

February 23, 2020

—The Gospel Changes Everything—

The Sabbath and Loving Your Neighbor

Mark 2:23-3:6

To live with Him in everlasting happiness

If you are new to us this morning, we are in the middle of a series on *the Sabbath*. Our basic claim throughout this series is that the Sabbath shows us the chief end of man. God created Man, as the Heidelberg catechism puts it, to truly know and love Him and to live with Him in everlasting happiness, all to His praise and glory.¹ That's the idea behind Sabbath.

Review: the Sabbath and your Conscience

Last time we looked at the Sabbath and our consciences. We saw that Christians are going to have different convictions on *how* specifically to practice the Sabbath. Paul told us that we need to be fully convinced in our own minds (**Romans 14:5**). This *doesn't mean* Christians can choose *not* to honor the Lord's Day. The Sabbath is part of the God's unchanging moral law—the 4th commandment. I spoke strongly last week about how we are to bear with one another when our consciences disagree, *because* to disobey conscience is to sin against God. But I did not mean that if *you think* your conscience is telling you to commit adultery, or steal or lie, or ignore the Lord's Day—you should obey it. God's law is supreme over our conscience and we can never use the excuse of conscience to disobey God's moral law. Remember Paul applied the rule of conscience to “matters of indifference”—those things that *don't* violate God's moral law *and* those things that are *not* essential for salvation. So how *specifically* we practice the Lord's day partly depends on your conscience, *but* that you

¹ Heidelberg Q.6

ought to observe and remember the Lord's day is not dependent on your conscience—God both commands and calls us to Himself on this day.

Now what do we do?

This morning we are looking at the Sabbath and Loving Your Neighbor. Here's our driving question this morning: if the Lord's Day is to be a day where we rest from our ordinary work, what do we do with the other hours that are not spent in public worship? And immediately our individualistic American hearts answer: *whatever I want to do*. I think this will be our most challenging message because the demon of individualism is so deep in our collective psyche that to attempt pry it out is *not only* painful but it *means* that we must actually change.

The Sabbath and loving your neighbor

What is the Sabbath *for*? It's for two things. The Sabbath exists 1) *so that* we could love the Lord your God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength and 2) *so that* we could love our neighbor as ourself (**Mark 12:30-31**). That's the summary of all the law. God gave us the Sabbath not *merely* to love Him, but to love others. Think about the specific wording of the 4th commandment. We are *not only* to rest and to care for ourselves *but* we are to help others find their rest: "...your son, [and] your daughter, your male servant, [and] your female servant, [and] your livestock, [and] the sojourner who is within your gates" (**Exodus 20:10**).

The Sabbath is for showing mercy

In other words, the Sabbath is the day when we are to help others find liberty and hope—it is a day *especially* to show mercy. As Edmund Clowney says "Christians have, through the centuries, used the first day of the week in caring for the sick and the poor, the oppressed and afflicted, and those whom we may reach with the message and the healing comfort of the gospel."² Why has this

² Edmund P. Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2007)64

been the practice of the church for two thousand years? Because this is what our Savior did. On the Sabbath:

- Jesus delivered the demon possessed man (**Mark 1:21-27**)
- Jesus brought healing to Peter's mother-in-law (**Mark 1:29-31**)
- Jesus healed the multitude of sick and oppressed people (**Mark 1:32-34**)
- Jesus restored the man's withered hand (**Mark 3:1-6**)
- Jesus healed the man who was an invalid for 38 years (**John 5:1-15**)
- Jesus gave sight to the man born blind (**John 9:1-12**)
- Jesus healed the woman who was crippled for 18 years (**Luke 13:10-17**)
- Jesus healed the man who had dropsy (**Luke 14:1-6**)

The early church father Irenaeus said "that Christ did more often exercise the works of mercy upon the Sabbath day, than upon other days."³ Why? Because that is what the Sabbath is for: to love your neighbor, to show mercy, to liberate those in bondage, to comfort the afflicted, to bring companionship to the lonely, to provide a way of escape for the tempted. The Sabbath is calling us to a live a greater life than we could ever conceive for ourselves.

The Big Idea...

Christ has shown us the greatest mercy on the Sabbath, therefore we ought to show mercy to others *especially* on this Day

- ☆ The Sabbath Is for Man
- ☆ The Sabbath Is for Mercy
- ☆ The Sabbath Is for Making Christ Known

³ Nicholas Bownd, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), pg. 413. Athanasius later said "You shall always see and perceive that the greatest miracles that were wrought, Christ did them upon the Sabbath day." *ibid*, pg. 414

I. The Sabbath Is for Man

The 39 articles of absurdity

Please look with me **Mark 2:23-24** “One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is *not lawful* on the Sabbath?” The Pharisees came from a long line of legalists who have added to what God required. The Orthodox Union has 39 articles that explain the Sabbath command.⁴ Among the things forbidden on the Sabbath, they include:

- Carrying trivial things like keys or handkerchiefs
- Throwing a toothpick into a fire
- Putting new laces into shoes
- Tearing toilet paper (only pre-cut toilet paper is allowed)
- Erasing a piece of paper
- Picking a piece of fruit from a tree
- Grating cheese
- Putting on lipstick or eyeshadow
- Cutting fingernails⁵

The greater tragedies

But there are much more tragic rules that have been added to the Sabbath than these. During the period between the Old and New Testaments, there was an incident that 1 Maccabees 2:34 records: some of the had Jews refused to defend themselves in battle on the Sabbath, and therefore 1,000 of them were

⁴ Source: <https://www.ou.org/holidays/shabbat/the-thirty-nine-categories-of-sabbath-work-prohibited-by-law/> Accessed February 22, 2020

⁵ After an exhausting list, these false teachers have the audacity to say: “After reading through the thirty-nine categories of work, you might have come to feel that keeping the Sabbath is an impossibly complex task...When put in handbook form, a different life style may seem very difficult and complex. When lived, however, it is really very easy.” *ibid*

slain.⁶ Likewise in the year 1257 there was a superstitious Jew who lived in England. He fell into the bottom of an outhouse and refused to be rescued out of reverence for the Sabbath. As history records, "...thus [he]...remained there till Monday, [and] was found dead in the dung."⁷

The Sabbath was *made for man*

All of these examples are of the *same nature* as the Pharisees' accusation. They all confuse the end with the means.⁸ Now how does Jesus respond? Please look at v.27 "And he said to them, "The Sabbath was *made for man*, not man *for* the Sabbath." What a remarkable statement! God made the Sabbath in order to care us, to benefit us, to bring us happiness and joy and life and comfort and hope. We don't exist in order to *preserve* the Sabbath, the Sabbath exists to *preserve* us.

Therefore any works that are required to preserve life and to show mercy are not *merely* allowed by God on the Sabbath, they are required. Imagine driving to church and you see a little toddler running in the middle of the street. What would you do? Would you come to church in order to keep the Lord's Day? No. You would stop and rescue her because the Sabbath was *made for man* not man *for* the Sabbath.

Mercy before sacrifice

Now it's true that God ordained that we rest on the Sabbath so that we could worship Him. But this rest is never absolute. It's not rest *at all cost*. When Jesus was explaining this this same account of the disciples eating on the Sabbath in **Matthew 12:6** He said 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' Meaning that God would rather have you show mercy to men than offer the sacrifice to Him. Nicholas Bownd says it like this: when "...comparing these duties, mercy

⁶ Bownd, pg. 234

⁷ *ibid*, pg. 235

⁸ Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons: Outlines of Discourses Doctrinal and Practical*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2011), pg. 303

with sacrifice, He prefers the one before the other...when both of them cannot be had together...if [one] must be neglected, then He would have us leave the sacrifice, and show mercy in helping others.”⁹ Rest at all cost is not the point of the Sabbath. That’s missing it. We rest from our ordinary works so that we can work the works of God.

The Sabbath was made for *man*

But consider one more thing. When Jesus said “The Sabbath was made for *man*...” The word for man is ἄνθρωπος *anthrōpos* and it can refer to an individual male or female (**Mark 3:1**); or it can refer to many people (**Mark 3:28**) or it can refer to all of humanity (**Romans 5:12**). What does Jesus mean here? In this age of individualism, no doubt we hear this entirely individualistically: ‘the Sabbath is made for the *individual* good, for the benefit of that *individual*.’ It’s true that Jesus includes the individual, *but* he means so much more than that. It’s clear from the context that Jesus is not limiting it to the individual: “The Sabbath was made for ἄνθρωπος *anthrōpos*—for mankind, for the whole human race.” Why is that important to stress here?

Experimental Sabbath

Because if we fail to see that Jesus intended to care for all humanity on the Sabbath, then we certainly will not pursue caring for others on this day. Jesus gave us the Sabbath as a way to love our neighbor. Have you considered that before? Do you see that helping others is greater than *mere* rest? Are you concerned with more than your individual rest? Are you concerned about helping others find true rest on this day? That’s our **first point**. **1)** God made the Sabbath for us. We don’t exist to preserve it, it exists to preserve us. **2)** God made the Sabbath for the rest of *all men*. And it is implied in the fourth commandment that we help others find their rest in Him: “...your son, [and] your daughter, your male servant, [and] your female servant, [and] your livestock, [and] the sojourner who is within your gates.”

⁹ Bownd, pg. 232

II. The Sabbath Is for Mercy

Non-inspired chapter breaks

Remember that the chapter breaks that exist in Scripture are not inspired. They were developed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1227 A.D.¹⁰ They have been extremely helpful to the church in order to find particular passages very quickly. But sometimes they are unfortunately placed. That is true here. The end of Mark 2 and the beginning of Mark 3 should really go together because they both deal with the Sabbath.¹¹ And here at the beginning of chapter 3 Jesus is illustrating what he just taught at the end of chapter 2.

The man with the withered hand

Please look with me at v.1 “Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand.” Perhaps this was akin polio where the man’s hand was shrunken and shriveled up. Imagine what that meant for this man. He no doubt suffered physical pain if not from the deformity itself, but from the everyday dangers that his hand could normally protect him from. But that is nothing compared to the shame. The prevailing thought in Israel at this time was that these types of physical ailments were always the result of some family sin. In **John 9**, when the disciples come across the man who was born blind, they ask Jesus in v.2 “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Certainly this man was thought to be a great sinner, or at least his family was. But then there is the back-breaking poverty. In Luke’s gospel account of this story we read “...a man was there whose *right hand* was withered” (**Luke 6:6**) That’s significant. His right-hand was withered. 90% of the world is right-handed which means most likely, this man’s dominant hand was useless

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/divided-Bible-chapters-verses.html> Accessed February 22, 2020

¹¹ That’s how it is divided in Matthew and Luke’s gospel: 12:1-8 & 9-14; 6:1-5 & 6-11 (respectively).

to him.¹² But even if he wasn't right handed, he still wouldn't have been able to work. The only jobs that were available in 1st century Israel were herding, farming, carpentry, fisherman—all blue-collar labor jobs.¹³ You can't do those things with one hand. Psychologically he would have been depressed because God made man to reflect him in work, and this man could no longer do that. And he would have been useless to anyone had he decided to sell himself as a slave. His parents probably no longer had the means to support him. Which is probably why he was in the synagogue to begin with—he was begging. Do the math. This meant he would never marry. What woman would marry a man who was a crippled beggar, who would not be able to take care of her? Which meant no sex, no children, no family. He would never have descendants. His name would be cut off from the earth. This man was probably the most depressed and lonely man in all of the synagogue that day. There was no earthly help or hope for him.

The Pharisaical dilemma

But Jesus has now entered his world. And the serpents were watching Him. v.2 “And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might *accuse* him.” When Matthew recorded these events in **Matthew 12:10**, the Pharisees engage first. They ask “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” The dilemma they present is really simple: ‘Jesus if you heal, then you are not resting, and therefore are breaking the Sabbath.’ So what does Jesus do?

‘Look at the man!’

Please look at v.3 “And he said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Come here.’” This is significant. Matthew Henry says here Jesus “...bade the man

¹² Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-percentage-of-the-world-population-are-left-handed.html> Accessed February 22, 2020

¹³ Source: <http://bibleresources.americanbible.org/resource/how-people-made-a-living-in-the-time-of-jesus> Accessed February 22, 2020

[to] *stand forth*, that by the sight of him they might be moved with compassion.”¹⁴ Often times we aren’t ready to show mercy to others *until* we actually see their desperate condition.¹⁵ So Jesus brought this miserable man and put him right in front of their faces essentially saying: ‘Look at him. Do you see his misery? Can’t you see the pain and shame and poverty that he has endured? No one can help him. And the longer he lives, the worse it will be for him.

The dilemma Jesus poses

Then Jesus poses his own dilemma to the Pharisees in v.4 “And he said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?’” Do you see what Jesus did? The Pharisees had two categories: either you rest which is the *essence* of Sabbath keeping or you don’t and consequently break the Sabbath. But Jesus is rejecting their categories. Rest is not the *essence* of the Sabbath. God gave us rest on the Sabbath *not* as an end in itself, but so that we can do good for others.

A fatal interpretation

Now we have to insert a vital note here. Some interpreters today have wrongly concluded that Jesus eventually healed this man *because* He is Lord of the Sabbath (**Mark 2:28**) and as Lord He can do whatever He wishes on it. Or that Jesus was able to heal him *because* He came to fulfill the law (**Matthew 5:17**) therefore we are not under any moral obligations on the Sabbath. It is deadly to adopt either one of these interpretations. If either one of those interpretations is true, it means that the Sabbath command originally outlawed

¹⁴ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Zondervan Publishing House, 6th Printing 1967), pg. 1369

¹⁵ “Hereupon the liberality of men many times is so cold as it is, for that they are beholding nothing but plenty in themselves, and abundance in their friends, know not the hungry meals that their brethren make with bread and water, and not enough of that; and hear not the pitiful cries of the poor children pinched with cold and hunger, upon whom their fathers and mothers cannot look many times with dry cheeks...” Bownd, pg. 416

doing good on that day.¹⁶ In other words, if Jesus has to change the rules to show mercy on the Sabbath, then He is admitting that it *was* against OT law to help and heal on this day. The Pharisees would have been right. The implications of this are deadly. It would mean that what Satan told our first parents was right: if we obey God, it will be to our harm (**Genesis 3:5**).¹⁷ To obey God's Sabbath meant that you couldn't break your rest even if someone were in peril. The law literally stopped you from doing good for others.¹⁸

Deadly silence

That's why Jesus' question in v.4 was so devastating to the Pharisees. They were left in the position of either accepting Jesus or of admitting that God's law preventing them from showing mercy. How do they respond? The end of v.4 says "But they were silent." They saw the dilemma. They understood that their position was indefensible.

The anger and grief of Jesus

v.5 "And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart..." Stop. Notice the two responses of Jesus: He is angry and grieved

¹⁶ "However, to conclude that Jesus annulled the Sabbath's unique nature by teaching that it is lawful to do good on it, one must assume that it was originally unlawful to do good on that day. That is clearly not the case. As He frequently chided those who criticized Him, doing good was specifically allowed on the Sabbath, as it always had been (Matthew 12:12; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9). The Sabbath is a day given by God for rest and religious observance, but this does not preclude doing good." Source: <https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/sunset-to-sunset-gods-sabbath-rest/jesus-christ-and-the-sabbath> Accessed February 22, 2020. NOTE: I do not know the the theology behind the organization responsible for this quote so I'm not endorsing them. However I did find this particular quote extremely helpful.

¹⁷ John Know the Scottish Reformer said that "...Satan first drew mankind [away] from the obedience of God...by pouring into their hearts that poison, that God did not love them." Iain Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. 157

¹⁸ Furthermore it would mean that the only reason why we are left with good laws is because Jesus took away all the bad ones. Do you realize what kind of a God this leaves us with? It leaves us with the harsh and mean God of the OT and the gracious Jesus of the NT. Dear congregation, that is not the story of the Bible. Who sent Jesus into the world? The Father. Why did He send Him? Because the Father so loved the world. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (**John 3:16**).

at the same time. He is angry because they rejected the truth. Jesus' question demanded an answer. Righteousness demanded them to repent. But they just stood there stone silent. Their silence was wicked and Jesus was angry.

Why was Jesus grieved? Because their hearts had become so hardened they they had lost their humanity. They had become incapable of showing mercy. And He was grieved because their rejection of Christ meant their eternal destruction.

Only Jesus Christ—the God-man—can be perfectly angry and perfectly grieved and rebellious sinners at the same time. He is as **Psalm 7:11** says “...a God who feels *indignation* every day” at the wickedness of sin. And He is the God who says “I have no *pleasure* in the death of the wicked...Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?” (**Ezekiel 33:11**).

Mercy changes everything

So what happens to this man with the withered hand? At the end of v.5 he says to the man “‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.” And instantaneously, everything changed for this man. His pain vanished. His shame evaporated. The entire course of his entire life was fundamentally altered. Jesus brought this man into the rest of the Sabbath. How? By showing mercy. Mercy changed his entire world. Mercy changes everything. And it wasn't an accident that Jesus picked the Sabbath to do this. If you survey the gospels, Jesus is always healing, and showing pity, and exercising His bowels of compassion on this day. As Irenaeus said “...Christ did more often exercise the works of mercy upon the Sabbath day, than upon [any other] day.”¹⁹

Experimental Sabbath

So let's test ourselves. How do we view our Sabbath rest? The Pharisees had no category for resting for the sake of showing mercy. Do you? Do you see that part of the reason God gave us rest on Sabbath was so that we could help

¹⁹ Bownd, pg. 414

others in need? Are you open to that? Is your heart soft to God leading you to show mercy to others on this day? I'm afraid how we as the American church answer those questions. These questions deeply trouble me. Not because I think that we have become legalistic like the Pharisees. I don't think we are in danger of using God's law to hide ourselves from showing mercy. I think the problem lies elsewhere. I think it's as Nicholas Bownd once said in the 16th century: "the [mercy] of men many times [grows] cold [because] they are beholding nothing but plenty in themselves, and abundance in their friends"²⁰ that they are blind to the needs of others. Dear congregation, Christians can be blinded to the needs of others by their own materialism. This is why a recovery of the Sabbath is so vital in our age. Think what good you could do for others if you planned your Sabbath to be a day where you explicitly love your neighbor as yourself. What withered souls could you show mercy to? Don't you realize that mercy can change someone forever? That's our **second point**: The Sabbath is for mercy.

III. The Sabbath Is for Making Christ Known

What this story is *not* about...

You must understand that there is a deeper story than just this man's hand being restored. The miracles of Jesus are never *primarily* about displaying His power. Nor is this story *primarily* about Jesus setting us an example of showing mercy *so that* we would go out and do the same. No this story is telling us something far more profound.²¹ It's showing us how we came into the world. You and I are the man with the withered hand. His withered hand stands in the place of our withered soul. His dead hand is a picture of our being dead in trespasses and sins. His shame and alienation from society is a picture of our shameful lives of rebellion and alienation from God. He was in the condition

²⁰ Bownd, pg. 416

²¹ It is a "sign" like how the gospel of John describes the miracles of Jesus.

that we all find ourselves in when we enter this world: beyond all human help, beyond the reach of all hope. We need a miracle, we need to be washed by the “regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”²² Then, in a moment, Jesus restored him. Here’s the question: *how* was Jesus able to heal and restore this man?

Death follows mercy

Mark gives us a clue in **v.6**. After Jesus healed this man we read: “The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.” “The Herodians [were] the *irreligious* and worldly *political* party who supported King Herod.”²³ Mark says they “held counsel together.” They already decided to kill him, “the only remain decision had to do with *how*.”²⁴ Why is Jesus’ showing mercy—**v.5** *immediately* followed by the announcement of Jesus death—**v.6**?

The withered Right Hand of God

Because beloved, that’s how Jesus healed and restored this man. That’s how Jesus can restore and heal anyone of us:

By exchanging places with us.

- It’s at the cross of calvary where Jesus took on the *pain* of our sin. Jesus—who literally is called the right hand of God—became withered under the weight of God’s wrath. He shriveled up on the cross as His life blood emptied away.

²² Titus 3:5

²³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 8-15* (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 1987), pg. 290

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The fact that the Pharisees teamed up with the secular Herodians showed that their concern for keeping the Sabbath law was entirely pretended.

²⁴ *ibid*

- All of the *shame* of our sin and rebellion against God was lifted off of us and laid upon Him. “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”²⁵
- We will never be *alienated* from God because Jesus was already alienated for us. As He hung on the cross He cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”²⁶
- He removed all our spiritual *poverty* by becoming poor Himself. **2 Corinthians 8:9** “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”
- Finally we are *restored*, just like the man was—because Jesus didn’t stay dead. No beloved, He was restored—resurrected from dead—three days later. “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

Mercy cost Him everything

Do you see what it cost Jesus to show us mercy? Mercy cost Christ *everything*. He showed mercy on *that* Sabbath morning—and for that—He laid in a tomb on another Sabbath morning.

The world cannot tell this story

Beloved, God is not calling us to show mercy on the Sabbath because we need to earn His mercy. Jesus already earned all the mercy we will ever need. God is calling us to show mercy so we can tell that story.

Sabbath mercy is for making Christ known. It’s for telling the gospel story.

²⁵ Isaiah 53

²⁶ Matthew 27:46

The world cannot tell this story when they show mercy. Do you realize that? The world, in a certain sense, can show mercy. It can alleviate suffering and pain when tragedy strikes. We see this all the time. Some tragedy hits, a hurricane, or a flood, and the world puts together a relief fund and scrambles workers. Or we see mercy being shown in hospitals and through first responders or perhaps through our neighbors. And we should thank God for all of that. All of these are great kindnesses from God.

But worldly mercy is a self-orientated mercy. The worldly man shows mercy for his own sake. It makes him feel better. It helps satisfy his conscience. The Christian doesn't have to show mercy to satisfy his conscience. Jesus has already made him clean, he doesn't show mercy as a self-salvation project. No rather, he shows mercy for Christ's sake. He shows mercy in order to tell a story about the gospel. How does our showing mercy tell a story about the gospel?

Mercy will cost you

Because mercy will cost you something. Dear congregation, showing mercy is costly. If you are waiting for mercy to be convenient, you will never show mercy. Maybe it will cost you money, or comfort, or living at a lesser lifestyle, or giving up your Sunday afternoons, or your reputation, or hanging out with those friends one less time. But mercy will always cost. And when the world sees Christians showing mercy at such a cost, it puts our Savior on display.

What did John Calvin display to the watching world when he still visited his sick flock in Geneva even when the plague struck? That Jesus lays down his life for the sheep. **John 14-15** "I am the good shepherd...and I lay down my life for the sheep."

What does the elderly Christian display when he quietly visits old folk's homes in his spare time bringing a smile and gospel comfort? That Jesus is with us till

the end. **Isaiah 46:4** "...even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save."

What does a Christian family display when they take in a mother and her children when home life gets bad? That Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. **Psalms 27:10** "Though my father and mother forsake me... the LORD will take me in."

What does the quiet lay elder *display* when he continually gives up his evenings, spending time away from his own wife and children to help restore the lives of others? That Jesus left the glories of heaven to restore us. "...though he was in the form of God [he took] on the form of a servant...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (**Phil. 2:6-8**)

Dear congregation, isn't that worth it? The Sabbath is calling us to a live a greater life than we could ever conceive for ourselves.

"Stretch out your hand"

If you are here this morning and your soul is withered, if you are still carrying around a dead heart towards God, if you still bear the shame of your own sin, then dear friend don't wait another moment. What does Jesus require of you? Exactly what He required of this man! "Stretch out your hand!" Stretch out your withered soul to Christ Jesus this Sabbath morning and He will show you mercy. You can be forgiven of your sins, your spirit can be fully restored, you don't have to be an outcast any longer. Take hold of Him by faith. Just as this man couldn't do anything to help himself, so you can do nothing to improve your lot. He couldn't do any amount of work to heal himself, and neither can you work to make yourself right with God. The Scripture says over and over again that you can not be saved by good works *but only* but only by faith alone. **Romans 3:28** "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."

Application

Why this day?

So why are we talking specifically about showing mercy on the Sabbath? Can't we show mercy the other six days a week? Yes of course. The problem often is that we have fewer opportunities to do others good the other six days because of our jobs and families. But God has given us this day of rest *especially* so that we can help others find rest.

How to begin?

So then how does one begin to show mercy on the Lord's Day? **First** simply pray for opportunities. James said "You do not have, because you do not ask" (**James 4:3**).

Second, start in concentric circles. Before you try to show mercy out there in the world, start with the people in this church. **Galatians 6:10** "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and *especially to those who are of the household of faith.*" Dear congregation there are some in great need of mercy in this congregation. They can't even show mercy because they are in need of yours. Do you know they are? Have you studied the membership directory to find out who they are?

Third, realize that your heart can grow cold when we don't see the misery of others. Remember what Bownd said "the [mercy] of men many times [grows] cold [because] they are beholding nothing but plenty in themselves, and abundance in their friends"²⁷ that they are blind to the needs of others. We must actually put the suffering of others before our eyes. Which means, that we must go to them. Again James says "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to *visit* orphans and widows in their affliction..." (**James 1:27**).

²⁷ Bownd, pg. 416

Fourth, realize that God does not measure mercy like we measure mercy. The poor widow in the gospels only gave two pennies to help bring mercy to others. Some of you have very little means. But **2 Corinthians 8:12** says “For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” On the other hand, some you have greater means. Don’t let materialism choke out your mercy. How this often happens is that we continue to up our lifestyle the more money we make. And so we never have a margin to show mercy, because we are spending it on our selves.

Fifth, realize that mercy is not one-dimensional. Meaning there is not *only one* way to show mercy. There are many ways to show mercy.

You can showing mercy simply visiting with someone who is ill or handicap. Do you realize how lonely these people are?

You can show mercy by writing a letter. There as an article this week that encouraged the church to write letters to the persecuted church through Voice of the Martyrs or other organizations in order to bring them hope and encouragement. Imagine taking a Sunday afternoon with your children to do that.²⁸

Some of you have small children and young families and it is merciful to make sure they get naps. We must always be mindful of the capacities of those God has entrusted us with.

You can show mercy to those out of town families by opening your home to them on Sunday afternoons so they can come to evening service.

²⁸ Source: <https://disrn.com/opinion/opinion-what-you-can-actually-do-to-help-the-persecuted-church> Accessed February 23, 2020

You can show mercy by going to the abortion clinic and holding up signs for the unborn.

You can show mercy by going to an old folks home and singing hymns.

You can show mercy by opening up your home on the Lord's Day to your neighbors.

How mercy changed a leftist lesbian forever

There's an article in your bulletin this morning by Rosaria Butterfield. I pray that you will read it. Rosaria was a tenured English professor at Syracuse. She described herself as a leftist lesbian, who despised Christians. But then a pastor and his wife opened their home to her and showed her mercy. Over the course of two years, before she even ever entered the church building, Ken and his wife, Floy kept inviting Rosaria back. She recalls those days "We talked openly about sexuality and politics. They did not act as if such conversations were polluting them. They did not treat me like a blank slate. When we ate together, Ken prayed in a way I had never heard before. His prayers were intimate. Vulnerable. He repented of his sin in front of me. He thanked God for all things. Ken's God was holy and firm, yet full of mercy."²⁹ What did it cost Ken and Floy? Time. A seat at their table. The cost of food. And it changed Rosaria forever. She came to know and love Jesus Christ through them. Oh beloved, mercy changes everything.

²⁹ Source: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/my-train-wreck-conversion.html> Accessed February 23, 2020