

**Mark 2:23-28.** <sup>23</sup> *One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.* <sup>24</sup> *The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"* <sup>25</sup> *He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need?"* <sup>26</sup> *In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."* <sup>27</sup> *Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.* <sup>28</sup> *So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."*

### **Remember the Sabbath**

#### **1. Remember the why**

#### **2. Remember this is for your good.**

What was meant to be a string around the finger had become a yoke around the neck. Even if we have never done such a thing, we are probably aware of the custom of tying a string around the finger as a reminder to mark an important task or event. In fact, even in our modern age if I was to set a reminder on my phone the Google icon would be of a finger with a string tied around it. Turns out that this saying and this custom might have a biblical origin. In the book of numbers God tells his people to tie a string around the edge of their garments as a reminder of all his commands, to tie a blue cord to look at and remember who God is and what he had done for them. <sup>38</sup> ***"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. 39 You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD.... 40 Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. 41 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD your God.'"***

Remember. God says to his people. Remember. In a sense God had tied a string around the collective finger of his people Israel with his Sabbath day command; telling them in a way that they could not easily overlook, "Remember". Every week found its absolute center and beginning and end on the Sabbath. Time stopped, the machine of work and household chores, and even the steps you took, and the work around your household and even the work your animals performed, came to a screeching halt. Why would God have them do such a thing? That is the important question isn't it? Why?

It was so that the people would find rest not just for their bodies, but for their souls. On the very first seventh day the God looked at all that he had done and the

Lord himself rested; and it was good. Certainly, therefore, it would be good for his people to rest as well. Thus, God set a reminder for his people. He set the example and he would include in his commands a day that they were to set aside to remember, recall what your God had done for them: how he created all things; how he delivered them; how he promised to be with his people. Rest, remember, recall that the LORD is God. Rest, remember, recall what your God has done for you. This was the essence behind the Sabbath law. It was an unmistakable reminder tied around the life of everyone of his people.

But as time passed the people forgot. Not so much about the command itself but they forgot the “why”? The law had not only become a shell of itself, an outward observance that lacked any meaning. Instead of that string around the finger it had become a heavy yoke. This command had somehow become tangled together with a heavy burden of obligation and self-righteousness and the people had lost their focus and the rest that God had intended. The people of Israel had become victims of this pharisaical interpretation of the sabbath law to the point where activities were carefully monitored. Consider how arduous, how strenuous this day that lacked activity could be. Long before pedometers and smartwatches would take the guess work out of recording your steps and your level of activity, many filled their days tracking and recording and monitoring steps and activities and that was their chief concern. Remember the LORD soon became remember to watch your steps, your activities. It also became a time where people were eager to find something wrong in the efforts of others.

And so it was that on one of those days that the Pharisees were monitoring activities Jesus and his disciples were walking alongside a field. And as they were walking his disciples began to pluck the heads of grain from the grain that was standing alongside the path. We rightly envision the disciples walking along and with a gentle motion of reaching their hands down as it brushed along the top of the grain. The kind of effortless motion that we might do on a leisurely walk. They walked along and plucked the heads of grain. This was far from arduous labor. And it was an activity allowed by the law. It is written in the book of Deuteronomy: <sup>25</sup> **If you enter your neighbor’s grain field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.** And in the book of Leviticus God tells his people to leave standing grain at the edge of their fields for this very purpose. **“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your God.”**

While the disciples were picking their heads of grain to ease their hunger the Pharisees were busy nit-picking as they hungered after recognition. Because the Pharisees had added their own regulations and stipulations, they now equated what the disciples were doing to reaping and harvesting, work that would have been

forbidden on the Sabbath. They were quick to tattle on the disciples to Jesus, and to criticize Jesus for his lack of restraint and leadership. But in doing so the Pharisees revealed that they had forgotten the very meaning and purpose of the laws that they were so outwardly concerned about obeying. They had misunderstood and misinterpreted not only the Sabbath commandment but also the rest of the law.

And so it is equally revealing how Jesus engages them. He could of went law for law with them, challenging their knowledge of Sabbath and ceremonial law, challenging them with what was truly proper and right, but instead he goes for the heart of the misunderstanding. He gives an example of how David while running for his life from Saul took refuge in the house of God. Now each Sabbath 12 fresh loaves of bread were consecrated to God and the bread that was being replaced was taken and eaten by the priests, but by the priests alone. But since there was nothing else for David and his men to eat the priest took five of the loaves and gave it to David and his men. Ahimelech rightly recognized that something greater was at stake than just a matter of outward regulations. Having given this eye-opening reference to the Pharisees and all who were around Jesus then enunciated clearly the principle that was involved: **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”** The Sabbath was not created as a means to merit the grace of God but was God’s own gift to man – a day of rest, a day when God would come and through the Word and worship help the people remember who God was and what he had done.

God had tied a string around the finger of his people to help them remember. The Pharisees had taken this useful gift and made the Sabbath a yoke around the neck.

Does the same happen for us? Have we made God’s command to Remember the Sabbath Day, to be in his house becomes a command full of drudgery. Are we concerned chiefly with mere outward observance, about being here so we are seen and counted rather than listening and remembering what God has done? Does church time and devotional time for that matter become a burden to bear, a labor to slog through, as we impatiently tap our foot in anticipation of taking up more “practical and productive” activities? As we come together again let us remember why we are here. God has told us not to give up meeting together so that we rest and recall what our God has done, so that we might be encouraged and refreshed by his Word. To both those who have neglected God’s house and to those who have been here every week, the LORD gives this command to all of us for our spiritually good. Remember the LORD and recall how he has delivered you; how he loves you, how he cares for you. The command to remember the LORD is a welcome string around the finger much more than it is a yoke around the neck.

It seems that with the pace of life these days we need to hear that reminder more than ever. So often we are running from one thing to another. Jobs, and family responsibilities all call for our attention. During the summer it seems only to get

even worse. The weddings, the graduation parties, the trips, kids' activities, it can even make our leisure time out be a tiresome labor. In his command for us the LORD is looking out for our spiritual needs. He reaches out with his gift of rest and spiritual nourishment. Remember! Remember the Sabbath Day! Remember what your God has done for you. Remember what God has done for you in Christ Jesus. Remember that this day, time in God's house, time in God's Word is designed for your good.

And now in the light of Christ's obedience, this becomes even more the case. As we live in the light of Christ's obedience and sacrifice we know that the LORD Jesus has fulfilled the law for us. He was in God's house from childhood to his final days recalling what the Lord had done, gladly and willingly coming to God in worship and praise. He has forgiven all our neglect of the Sabbath. He has paid for all our imperfect and distracted worship. The times that we have come to worship begrudgingly he took it to the cross and nailed our guilt and our shame upon the tree. And in his mercy, he has given us his spotless record. The Son of Man is our Lord and Savior, our substitute and our sacrifice of atonement. And this same Lord is even Lord of the Sabbath and he sets this law before us as a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. In the light of Christ, the mom and dad caring for their kids in the back row, who can't quite pay attention to the sermon as closely as they used to are still blessed by time in God's house. The elderly man who can't quite hear and read like he used to, is still blessed by time spent with fellow believers in the presence of God. For it is not so much our activity that God is concerned with here on a day like today, but his. He wants to come to us with his Word, to serve us with his means of grace, to encourage us with time in his presence.; to give us rest. Jesus is LORD of the Sabbath who has established this law not so that we may merit God's favor by our own activity, but it is a command given to help us remember, to recall, that the LORD is God. In that command, "Remember the Sabbath day" sinful souls living in a busy and broken world are given the gentle invitation. ***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.*** That promise is imbedded so wonderfully in the command to "Remember the Sabbath day" for here gathered in God's house around word and sacrament is a place where Jesus brings his gift of rest in a special way.

May the Lord bless our time spent in his house! Through his command, may he give us needed and gracious reminder to remember, remember why we come here often, may he remind us that this is for our good. Rest, recall, remember that the LORD is God. Amen.