

How Jesus Kept the Sabbath

By Alejandro Bullon

He had been born blind. In his world, in his very being, there was only darkness, sadness, and hopelessness. To survive, he sat on street corners, hands extended, waiting for the compassion of others.

But on this day all would be transformed—because Jesus came into his life. And Jesus is the difference. And Jesus always makes a difference. Between shadows and light, between sadness and joy, between emptiness and fullness, between life and death, Jesus is the difference. Unfortunately, human beings have such difficulty discovering this truth.

The blind man's encounter with Jesus was life altering. Suddenly his eyes were opened and he could see the sparkling water in the pool, the cobblestone streets, the trees in the courtyards, and the smiles of children. On this happiest day in his life, he felt like singing, praising God, and celebrating. He wanted to give thanks and worship because his life of darkness, sadness, and misery had ended, and a new dimension of light and happiness had begun. He would never forget that Sabbath (Saturday according to the Bible). For this man, every Saturday that followed would be a day of celebration and thanksgiving, for on such a day salvation had come to his life.

The divine miracle that brought so much joy to this blind man was, however, a cause of misunderstanding, accusations, and criticism toward Jesus. Some of the Pharisees accused, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” (1)

Did Jesus devalue the day of rest?

Was Jesus a transgressor of the Sabbath? Did our Lord do away with the principle of Sabbath rest,

established from the beginning of the world? Jesus was often accused of devaluing the day of rest, but He himself stated with conviction, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (2) If He came to fulfill, why was Jesus accused of disobeying the law? Because He brought life to a principle that had degenerated into cold words and ceremonies.

A day of inactivity or a day of action?

It is by design that the gospels record seven miracles performed by Jesus on the Sabbath. (3) Each one involves a healing. They reveal that the Savior did not keep the Sabbath by refraining from action; instead, He kept it by bringing life to people who were burdened by death. This was the direct opposite of the Pharisees' teaching that keeping the sabbath appropriately meant total inactivity. Jesus' life-giving activity contradicted their tradition and aroused their resentment. After the healing of the paralytic at the fountain of Bethesda, the biblical account says, “So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.” (4)

Did Jesus support changing the day?

It's interesting to note that most of the arguments between the Jews and Jesus involved what was lawful to do on the Sabbath, but even more noteworthy is that they never argued whether the Sabbath (Saturday) was the day of rest. By the silence of that issue, the Gospel narratives and the rest of the New Testament leave no doubt that the only day of rest acknowledged by Jesus, the apostles, and the early church was the seventh-day Sabbath. The history of the church during the first centuries of Christianity shows the manner in which Sunday came to be considered the day of rest by the majority of Christians. But neither the ministry of Jesus nor the New Testament Scriptures gives the least support of a first-day Sabbath.

Does Jesus' example matter?

To the contrary, the apostle Luke tells about Jesus' respect and obedience toward the keeping of the Sabbath throughout His ministry. "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read." (5) The phrase "as was his custom" is noteworthy.

The miraculous healings Jesus performed on the Sabbath were not accidental. Jesus had a purpose in mind that went beyond healing. His attitude toward the Sabbath shows that He wanted to uphold the sanctity of the day of rest, and to bring it out from under the human traditions that had made it a day of prohibitions and senseless regulations, far from a day of delight, holiness, and honor. (6) In performing miracles of healing and redemption on the Sabbath, Jesus was affirming the Sabbath as "a day of good news, a day of salvation."

Another interesting dimension of the Sabbath in its relationship to Jesus is revealed in the Creation narrative, where we are told that God created the world in six days and that He rested on the seventh. (7) Before resting, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." (8) The work of creation was finished. Everything was perfect. But it didn't remain perfect. Eventually, the enemy came and disfigured God's wonderful work.

On the seventh day Jesus rested in the tomb

Was the world condemned for eternity by this distortion of God's original plan? Of course not! And Jesus was God's answer to the enemy of the soul. By His miracles of healing, Jesus revealed that He came to this world to restore a creation that had deteriorated in sin. And when His earthly ministry came to a close

upon the cross of Calvary, Jesus completed not only His work of creation—but also His work of redemption. Before dying, He proclaimed **“It is finished.”**(9)

The work of salvation having been completed, on the Sabbath Jesus rested in the tomb, according to the commandment. From that moment on, the Sabbath would not be merely a memorial of creation, but also a memorial of salvation. Even in His death, Jesus gave us the example of putting aside the Sabbath as a special day.

Even today, the Lord Jesus opens His arms wide and invites us to come to Him and rest: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”(10)

Rest for the weary

Rest. Isn't that what we wish for? This world is full of pain and sadness. Life without Christ is a difficult burden. We struggle; we work hard—with little to show for it. We search desperately for a little peace but find conflict instead. We lie down to sleep at night, but the deafening noises from our past keep us awake. We are afraid, but don't know exactly why.

Don't you want rest? Jesus is waiting for you with open arms. Go to Him and find rest for your weary heart—but also come ready to learn of Him. Remember that He said, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”(11)

How did Jesus relate to the Sabbath? How did He keep it? He gave us His example; He restored the vitality and holiness that had been taken from it. “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people

of God; Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest.”(12)

Do you want to enter into such rest? Do you want to enjoy the blessings that God promised to those who keep the Sabbath? Respond to Jesus and give Him all your sadness and your burdens—your entire being. But don't delay, for the Scriptures urge us, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”(13)

(1)John 9:16. (2)Matthew 5:17 (3) See John 5:1-15; Mark 1:21-28; 1:29-31; 3:1-6; John 9:1-41; Luke 13:10-17; Luke 14:1-4.

(4)John 5:16. (5)Luke 4:16. (6)See Isaiah 58:13. (7) Exodus 20:8

(8)Genesis 1:31. (9)John 19:30. (10)Matthew 11:28, 29.

(11)John 13:15. (12)Hebrews 4:9, 11. (13)Psalm 95:7, 8.

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