

### 3. Sabbath: A Day of Freedom (3Q 2019—The Least of These)

**Biblical material:** Exod. 16:16–18, Exod. 20:8–11, Deut.5:12–15, Matt. 12:9–13, Lev. 25:1–7, Mark 2:17.

#### Quotes

- Without a Sabbath, no worship; without worship, no religion; and without religion, no permanent freedom. *Charles Forbes Montalembert*
- The happiness of heaven is the constant keeping of the Sabbath. Heaven is called a Sabbath, to make those who have Sabbaths long for heaven, and those who long for heaven love Sabbaths. *Philip Henry*
- A world without a Sabbath would be like a man without a smile, like a summer without flowers, and like a homestead without a garden. It is the joyous day of the whole week. *Henry Ward Beecher*
- The spiritual rest, which God particularly intends in this Commandment, is this: that we not only cease from our labor and trade, but much more, that we let God alone work in us and that we do nothing of our own with all our powers. *Martin Luther*
- Life and blessing will attend the man who observes the Sabbath. The Sabbath of rest is a continual lesson to him to turn his eye from all created objects, and look to that heavenly rest into which God is entered, and which is promised to man. *James Milner*
- Like a path through the forest, Sabbath creates a marker for ourselves so, if we are lost, we can find our way back to our center. *Wayne Muller*

#### Questions

In what ways is the Sabbath a day of freedom? Is that how the Sabbath is usually viewed? How do we best “observe” the Sabbath? What is the Sabbath *for*? How does the Sabbath reflect the character of God? Why would God *command* the observance of the Sabbath? What are the ways we can make the Sabbath a true delight?

#### Bible summary

Exod. 16:16–18 is part of the story of the manna, which would not last until the next day except over the Sabbath. In Exod. 20:8–11 the Sabbath is given as a memorial of creation, while in Deut.5:12–15 it’s a memorial of deliverance from slavery. In healing the man with the withered hand Jesus makes it clear it’s lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9–13). Lev. 25:1–7 speaks of a “Sabbatical year” when the land was to be left to rest the seventh year.

#### Comment

When people are introduced to what we believe as a church, one of the very first questions is about the Sabbath. Once the doctrinal details are established, once the eternal validity of the Sabbath is clear, what do they immediately ask? *How do I keep Sabbath? What must I do? And most importantly: what mustn’t I do?*

Sometimes I do feel for the scribes and Pharisees. You can imagine the situation in Israel. Again and again the religious leaders would be asked: “Is it all right to do such-

and-such on the Sabbath? What about this? Is that OK on the Sabbath? What about this man's behavior? Surely he shouldn't be doing that on the Sabbath?" And so on.

The real problem there is that the religious leaders listened to the people, and answered them as specifically as they were asked. Instead of pointing out the *principles* on which activities are judged appropriate, they gave them precise and exacting details. So much so that the people ended up with hundreds and hundreds of regulations they were meant to observe. The result? All through the Sabbath they had to think whether they were breaking any of these many rules!

What a wrong concept! For what principle did they already have? Isaiah 58:13,14: "If you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord." Sadly people are not satisfied with that. They want to know whether they should do this that or the other. Their view of the Lord of the Sabbath is of a God who delights in burdening them down with restrictive regulations.

God's Sabbath is a delight, not burdensome; it is a time to be with Jesus. If we are worrying all the time about rules, we will not enter in the joy of true obedience. The Sabbath is only important in what it tells about God. For many of the Jews, the Sabbath said the wrong thing about God!

*The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.* And what happened to the Son of man? He was executed for breaking God's laws, Sabbath breaking and blasphemy!

On the cross we see God as he is. On the cross he is the Son of man, Lord of the Sabbath. As we come to know him as he really is, our Sabbaths will reflect him as he truly is. Not blindly following rules and regulations, but automatically following the Lord's way, because we agree with him that he is right. We love him and can delight in him and his Sabbath, for our God is a God of freedom.

### **Ellen White Comments**

As the Jews departed from God, and failed to make the righteousness of Christ their own by faith, the Sabbath lost its significance to them. Satan was seeking to exalt himself and to draw men away from Christ, and he worked to pervert the Sabbath, because it is the sign of the power of Christ. The Jewish leaders accomplished the will of Satan by surrounding God's rest day with burdensome requirements. In the days of Christ the Sabbath had become so perverted that its observance reflected the character of selfish and arbitrary men rather than the character of the loving heavenly Father. The rabbis virtually represented God as giving laws which it was impossible for men to obey. They led the people to look upon God as a tyrant, and to think that the observance of the Sabbath, as He required it, made men hard-hearted and cruel. It was the work of Christ to clear away these misconceptions. {DA 283-4}

His [Jesus'] mingling with publicans and others of ill repute, His disregard of the rabbinical observances, and the freedom with which He set aside the traditional requirements concerning the Sabbath, all seeming to place Him in antagonism to the religious authorities, excited much questioning. His brothers thought it a mistake for Him to alienate the great and learned men of the nation. They felt that these men must be in the right, and that Jesus was at fault in placing Himself in antagonism to them. {DA 450.1}