

“And this Gospel” shall be preached... Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

God's Sabbath: A Rich Delight

We read in Genesis 2 that God rested the seventh day and blessed and sanctified it. Jesus taught that the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27-28) at the time man was made. Our booklet *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?* explains how we know which day it is that God calls the Sabbath and why it is important to keep it.

I want to expound a bit on the meaning and purpose of the Sabbath and show why we have been given this law by God and how to make the Sabbath what God intended it to be — an opportunity to pursue some of the very highest ideals of human life.

In Genesis 2:1 we see the beginning of the Sabbath day. “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it [which means set apart for a holy use]; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.”

So we see that God rested at creation. And when a man rests on this Sabbath day he's imitating his God, the very God who set this time aside.

In Exodus 20:8, Sabbath observance is given as a commandment: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

So it is that God made this day for man at the very time of creation. It was a time set aside for man to use.

Purpose of the Sabbath

Why was this day given? Isaiah 58:13 gives us some of the answer. “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own way, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.” (Here, where it talks about your own pleasure, it is essentially referring to, if you read the Jewish translation, pursuing your own *business*.)

The Sabbath is to be a delightful day to the people of God. We are not to pursue our own business. It doesn't mean we can't have pleasure on this day. Indeed, the Sabbath will become one of the most meaningful and rich days once we comprehend the vision of why this day is given to man.

Day for teaching children

I personally believe that this day should be very enjoyable even for children. It is a day to teach them about God and the great purpose in life.

Let me take the time to read you three parables that illustrate different approaches toward teaching children about God on the Sabbath day. Some approaches produce good results while others fall short of our desired results.

Parable No. 1

“I took a little child's hand in mine. He and I were to walk together for awhile. I was to lead him to the Father. It was a task that overcame me, so awful was the responsibility. I talked to the little child only of the Father. I painted the sternness of the Father's face. We walked under tall trees. I said the Father had the power to send them crashing down, struck by His thunderbolts. We walked in the sunshine. I told him of the

greatness of the Father who made the burning blazing sun.

“One twilight we met the Father. The child hid behind me; he was afraid. He would not look up at the face so loving, he remembered my picture. He would not put his hand in the Father's hand. I was between the child and the Father. I wondered. I had been so conscientious, so serious.”

Parable No. 2

“I took a little child's hand in mine. I was to lead him to the Father. I felt burdened by the multitude of the things I was to teach him. We did not ramble, we hastened from spot to spot. In one moment we compared the leaves of the trees and the next we were examining a bird's nest. While the child was questioning me about it, I hurried him away to chase the butterflies. Did he chance to fall asleep I wakened him lest he should miss something I wished him to see.

“We spoke of the Father often and rapidly. I poured into his ears all the stories he ought to know and we were interrupted often by the wind of which we must trace to its source. But then in twilight we met the Father. The child merely glanced at Him. The Father stretched out His hand but the child was not interested enough to take it. Feverish spots burned on his cheeks. He dropped exhausted to the ground and fell asleep. Again I was between the child and the Father and I wondered. I taught him so many, many things.”

Parable No. 3

Now the third parable illustrates a more successful and desirable method of teaching.

“I took a little child's hand in mine to lead him to the Father. My heart was full of gratitude for the glad service, for the glad privilege. We walked slowly, I suited my steps to the short steps of the child. We spoke of the things the child noticed. Sometimes it was one of the Father's birds. We watched it build a nest and saw the eggs that were laid. We wondered later of the care it gave its young. Sometimes we picked the Father's flowers and stroked their soft petals and loved their bright colors.

“Often we told stories of the Father. I told them to the child and the child told them to me. We told them, the child and I, over and over and over again. Sometimes we stopped to lean, resting against the Father's tree and letting His air cool our brow and never speaking.

“And then in the twilight we met the Father. The child's eyes shone. He looked up lovingly, trustingly, eagerly into the Father's face. He put his hand in the Father's hand. I was for a moment forgotten. I was content.”

Yes, the Sabbath is an opportunity to help our children appreciate and understand God through His creation, to take time and reflect deeply on the beauty and meaning of life. It is the day when we prepare to meet God!

Day to set priorities

It's easy to get our priorities out of line. The Sabbath day allows us to keep our priorities in perspective. It can give us an awareness of what's really important.

Oftentimes we tend to get our minds on the day-to-day business, our pursuits, frustrations we're facing in life, difficulties we face as human be-

ings. Most people in this world labor with their mundane troubles and concerns seven days a week — with the result that anxieties, ulcers and emotional upsets beset millions.

God has told us that there are six day to labor and be concerned with material pursuits. But the Sabbath is a day of rest and freedom from the daily cares. The very fact that we're not pursuing our own material gains on this day makes it a delight. We are showing that we are not the slaves of materialism. We're not bent on packing in as much money or as much of anything as we can possibly get.

Lesson from history

In Nehemiah 13, Judah was in trouble. They had gone into captivity, Ezra, the great leader of God, brought them back into the land and now Nehemiah, a very vigorous, very forceful leader, was restoring and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem once again. But the people were in a weakened spiritual condition.

And so in Nehemiah 13: “In those days I saw in Judah men treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on asses; and also wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day; and I testified against them in the day which they sold provisions. There dwelt men of Tyre also in the city who brought fish, all kinds of wares and sold on the sabbath day unto the children of Judah.

“Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that you do, and profane the sabbath day? And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened until after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside of Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why do you lodge before the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath day. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day” (verses 15-17, 19-22, paraphrased).

Jesus' example

Jesus also had a lot to say about the Sabbath day. Probably no part of His conduct was more criticized than His mode of observing the Sabbath. Let's look at a list of the charges that the Pharisees leveled against Jesus regarding His Sabbath keeping. There are five recorded incidents in which the Pharisees charged Jesus with breaking the Sabbath.

Here are the five things that Jesus did on the Sabbath day that were His “crimes”: 1) healing a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years and telling him to take up his bed; 2) healing a man with a withered hand; 3) healing a blind man; 4) healing a man of drowsy; 5) healing a woman bowed down by an infirmity for 18 years.

Those were the five “acts of work” that Jesus committed and those were the “crimes” that were charged against Him on the Sabbath day. They were acts of mercy, acts of love.

The Pharisees thought that by setting up innu-

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God's Sabbath

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merable rules for the Sabbath, people would be able to keep it better. In reality they reduced the day to a miserable micrology of dos and don'ts.

Jesus' approach to this day is very important for us to study. He responded with remarkable wisdom to the formalism of the Pharisees when they charged Him with this Sabbath breaking. His replies were simple. They went right to the core of reasons why God had originally instituted the day. In no case, however, in His defense of His actions on the Sabbath day, does Jesus call in question the fact of man's obligation to the Sabbath. Jesus had no quarrel with the Pharisees that the Sabbath should be kept. The question was one of how it should be kept.

In Mark 2:27 we see, "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." It was made on the seventh day of creation. In fact, it was the last act — the conclusion — of God's physical creation as recorded in Genesis. Man was made on the sixth day. And then God in His love gave this seventh day of rest to man in order that he would be able to keep in contact with God, to see clearly the highest goals and the highest priorities that human beings can pursue. The Sabbath was made for man's rest, for his worship, for his growing close to God, for his fellowship. It was made for man's benefit.

Human dos and don'ts

The Pharisees' view was that he who best keeps

the Sabbath goes to the greatest lengths in abstaining from what might be construed as labor, irrespective of what that does to himself or others. But Christianity is much more than mere lawkeeping.

True worship, according to Jesus, is not legalistic or mechanical. It's deeply predicated on understanding of the purpose of law.

You see, Jesus by His life was showing people how one should love God with all his soul and heart and might and how to love one's neighbor as oneself.

Jesus taught it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath day. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." How did Jesus fill the law to the full? Galatians 5:14, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." So how did Jesus fill the Sabbath to the full? He acknowledged it was a day for rest and for worship, but He also taught through His life that the Sabbath day is also a day for loving one's neighbor as one's self, and His life reflected that throughout that day.

So far we have said that the Sabbath day was the conclusion of creation week and that it was made for man to rest, to be refreshed and to be renewed. It's also a time to pursue some of the highest goals of his potentiality — that of growing to become a member of the Family of God. It's a day of rich, full worship of God and for fellowship and for doing good.

The Sabbath is a day for prayer, for studying God's Word, for thinking about God. Early in the

morning we can establish contact with God, talk with God, draw close to Him, study His Word, drink in of it.

The Sabbath day when properly understood is utterly a delight. It's not burdensome. It's a day once again when man can pursue the highest of his potentiality. When he can pursue what so many men in today's society have neglected, time to draw close to God. Time to develop the spiritual aspect in man which in an age of materialism tends to be pushed further and further out. In I John 5:3, it says: "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." His commandments aren't burdensome. Properly construed and understood they're beautiful elements in the plan of God.

As Jeremiah said, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt: which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The Sabbath is a law that God doesn't want to force us to keep, but He does desire us to have it inscribed in our hearts for our own benefit. He desires that we understand what this day means to our development, spiritually, physically, emotionally and every other way.