there is no need for that, I am giving him all he requires on the rest of the six days. God is wiser than we are.

And we must always be careful lest our alleged piety degenerated into a sinful piousness. Jesus is fast making enemies at this point. There is a sense in which the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is already emerging on the scene of his life.

And he is doing so very especially because men have ideas and thoughts as to what the Messiah should do. And he is not doing that. He is going quite contrary to the institutions of men and what men expect him to do if he is the Messiah.

For example, Jesus and his disciples, as you saw the other day Greg Schaaf was preaching in my absence, Jesus and his disciples join a party. You imagine they go to a party organized by one of the people who are allegedly, according to the common standards, one of the real bad nuts of the day. He has been converted and now he has arranged a party for his old comrades and here they have invited Jesus and his disciples and behold Jesus and his disciples are there in the party.

Scribes and Pharisees shuddered at the very notion of it. This kind of thing should never take place. Then you have the other side of the coin.

We were looking at it last Lord's Day. Jesus and his disciples did not fast. As the disciples of John the Baptist and as the Pharisees fasted they went to a feast but they did not fast.

And Jesus explains why. He says the thing is impossible. You see, when I am with my disciples I am the bridegroom of prophecy.

I am the bridegroom, the husband of God's people. And if they've got me, their mood is such they couldn't fast. Oh, they might put on sackcloth and ashes but it would be hypocritical.

If they know me and love me and recognize me for the person I am, they simply can't fast. It's a time of gladness. But one day I leave them, well then they'll fast.

And you see he's cutting right across so much that the, may I say, the ecclesiastics of his day had come to expect. But here he's reaching a new high watermark. Here he's touching something which is absolutely the sacred cow of the Pharisees.

He is really refusing to toe the line as far as their expectations from him relating to the Sabbath day. And it is no wonder that as he proceeds he so arouses his critics to a frenzied hate that the passage ends up with their entering into a murder pact. Verse 6 of chapter 3. They go out and they get hold of the Herodians and they say, let's get rid of this fellow.

We can't put up with him. Now I want us to look first of all at the charge brought against Jesus or against his disciples. And then we shall see how Jesus justifies that charge.

And then we shall see how he honors the Sabbath according to the requirement of God, if not according to the expectations of man. First of all, the charge against Jesus. Look at verses 23 and 24.

Now I want you to check me this morning. I want you to be quite sure that what I'm saying is biblical. Because the thrust of the message this morning may be a little bit hard at the end.

And I want you to make sure that I'm saying things that are biblical so you might like to follow very clearly, very carefully. One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields. And as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

And the Pharisees said to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? Now look at the day. The day is the Sabbath day. We are dealing here with a divine institution when we are considering the Sabbath.

It is as old as creation. Genesis 2, 1 to 3. Although, of course, it was stressed in a very special way as something that God required of the people of Israel as his own people. And something that is incorporated very especially into the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments.

The Sabbath of the Lord, as it is called in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 10, the Sabbath of the Lord thy God was foreseen by the prophet Isaiah, much later on, of course. It was foreseen by the prophet Isaiah as something that was going to linger on into a coming age. Not something that was going to pass away.

The prophet Isaiah, in chapter 56, foresees that the Sabbath of the Lord is going to be something that will linger on and something that will continue to require obedience from the people of God and its being honored in the day, as he puts it, when the Lord's deliverance would be revealed. And to go a little further on, when God's house would become a house of prayer for all nations. Now you remember that our Lord Jesus Christ said that that was exactly what the house of the Lord should be in his day and in his age.

That's why he cleansed the temple. He said, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. And you are turning it upside down and because of that I'm sending you out.

He expected that in his day. Therefore, if we rightly understand, the prophet Isaiah expected the Sabbath institution to continue on into New Testament times. So that when we read in the New Testament of the Lord's day, I at any rate in my simplicity, believe that it is exactly the same phenomenon at this as that concerning which I read in the book of Exodus when I read slightly different words, the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.

The Lord's day. Now of course, in between times it has undergone a great change, a great metamorphosis. In the beginning the Sabbath represented and symbolized God's cessation from the work of creation.

God finished what he had done and he rested the seventh day and he hallowed it, he sanctified it. He set it aside and he said, I'm resting on this seventh day because all that I was going to do in a sense has been finished. In the New Testament, God enters more fully into that experience of rest when he not only accomplishes the work of creation that is done, finished, but he adds to that the work of our redemption in Christ.

And when Jesus uttered his word on the cross, it is finished. This was a moment for the celebration of rest in a way in which God could never rest hitherto. So that the principle, the concept of the Sabbath has undergone a metamorphosis, but it's the same thing underneath.

Whether we look at it in its purely Old Testament context and with its Old Testament complexion or with its New Covenant complexion. Now here in Mark, of course, the day is the Jewish Sabbath before its Lord by his deed of resurrection, if not by a word of command, caused it to be changed from the seventh to the first day of the week in the weekly cycle. It's the Jewish Sabbath.

Now look at the deed, the charge brought against these disciples. What have they done? What have they done on the Lord's day, which is contrary to the requirements according to these judges of men, the Pharisees? Well, it's so simple. On the Sabbath morning they were walking through the, I was going to say cornfields, that's what we would say elsewhere in the world apart from North America, but we must have saved here.

The grain fields. Walking through the grain fields on the Sabbath day and his disciples picked some heads of grain. Luke adds that they rubbed the grains together in their hands evidently to get rid of the husks, what we would call the chaff if they were threshing, and then they proceeded to eat the kernels.

The deed is as simple as that, as simple and apparently unoffensive as that. But look at the disapproval. The Pharisees said to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? Now to the Pharisees who have, as we've already indicated, made so many rules in order allegedly to fence the Sabbath from wrong usage, this action was altogether wrong.

It was obnoxious. According to their understanding, not according to scripture, but according to their understanding of it, it involved the combined sin of harvesting, gathering grain, and threshing at one and the same time. In short, according to rabbinical understanding it contravened the commandment of God that you do no work on the Sabbath day, but you rest.

The work they have done is gathering in the grain and threshing it so that they can eat it, albeit in a simplified form. Now the rabbis taught that. This is not my idea.

This is all written down for you to study if you'd like to turn to the proper sources. Now probably in our Western world, we wouldn't criticize the disciples of our Lord for that, but I guess if you and I had been bystanders, we might have criticized the disciples of our Lord for another reason. We might have criticized them for what appears at first sight to be an act of petty pilfering.

What right are these guys to walk in somebody else's field and pluck the grains? What are they doing there? What right have they got? You see, there is no basis for our criticism either. Oh, if only we knew our Old Testament better, and especially the book of Deuteronomy, where we see something of the heart of God and his concern for the poor of the land. You know, my friends, I'm sure we need to read this book of Deuteronomy more, especially as the number of unemployed people are increasing.

God has something for you and for me, men and women of God, Christian people who have a good job, who have a regular wage. He wants us to see those who have no work and who have no means of livelihood in a new light. Our God has always been concerned for the needy, and there is a streak in our capitalistic society which is unprepared for that.

Let's be very careful. In the book of Deuteronomy, I read this. When you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes.

My word. Is this right? It is. When you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in your basket or in your vessel.

Again, when you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain. Now, have you got the picture? Here is a divine ordinance. Here are people envisaged by our God, the great, gracious Creator, whom men make to appear as a blaggard of a king so often.

Here is our great-hearted God going on record and telling his people, look, man, what you have is not exclusively your own. You may bring your tithe, but what is left is not your own. If there is a poor man who comes along to your vineyard, he has the right to his fill according to his need.

I say so, says the Lord. If you are my people, I say so. And if somebody walks through your grain field and he is hungry, he has the right to as much as he needs.

I say so. And you see, this is what it means to live in a theocracy, under the rule of God, in the kingdom of God. We play, we give lip service to the rule of God, Jesus as Lord, but so often it is just lip service.

There then is the charge leveled against the disciples. It does not stand. Neither would our charge stand.

But the question is, what does Jesus say about it? And this brings us, of course, to a better understanding, though we cannot deal with this subject this morning in any extended form. It is too big, it is too large, but it does give us a window, as it were, into the heart and mind of our Lord as to what he thinks of all this and then, behind there, what he thinks of the Sabbath and how our Christian Sabbath should be kept. I want you to look now, then, at the action justified by Jesus.

And in order to get the complete picture, may I say to you, because I may not have the opportunity to do it, you really need to read Mark's passage in conjunction with Matthew 12, 1 to 14, and Luke 6, 1 to 11, where Matthew and Luke give their versions. There are one or two differences, or they bring something extra in. And it makes a beautiful picture when you take the whole together.

Now, the first thing that Jesus does is this. You've got the picture. Here they've brought forward their criticism.

What are your disciples doing? It's all wrong, it's all unlawful. Now, the first thing Jesus does is this. He refers to a precedent that should, in measure, pacify the Pharisees, if not justify the disciples.

Look at verses 25 and 26. He said to them, have you never read? I don't know whether I'm naughty, but I think our Lord had a great sense of humor sometimes. These are the fellows, you see, the know-alls.

They're sitting in judgment upon everybody, everybody, everywhere. The scribes and the Pharisees, they're always on the judge's seat, judging everybody. We know everybody.

We've the right to say the last word. And he says to them, haven't you ever read? Isn't your reading as wide as that? Didn't you know? He needles them. He's not running away from them.

He needles them because they are ignorant of some very basic and fundamental things. Have you never read what David did? Now, our Lord puts his finger on the reason why his disciples ate the grains in the field. That's what he's going to do.

He's referring here to an incident that you will find recorded in 1 Samuel 21, verses 1 to 6. What David did. It's recorded there. Now, the point of contact is not that both deeds were done on the Sabbath day.

That's incidental. The point of contact is this. Why did David do it? Why did the disciples do what they have done? Why did David go into the house of the Lord and eat what is called by the King James Version, the showbread? What the RSV calls the bread of the Passover.

What the New International Version calls consecrated bread. That's what he did. Why did David go into the house of the Lord and eat the bread that only the priests had the right to eat by divine proposition? Well, says the passage, and our Lord knew full well, they did it because of need.

David was hungry. Hungry. Really hungry.

He and his men were terribly hungry, and it was an evil day. I don't want to go into all the details. They're not all relevant.

The point is, David and his followers come to that point. They come to the Lord's house, and they're desperately hungry. David asks the high priest, have you got any food yet? No, he says, none at all.

Only the showbread. Only, only these sacred twelve cakes. Now, if you know your Old Testament, you will remember that these cakes, or should I call them loaves, they were, they were, they were, the word is not cooked.

What's the word? They were baked every Friday on the Presence. They were baked every Friday. And then on the Sabbath, on the seventh day, the stale twelve cakes were taken out, and the fresh twelve cakes were brought in.

They were loaves, little loaves. The showbread having a very real symbolical, symbolical significance, indicating that God was the giver of all, and they were dependent upon God for all, and there they were. Now David then was so terribly hungry that he asked that he and his men be allowed to eat that sacred, sanctified bread.

And Jesus justifies it. Not in so many words, but by his whole attitude. He says David did that.

Now he says, this is exactly the reason why my disciples, my followers, ate the grain in the field. It's not because of cussiveness. Not because they were setting themselves up against what you deem to be accepted on the Sabbath.

Not even that. They ate because they were hungry. They were hungry.

And the argument that Jesus brings forward is this, you see. He argues, it would seem, that if it was right for David to eat such consecrated bread because he was hungry, surely it was not wrong for Jesus' disciples to eat some grains for the same reason. Underlying this fairly self-evident justification for the

Disciples' Act, of course, is the basic principle that the ceremonial law, and especially mere human rules and regulations, must always give way before genuine need and especially before human hunger.

Jesus is not saying, I don't want anybody to misunderstand me. Jesus is not saying, if you're hungry then you can break the moral law, the Ten Commandments, and you can steal. He's not saying that.

He's not saying that. But what he is saying is this, that no man-made rules, no rabbinical rules, should intervene to keep a man from being satisfied legitimately according to the provisions of Scripture on the Sabbath day. If a man is hungry, that man has a right to food.

Now, this is linked up with the second thing that Jesus does to answer this problem. He proceeds to enunciate a principle that adds emphasis to his justification. And this is the principle.

He said to them, the Sabbath, he says, was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Now here he puts it positively and negatively. Let's try to get the main meaning of it.

Positively, our Lord says, the Sabbath was made for man. Now you see, the scribes and the Pharisees were really acting as if man had been made for the Sabbath. And the man was told the line to what they deemed to be necessary in order to respect the Sabbath.

Jesus says, the boot's on the other foot. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. This divine institution was not brought into existence without reason.

The divine reason for its creation was basically the good of the creatures, your good and mine. God ordained one day in seven to be a rest from labor and a rest in himself, so that man would not be destroyed by constant, unending toil, but renewed by renewing Sabbaths. I could say so much more about that, but the only thing I can say at this stage is this.

I believe that many of our periods of sickness and hospitalization and the like are nothing other than Sabbaths in arrears. We've transgressed the law of God, we've gone contrary to the will of God, we've not had one day in seven set apart exclusively for the worship of God and to be with him in his house and with his people. We've transgressed the divine law, we've gone contrary to the divine will, and we earn something for that, and largely what we earn is dis-peace in mind.

We are grated, we are torn asunder, we worry and we fret, and physically we have some ills that only come because we have so many Sabbaths in arrears. We've not known how to rest in God nor rest with God. I find this most challenging.

There are some people who can't spend twenty-four hours with God, and they talk about eternity, and they sing about heaven, and they say they're going to glory, and they'll sing with the redeemed of the Lord, and they mean to live with God forever, and quite frankly they're fed up with God at twelve noon. Now pardon me for being so blunt. They just couldn't stand a whole day with God.

They couldn't do it. They've got to get on to other things. They couldn't take, they couldn't stand God for one whole day.

Are you among them? Is your absence from the house of the Lord in the evening diet, for example, just because you can't put up with him for twenty-four hours? And you're going to heaven, you say? And you mean to spend eternity, day in and day out, with the Holy One of Israel, and you can't give him a whole

day? My friend, there's something wrong, and if you're angry with me for saying it, I want you to think of this. It may be well for you and for me, seriously, to take cognizance of this now, rather than find that in eternity we're not prepared for heaven. If there's a concert, if there's a little bit of entertainment, we can be called together, we can be convened together, we will pay any price to get there, we don't care when it starts or when it ends.

But with God, when God is the sole attraction, men and women, many of you professing to be born again, you can't take it. And I'm afraid for some of you, and I speak as your pastor, I'm afraid for some of you. In the context here our Lord means to focus attention upon the difference between God's concern for man's well-being, that's why he ordained the Sabbath, and the pharisaic carelessness for his urgent needs, even for food.

Negatively, Jesus says man was not made for the Sabbath. Man was made first in point of order, and he is also first in importance in God's reckoning. Therefore, such rabbinical and pharisaic laws as prohibit or hinder a man eating or drinking or making necessary provision for himself or even for his cattle, as Jesus says in Matthew.

All these things are contrary to God's intention, but God has an intention for his creatures. He ordained the Sabbath because he wants man to be blessed. He sees it's necessary.

Now you see, we notice what Jesus is doing. He is establishing the right use of the Sabbath over against the false views enunciated by men at their best. All these people were known as the ecclesiastical leaders, and they were generally clever people, but they've gone all astray.

And Jesus takes them back to the divine purpose, the divine meaning and intention in the Sabbath. Man needs one day with God for his own sanity as well as spirituality. But now there's a third element here.

Jesus makes a claim for his own person, and this you see, this is what brings us right into the heart of the New Testament concept. Jesus makes a claim for his own person that finally vindicates and justifies the view that he is enunciating. So he says, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Now that word even is in the text, in the Greek text. It's not, I believe, in King James and in some other versions, but it's here. He's not just Lord generally.

He's not just Lord in a vague sense. He's Lord even of the Sabbath, he tells the Pharisees. Now the title, the Son of Man is one of the most misunderstood in the entire scriptures.

It is generally understood by so many people as if when Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man, he's just saying, well, I'm one of you, a son of man. You're a son of man, I'm a son of man. You know the Hebrew word for man is Adon, Adon.

And so you can legitimately, grammatically translate it as just son of a man, son of a man. But the concept that Jesus had, though it sometimes stressed his humanity, he was one of us, he ate and drank with us, he was in need as we are in need. He was tempted like us.

He does stress that, but he also stresses another aspect of it, which is the exact opposite. An aspect which is brought out in the book of Daniel and which surely we must bring forward into the New Testament to have a proper understanding of what this title means, and especially in this context. Let me read to you from Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 and 14.

I saw, says Daniel, in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man. Now the significance of that is this, seeing him at first sight, he only appears like a son of Adam, a child of Adam, an ordinary person, nothing unusual. Here he comes from the clouds of heaven, just like a man, says Daniel, and I saw him coming.

And he came to the Ancient of Days, the great I Am, the eternal God, the ruler of the universe. He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him, now here we come to it, and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom, one that shall not be destroyed. A son of man, according to Daniel's vision, is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. And Jesus, you see, employs it in that sense.

He says, the son of man is Lord, and the word Lord means Jehovah. You see what he's claiming for himself. He claims that he is the son of man of Daniel's prophecy, and that he is the Lord, the Lord incarnate.

But someone may say, what on earth has all this got to do with the argument against the Sabbath, or for our Lord's view of the Sabbath? Well, now let me explain. Let me explain by referring to something that Matthew says. I refer to Matthew 12, verses 5 and 6. Haven't you read in the law that on the Sabbath, the priests in the temple desecrate the day, and yet, says Jesus, they are innocent? I tell you, he says, that one greater than the temple is here.

Now, what does that mean? It means this. Look, he says, you know, really, strictly speaking, the priests in the temple desecrate it every Sabbath. Well, how do they do that? Not because they go in with dirty feet or anything like that, but because the Ten Commandments tells them not to do any work on the Sabbath day.

But they do work on the Sabbath day. They offer the sacrifices. If there is a child who is to be circumcised on the eighth day, they would do that.

They do all their ministrations on the Sabbath day. But, says Jesus, they're innocent, they're guiltless, because they serve the sanctuary. Therefore, though technically they break the law, morally they're not guilty.

But now notice, notice what he says. Look, he says, there is someone standing before you who is greater than the temple. In the temple, however great and magnificent it was, with the symbol of the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, in your presence stands the Lord God Jehovah incarnate.

There is no doubt about it. Therefore, he says, if the priests can do that kind of thing, my disciples, the servants of the Lord, the Son of Man, had every right as my servants to eat those grains on the Sabbath day. I'm the Lord also of the Sabbath? My friend, is Jesus Christ so large, so divine in your concept of him, that he's Lord also of the Sabbath? Or is there a Sabbath day that you keep for yourself, as it were, which is really yours and not his? Now you will appreciate what I meant earlier when I said that this passage requires careful handling.

Jesus is here countering a group of ecclesiastics who have enunciated countless laws in order, allegedly, to safeguard the Sabbath, and they're breaking into pieces the main purpose of God for the institution. But our society, let me repeat, has gone to the very opposite extreme. We have lost, or some of us have never had the concept that lies behind the institution of the Sabbath.

The concept behind the commandment is this, that for the six days of the week we are to do all our labor for God. Now, don't miss that out, for God, because he's the God of the six days. And so we are indirectly serving God for the six days of the week, indirectly.

Now we go to our offices, we go to our schools, we go wherever we are, but if we are God's people and we want to honor him, we are serving him indirectly. You may not be able to think of the Almighty when you're doing your experiments in your laboratory. You have to keep all your mind on your work, but indirectly you're serving him.

When you're feeding the computer, what are you doing? You can't directly think of God or offer him your heart's love and your mind's thoughts. You can't do it, but indirectly you're doing it. So that six days' labor means giving him all I am, but oftentimes indirectly.

But the Sabbath day is altogether different. The Sabbath day is constituted and consecrated to give him directly, directly, face-to-face, in his house, unhurriedly. Of course you have your prayers on the six days of the week.

Of course you read the Word of God the six days of the week, but it's so hurried and you have to run here and there. Time is your master almost. But on the seventh day it's the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.

In it thou shalt do no manner of work. Don't let anything interfere directly, exclusively. This is the meaning.

Have you got the vision, my friend? Have you got the vision? The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. And in all this, of course, we are thereby symbolizing the eternal Sabbath when we shall serve him day and night in his temple. And so the Sabbath day for people like this becomes emblematic and symbolic of what is to come and the world sees these people delight in God.

I can't go on. My time is up. I was going to show how Jesus honored the Sabbath day in the next passage.

I just ask you to look at the beginning of chapter three and I want to end with one picture. You asked me, what does it mean then to do this? Well, I can only give you a picture which to me symbolizes what should be ours as the Lord's people. I want to take you back to the book of the Acts, chapter three, verses six to ten.

Now it's a picture, only a picture, and I'm applying it to the Sabbath, not that it's applied there to the subject that we are dealing with today. But I think it represents the spirit that should be ours. You remember Peter and John are involved here and there's a lame man outside the beautiful gate of the temple.

He asks Peter for help. Peter said, I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. And he took him up by the right hand and raised him up and immediately his feet and ankle bones were made strong.

And leaping up, now this is what I want, and leaping up, he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God and recognized him as the one who sat for alms at the beautiful gate of the temple. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had taken place.

How does a man enjoy the Sabbath? I'll tell you, if he's been saved, he ought to. If God has intervened in his life and he recognizes what has happened and he knows that he's free, he wants to leap, he wants to

dance, and it's the dance that brings him to the house of the Lord. It's the dance of the soul, it's the joy of the redeemed.

Men and women, has God done anything for you and for me? Then we ought to come with dancing. If there is somebody here this morning who bears the name of Christ and you find it a drudgery to come to the Lord's house, I ask you if it's the last thing I ever do from this pulpit, for God's sake and glory and your own salvation's sake, question yourself. Examine your soul.

Because if you don't examine your soul, is there something wrong? The Lord has raised us up, not from being sick physically for a number of years like that man outside the temple. He saved us from hell. He's made us children of his kingdom.

He's given us his Spirit. He's given us his Son. We've got heaven and more.

Shouldn't we be dancing? Shouldn't we be responding? Shouldn't we be honoring his concept? Shouldn't we be coming and seeing what has his word got to say about this day and every other day? And shouldn't we rejoice to do it? Of course we should. To see a man or a woman walking to the house of the Lord with a long face, as if he were going to the funeral of his best friend, you know, it's the very thing that makes Satan smile. It's far better than staying home in bed.

It's far worse, I should say, than staying home in bed. To see you and see me coming here on the Lord's Day morning, dry and drab and in the blues, and seeing us going out in the same spirit, leaping and dancing and praising God. My friend, I don't know what the Lord has to say to us this morning, but I'm quite sure he's got something.

Will you put right something if he says it's wrong? Will you come with me to the foot of the cross today and acknowledge, Lord, if I'm out of gear here, the Pharisees went in one direction. They tampered with your law. I've gone in another direction.

The opposite way, maybe. I've never thought in terms of giving you a whole day. I thought it was really quite a lot that I give you a part of it.

And I prided myself on that. I'd never be found missing in the Lord's Day morning. If you're saying that you're Lord also of the Sabbath and the whole of it, and you want me to rectify my life and bring it into alignment with that, well, if your glory is at stake, I'm willing.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us consider this together at this Christmas time to the glory of our Lord, the witness of the church, and the blessing of the world. Amen. Our Heavenly Father, hear the cry of our hearts.

Be that cry one of penitence and acknowledgement of thoughtlessness, if not of defiant sin. Hear that cry, and especially when we say that, though we are not under law in one sense, we want to be under the lordship of the lawgiver. And that's not for any one hour or period of our lives, but for all time and eternity.

Oh, take us afresh this morning as individuals and as a people, to your praise and to your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

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