

Sermon- All in a Sabbath Day's Work

Scripture: John 9:13-16

Sunday, October 28, 2018

Time to go back into the Gospel of John and back into the story of the healing of the man born blind. The last time we were in John, the man was healed and when the neighbors saw what had happened they were baffled and was trying to figure out exactly how this man was healed. Well, they did find out that the healing happened because a man named Jesus did something and they also found out that whatever this man did, he did on the Sabbath. So someone in the neighborhood gets the bright idea that this case should be taken to the Pharisees because some people are like that, right?

Now Jesus could have healed this man without lifting a finger right? What does Jesus chose to do? He chooses to make a paste and then applies it to this mans eyes carefully making sure to violate their Sabbath regulations before he healed the man. Then he tells this man to also go wash his face after walking all the way to the pool of Silom. Also another Sabbath violation. And the Pharisees look at all this and say this man Jesus is violating the Sabbath therefore he must not be from God. That was one set of opinions. Others said, what Jesus did was an unheard of miracle that could not have been performed without God's power present. This raises a dilemma. Who is right? To solve this problem, we have to figure out the answer to the question, is Jesus breaking the law here? Now in Matt 5:17 Jesus was very clear that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it, right? So if Jesus is not blowing up the Sabbath law how is he respecting it by healing in this manner, specifically on the Sabbath?

To figure out what Jesus is doing, we need to understand something about the Old Testament Laws. You see in the OT there are three categories of laws. First, there is the

moral law. The purpose behind the Moral Laws is to demonstrate God's righteous standard for human beings. If you keep the moral law, the biggest beneficiary is yourself. Examples would be the 10 commandments. Laws like "thou shall not steal or kill" etc. That's moral law.

Then there are the Civil laws. The purpose of the civil laws is to show people the proper way of dealing with others in civil society. An example of this would be Deut 24:10 which says, "if you have lent money to a neighbor, then you should not enter his house to collect the item he is giving as security". Civil laws define the interactions within the society that God is leading and help create a Godly community filled with harmony and justice for all.

Then there is the ceremonial laws. The purpose of the Ceremonial laws is to show human beings the proper way to honor God. They are like the Protocol Rules when you interact with royalty or heads of state. If you are meeting the Queen of England, there are a whole list of do's and don't's you have to follow to show her honor. These Protocol Rules are explained to people by a Protocol officer before you meet with her. Things like you would never go and start talking to her or touch her even. She has to initiate all conversation and touch even. In the Old Testament, in Lev 1:3, it says, "when you bring a burnt offering from your herd, it has to be a male with no blemish." The Bible is saying this is the proper way to bring a sacrifice to God because this sacrifice pointed forward to Christ's sacrifice.

We need to know the purpose behind these laws because the impact of a law is very situation dependent. And only when you know the purpose of the law can you make sure that its impact is appropriate for the situation. For example "thou shall not murder" is a law but it is possible for someone to get killed accidentally. That is why when there is a violation of the law, the person who violates the law is brought before a judge. And

the judge looks at the law, and looks at the perceived violation and decides if the purpose of the law has been violated.

With that introduction, we come back to the Sabbath law situation. Firstly, the Sabbath law is a Ceremonial law. And with Ceremonial Laws, every one of them is transformed in some way from the Old Testament to the New Testament because how we honor God changes when we understand more about God right? In the case of the Sabbath Law the Law giver Himself came to tell the people, look, to understand the Sabbath law I want you to understand the purpose of the Sabbath. Now earlier in the book of John 5:17 he had said, “to this day my Father is working and so am I”. In other words the Father is always working on the Sabbath as well. So in other words the Sabbath was never about doing nothing. And in fact there are some things that you cannot stop doing. If you are a farmer who is taking care of sheep or milking cows, you could not tell your animals you are not going to get fed today because it is the Sabbath or that you are not going to get milked today because it is the Sabbath. The essential work of sustaining life goes on continually for God in heaven, it went on for Jesus when he was on earth and it goes on for us in our world as well. What that means is that some work goes on. This aspect of our life is like our heart. It is always beating and never stops. But if you look at our human body, there are 700 named muscles in the human body. But there are 3 types, one kind that we get to control, and two kinds that we do not get to control. Or the two kinds that we don’t control, they work when they are told to like the muscles that control our lungs. Then there is our heart muscle. We don’t control it, God does and it never stops. But that is only one muscle out of 700 muscles in our body that never stops working even for a second.

But the majority of our muscles are muscles that we do control. And every one of those muscles can only work for short periods of time before they need rest. So God instituted a rhythm to the work that we do. Work for 6 days and rest for one. In Mark 2:27, Jesus says something very interesting about the Sabbath. He is saying, the Sabbath was made

for man, not man for the Sabbath. This is very interesting because remember earlier I had said that the Sabbath was a Ceremonial Law and Ceremonial Laws were laws that were showing us the proper protocol to honor God? And now Jesus is saying, this Sabbath law was made for the sake of us and for our wellbeing. So some of you must be saying, well which is it? It is for honoring God or it is for our rest. Well, it is both and interrelated like this. What Jesus is saying in effect is this. You honor God by allowing your body to rest according to the rhythm God instituted. I want us to think about this. God is saying that in the rhythms of life, there is the work of eating and all the daily things that you do. Don't feel guilty in doing the essentials on the Sabbath. But hear this. You honor God by taking care of yourself and resting one day out of 7 from the regular work that you do to earn a living.

But there is a third thing that Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath specifically is teaching us about the Sabbath in the healing of the man born blind. Well, think about this is, this is the second time Jesus is healing someone specifically on the Sabbath in the Gospel of John. But if you were to consider all 4 Gospels, what you find is that Jesus heals on the Sabbath 7 times in his ministry. And while Jesus is not speaking in the 4 verses we read today, he is saying by his actions here and specially by his words in other places that there is some kinds of work that God does on the Sabbath. In Matt 12 when he heals a man's withered hand he says in verse 11, yes you can do something good for someone on the Sabbath. In another instance in Luke 13:10-17, Jesus heals a woman who was crippled for 18 years on the Sabbath. And when he gets push back because he healed on the Sabbath Jesus says this in verse 15-16, *"Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? {16} "So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound; think of it; for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?"* What Jesus is saying is that liberating someone from bondage is a perfect thing to do on the Sabbath. So is showing compassion on someone. So is showing someone mercy.

Of course we know from the original Sabbath law in Ex 20:8 where the Lord says, Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it Holy. The word Holy in the Bible means dedicated for God's purposes only. That is why we gather to worship on the Sabbath. It is one of those activities that we do that is only for God and therefore a Holy activity.

So there are specific things that can be considered Sabbath work. Things like Healing, liberation, restoration. Some of these things are miracles that require special power from God. But underlying these miracles are equally important things that may not be miracles but also require special power from God to do them. Things like showing mercy and kindness and compassion. Having said that some of you may be asking, so that means we have to show mercy and kindness and compassion only on the Sabbath. Please, I am not saying that. Actually what Jesus Christ is saying, is that God does not cease from showing mercy and kindness and compassion on any day and we should not use the Sabbath as an excuse to not show mercy and compassion on people. And showing compassion and mercy are things that glorify and bless God. And those make them Holy activities and things we can do on the Sabbath.

There is more that needs to be said about the Sabbath and especially how Jesus has transformed the Sabbath and given us Sabbath rest. Actually, every moment we are in Christ we are in a moment of Sabbath rest. We are not going into all of that today. But if when you hear, you must be compassionate and merciful and so when people call for help you keep going things all day, everyday without a break, now we do have a problem. God is not what the Lord of the Sabbath wants to see happen in your life as well. Remember I said that you also need actual downtime. Time in which you do get rest. Time to pursue a hobby or do things that help you relax, things that restore your energy, things that refresh you and restores your capacity to do the work that God has called you to do.

This is particularly hard for me too. Remember everything I preach a sermon, I am preaching to myself as well. And when I preach it to you all, I am making myself accountable to all of you in the things that I am preaching. So yes, this is something that I need to do as well and I am still working on how exactly to structure my week so that I can follow this 6:1 pattern. Spending one day out of 6 in worship and rejuvenation.

Think about this, the Sabbath was made for us. We were not made so that we could fulfill the requirements of the Sabbath. In other words, God is honored when we take care of ourselves. God is honored when we give ourselves time for relaxation and restoration. God is honored when we use the Sabbath to show compassion and mercy on others and even ourselves. God is saying, since you belong to me, when you take care of yourself and allow yourself some Sabbath rest, then in that you are honoring me. May we all honor God in this way. Let us pray.