

Man and the Day of Rest

The Sunday of God's Purpose and the Sunday of Human Needs

Sermon by the "Highway and Byway" Preacher.

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Chicago, Sunday, 1903.
Text:—"Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day."—Matt. 12:12.



THE Sunday Question.—It is not new. It has agitated the Christian church from the earliest times. Jesus came face to face with it at the very beginning of His ministry. He found the day burdened and distorted by the restrictions which the Scribes and Pharisees had placed upon it. His effort was to deliver the day from its unbearable exactions and make it, as God intended, a real day of rest. The cold formalism of the letter of the law had killed the freedom of the Spirit of God in His relations to the day. Jesus at once struck at the root of the matter when He declared: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." This statement was so radically opposed to the Jewish idea of the Sabbath as to arouse the bitterest opposition. The Scribes and Pharisees in their zeal for form and ceremony had deified the Sabbath and made it something for man to worship and serve. Jesus corrected this error by declaring that God had made the Sabbath day to serve the needs of man. Here, then, we have the first and fundamental doctrine in regard to the Sabbath day, or the day of rest. The other great truth, as Jesus went on to declare it, was that He was Lord of the Sabbath. He was not to be crowded out of the day as God, His Father, had been, for they had so filled the day with burdensome restrictions and obligations that it had become a religion of cold and lifeless forms and exactions. And not only was He Lord of the Sabbath day, but the law of that day was one of positive and active goodness. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Here, then, we have before us the fundamentals of the Sabbath day question: "The Sabbath made for man," "Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath," and the law of the Sabbath, "do good."

WHEN Jesus was on earth and endeavoring to restore to its rightful functions the day of rest which God had established, it was the extreme of ceremonial restrictions and exactions which robbed the day of its true spirit and purpose; but to-day the pendulum has swung clear to the other side, and we find that instead of the Puritanical type of Sunday we have the "wide-open" Sunday, the Sunday when liberal views, indifference to God's claims, and love of pleasure prevail. Instead of the burden of stern religious exactions, there is distracting and demoralizing freedom in every department in life. The laziness and ease which keep from church on Sunday morning; the Sunday newspaper, the reading of which relegates the Bible to the dusty shelf; the feasting and social functions; the pleasure outings, which take the whole or part of the day; the rush of trains and street cars; the grind of the wheels of business; the din and pound of the workshop. Instead of the prescribed Sabbath's day journey of our Lord's day which the hypocritical Pharisees would not allow to be overstepped even to minister to a suffering and needy creature, we have the bicycle or automobile run; the long street-car ride to visit distant friends; the picnic in the park or the country. In Jesus' day God was crowded out of the Sabbath day by man's superficial zeal in religious things; to-day, God is crowded out of the rest day by man's utter forgetfulness or partial forgetfulness of God's claims upon him and his seeking the things and pleasures of the world, so that there is just as much need of effort to redeem the blessed rest day from the error and evil which crowd it as there was when Jesus faced His bigoted critics and declared that the Sabbath was made for man, that He was Lord of the Sabbath, and that the law which was to govern the day was that of doing good.

THE fact that the Christian world observes the first day of the week instead of the seventh as prescribed by the Mosaic law does not in the least alter the great underlying purposes and obligations of the day. We have not space here to develop the argument that man, physically and spiritually, needs one day in seven for rest. It is not necessary for us to recall how with the passing of the Jewish dispensation in the rejection and crucifixion of Christ and His resurrection upon the first day of the week and the establishment of the church of the Gospel dispensation upon the day of Pentecost, the Jewish Sabbath ceased to be observed by the Christians, who in its stead observed Sunday, or the first day of the week. But whether the seventh-day Sabbath of the Jews or the first-day Sun-

day of the Christians, they both rest upon foundation principles which are identical, and unchanged and unchangeable. The day of rest was made for man. Of that day Christ is still Lord and great Exemplar. The one great obligation of that day is that of doing good. It is not our purpose to discuss the question of whether the seventh day or the first day should be observed, nor is it our purpose to add to the great and confused discussion of what one can do and what one ought not to do on Sunday. Christ did not attempt to outline a list of the cans and the can'ts for the day, but He did call attention to certain fundamental truths in regard to the day, and these are unchanged and unchangeable, and they afford a sure means of determining what one ought to do and what one ought not to do on Sunday at the present time, even as they would have revealed to the Pharisees the true freedom, and blessing and obligations of the day when Jesus attacked their false and unholy position.

WITH a Chicago university professor advocating Sunday baseball, and other religious teachers and preachers throughout the country attempting to determine what may lawfully be done on Sunday; with the letting down of the bars in every direction and the shutting out of God from the rest day by the distraction of human plans and purposes, there is need to turn from human thought and reasoning and get near to Jesus, where we may hear Him tell us again: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; so that the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath." "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day." Jesus' critics were ready to argue with Him. And there is just as eager willingness to-day to enter into controversy over the Sunday question. The punctilious Pharisees in their bigotry and blindness thought they were right on the question of the right observation of the Sabbath day, and the liberalist of to-day, although he is on the other side of the fence, as he reasons from his human point of view, believes that he is right. The Pharisees, with their distorted ideas as to what constituted work, asked: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" Think of it! What blindness! And to-day with the extreme of liberality reached in reference to the question of Sunday observance, and with human desire and selfishness encroaching more and more upon the Lord's day, we find those who do not understand the real purpose and obligations of the day asking as foolish questions, and making as vital mistakes as did the Pharisees.

LET us analyze Jesus' statement that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day. The doing of good involves a triple relationship: The relation of a man to himself, to his God and to his fellowman. Doing good cannot measure up to God's standard of what goodness is, if any one of these conditions is lacking. First of all, then, man must consider himself in reference to this Sunday question. What should the day bring to him, and what of his own personality should he put into the day? If the day of rest was instituted for man, what is it that it should bring to him in his physical and spiritual being? Is it not rest on the world side, and growth Godward? Every seventh day was to be a day of rest. It is declared of God that "in six days He 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." But that it does not mean the rest of inactivity and aimless purpose is evident from what Jesus declared, for, when He healed and wrought good on the Sabbath day, He defended His actions when the Jews accused Him of violating the commandment of God in regard to the holy Sabbath day by declaring that His Father worked hitherto and He worked. The rest which God purposed for man was not the rest of laziness, nor was God providing for a time when man could recover from the week of indulgences and excesses. And yet how many there are who run riot in the direction of business and pleasure during the week, because they know there is a Sunday coming in which they can obtain rest. How many make Saturday night the convenient season of excesses of all varieties, because they know that on the Sunday following they can sleep and rest up the physically tired and worn-out body. How many, many Christians—be it said to their shame and confusion—deliberately plan the Saturday night social pleasure and outing, because they know that on Sunday they can sleep late. But such rest brings no blessing, save perhaps to the lower physical nature. To the Christian Saturday night ought to be the home night, as far as possible, so that planning and preparation for the Lord's day

to follow may be made. Rest such as God intended should be found upon the day of rest was that which took one from the secular things of the week and gave him a favorable opportunity to grow towards the things of God.

AND in the second place, as regards man's relation to God on the day of rest: There is a distinctive obligation to God on the Sabbath day which no other day of the week can know. It provides an environment in which man's spiritual nature can properly develop and grow. To the degree to which man recognizes this fact, to that extent does he realize the blessings and benefits of the day of rest. The Sabbath day is given to man that God may have opportunity to come closer to him and satisfy the needs of his spiritual nature. Some natures are so starved and dead to a sense of God that they crowd Sunday full of the things of the world, their pleasures and ambitions, and are indifferent to the claims of God upon them or of their own need of Him. Many Christians by their worldliness, by allowing the natural man to predominate and rule, fail to realize the blessing of the Lord's day. There must be a separation from the world and the things of the world in order that the way unto God and His approach unto us may be unobstructed. In the days of Nehemiah, when the people had grown careless as to the Sabbath day and the day had come to be pretty nearly like the other days of the week, he shut the gates against those who had been coming into Jerusalem to buy and sell. He separated the people of the city from the outside influences which drew them away from God, and to-day we need the same stern and decisive action upon the part of every individual Christian in shutting the gates of his mind and heart against the cares and thought and plans of the secular week; there is need of shutting out the activities of the natural man in order that there may be growth and development Godward. This is essential to well-doing on the Sabbath day.

IN the third place, well doing on the Sabbath day involves man's relation to his fellowman. This raises a complexity of questions and problems which only can be settled as light is received from God, and His will and Spirit have opportunity to operate freely through one. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day," declares Jesus, and there is apparently a vast deal of well doing from man to man on the Sabbath day which apparently receives the general approval of man, but we dare to say that some of it at least does not meet the approval of God, for the well doing does not reach any higher than man or seek to go beyond the temporal physical needs of man. Take your Bibles and read all portions of the Gospels, which tell of Jesus' Sabbath day activities, and what do we find? Jesus' well doing as it touched the physical sought to reach the spiritual and lead to clearer understanding of God and nearer approach unto Him. Test your activities on the Lord's day as those activities bring you into touch with others and see what is the underlying motive. Why do you do this or that on the Sabbath day? Why do you go to this or that place? Why do you make that call, or go on that jaunt on the street cars to another part of the city or country? Why do you arrange that gathering of relatives or friends at the festive board? What is your purpose in it all? All that you do may in itself be harmless and perfectly proper in its rightful place. It may satisfy and please your friends, and those with whom you come in contact, but if it does not satisfy the conditions which God lays down as the law of His day you have failed.

IF Sunday baseball, Sunday picnics, Sunday pleasures and outings, Sunday sociabilities and feasting can stand the test of this triple-sided view of the law of the Sabbath day, all right; but if not, it is all wrong. The trouble with people in arguing with themselves and with others in regard to what they rightfully may and rightfully may not do on the Sabbath day is that they reason from human standpoints and with conceptions of life which do not reach beyond the present life. But if a question as regards to conduct on the Sabbath day is to be settled rightfully and finally it must be considered in relation to himself, to his God and to his fellowmen. Christians would not be so troubled and anxious over this Sunday question if they were moved by the purpose of doing good which actuated Christ. He never found it difficult to decide what He ought to do. He never seemed to be troubled by the criticism of those about Him, for the law of the Sabbath day was being lived out in His life. He was doing good. It involved His relations to Himself, to His God and to His fellowman, and this was the purpose of the day. It was the direction in which the highest possibilities of the day might be realized. Surely the Sabbath day was made for man, but the only pathway of realization of all the blessed possibilities of that day is the way which Jesus marked out. He is the Lord of the Sabbath. He it is who can lead us. Do good on the Sabbath day and test that good doing by your relationship to yourself, to your God and to your fellowman. Then the Sunday question will be settled, at least as far as you yourself are concerned, and this will be a long step in the direction of settling it for others.

A thief loves honesty as a hungry man loves steak, and for the same reason—that he feeds upon it.—N. O. Times-Democrat.

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