

Resting (Trusting) in Christ



SABBATH—APRIL 30

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 11:28–30; Matthew 12:1, 2; Luke 14:1–6; John 5:9–16.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest’ ” (Matthew 11:28, NIV).

CHRIST WAS A LIVING EXAMPLE OF THE LAW. “Not once in His life did He break God’s law. People were always looking for an excuse to criticize Him for doing wrong. Yet, He could say to His accusers, ‘Can any of you prove I am guilty of sinning?’ (John 8:46, NIV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 287.

Jesus’ life fully reflected (showed) the meaning of God’s law, the Ten Commandments. He was the law of God lived out in human life. So, by studying Jesus’ life, we learn what keeping the commandments is like. We also learn how to keep the commandments so that they are not a dry and spiritless legalism.¹

And, of course, among those commandments is the fourth commandment, to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy.

This week, we will continue our study of Matthew. We will look at a few of the disagreements over how to keep the Sabbath. Then we will see in the life of Jesus an example of what it means to keep the Sabbath. The law is an example of the character (thoughts; feelings; actions) of God. And Jesus personally kept that law. So, by learning how He kept the fourth commandment and what He taught about it, we can learn more about the character of God. And, above all, we can learn how we can reflect (show) that character in our own lives.

DEFINITIONS

1. legalism—the belief that keeping the law can save you.

THE LIGHT YOKE² OF CHRIST (Matthew 11:28–30)

Jesus offers rest to all who are weary.

In Matthew 11:20–27, Jesus begins with a powerful warning for people in some of the cities in Galilee who refused to accept His ministry (work done for God). What makes His warning so frightening is that these people had great opportunities to know the truth. Jesus, the Truth (John 14:6), walked in person among them. And not only that, He did many “ ‘mighty works’ ” (Matthew 11:20) there, too. But many refused to repent.³ Indeed, He said that if the “ ‘mighty works’ ” He had done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, then “ ‘it would have remained until this day’ ” (Matthew 11:23). This means that the people of Capernaum were worse than the Sodomites.

Right after that, in verses 25–27, Jesus starts praying to the Father. He thanks the Father and then talks about the close relationship between the Father and Himself. And He also lets it be known that all that He had or did was given to Him by the Father. This shows more clearly why the refusal of so many in these cities to accept Him was so sad.

Read Matthew 11:28–30. What is Jesus saying in these verses? Why would He say this here, right after what He had just said?

Jesus criticizes unbelief and speaks again of His closeness with the Father. Then He offers rest to all who are weary. In other words, He is telling the people not to make the mistake these others made by refusing to accept Him. He has the authority and power to do what He says. And He says that by coming to Him you will find rest for your souls. So, that rest would include peace, the promise of salvation, and the hope that those who refuse to accept Him do not and cannot have.

What else does Jesus mean when He says He will give us rest? Does it mean laziness? Of course not. Jesus has a very high standard (goal) for us. We saw this in His Sermon on the Mount. But a relationship with Jesus is not meant to wear us out. By learning of Him, by following Him, and adopting (accepting) His character, we can find rest from many of the problems and troubles of life. And, as we will see, one way of having that rest is found in keeping the Sabbath.

How do you experience the promise that Jesus offers us here? What does being “gentle and lowly” have to do with making it easier to carry our loads (responsibilities) in life?

DEFINITIONS

2. yoke—a frame fitted to a person’s shoulders to carry a load in two equal portions.

3. repent—to feel or show that you are sorry for something bad or wrong that you did and that you want to do what is right.

UNREST⁴ OVER A REST DAY (Matthew 12:1, 2)

Much of the Christian world argues that the seventh-day Sabbath has been removed. If that were really true, why did Jesus spend so much time dealing with how to keep the Sabbath?

Read Matthew 12:1, 2; Luke 14:1–6; Mark 2:23–28; and John 5:9–16. What are the issues (problems) in these scenes? And what things are not issues?

The Pharisees⁵ knew that one of the reasons Israel had been taken captive to Babylon was that the nation had dishonored the Sabbath. The Pharisees wanted to prevent that from happening again. So, they created a long list of rules about what was and was not acceptable to do on the Sabbath. What were some of those rules?

If a hen lays an egg on the Sabbath, is it OK to eat the egg? Most Pharisees thought that if the hen were an egg-laying hen, then it was not OK to eat an egg laid on Sabbath because the hen was working. But what if a hen that laid an egg was not an egg-laying hen? Then it was OK to eat the egg. That is because egg laying was not the hen's first "duty" or job. (There was also a suggestion that you could eat an egg laid on Sabbath by a laying hen if you later killed the hen for breaking the Sabbath.)

Is it OK to look at yourself in a mirror on Sabbath? The answer? No, because if you see a gray hair you might be tempted to pull it out. And pulling a hair out would be reaping, and that makes hair-pulling an act of work.

If your house catches fire on Sabbath, is it OK to go save your clothes? The answer: you should carry out only one set of clothing. But if you put on one set of clothing, then you may carry out another set. (By the way, if your home catches fire, it is not OK to ask a Gentile [non-Jew] to put out the fire. But if the Gentile is putting out the fire anyway, that is OK.)

Is it OK to spit on Sabbath? The answer: you may spit on a rock, but you may not spit on the ground because that would be making mud or mortar.⁶

We might laugh at these rules, but how might we be doing the same thing, not just to the Sabbath but in regard to every part of our faith? How can we avoid losing sight of what is truly important when paying attention to less important things?



The Pharisees thought that if an egg-laying hen lays an egg on the Sabbath, it was wrong to eat the egg because the hen was working.

DEFINITIONS

4. unrest—a situation in which a lot of people are angry about something and are likely to become violent.

5. Pharisees—members of an ancient Jewish group that followed Jewish religious laws and teachings very strictly.

6. mortar—a wet substance that is spread between bricks or stones that holds them together when it hardens.

JESUS' ANSWER (Matthew 12:3–8)

Monday's study shows the situation Jesus was up against: strict rules for Sabbath keeping that ruined the true purpose of the Sabbath. It was to be a day of rest from our work. It was a day to worship God and fellowship with other believers in ways that could not be done during the workweek. It was a day that parents would be more available to their children than they might have been throughout the week. It was a day to celebrate what our Creator, our Savior, did for us.

Read Matthew 12:3–8 to see how Jesus answers the heavy yoke of the Pharisees. Also read 1 Samuel 21:1–6. What does Jesus want them to understand?

Jesus was telling them what He would later say in a much stronger way (read Matthew 23:23, 24). He wanted them to focus on what is really important. Jesus retells the familiar story of the fugitive David taking bread from the sanctuary. The bread was supposed to be eaten by priests only. In that situation, the hunger of David and his men was more important than the sanctuary service the bread was meant to be used for. In the same way, the hunger of Jesus' followers was more important than Sabbath rules (about reaping) planned for other purposes.

Jesus also points to the work of the priests in the temple on the Sabbath day. The Sabbath allowed for the work of helping others. In the same way, the Sabbath allows for the work of Jesus' disciples because Jesus and His work were greater than the temple.

Nothing Jesus said here or anywhere else about keeping the Sabbath made God's command less important. He wanted to break them free, not from the Sabbath but from foolish rules that hid the true purpose of the Sabbath. The Sabbath also is an example of the peace and rest that we have in Christ as our Creator and our Savior.

“In the days of Christ the Sabbath had become so twisted that its keeping showed the character of selfish men rather than the character of the loving heavenly Father.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 284. Look at your actions and ask yourself what you could do to make sure that they show the character of our loving heavenly Father.



The Sabbath was a day in which children knew their parents would be more available to them than they might have been throughout the week.

HEALING ON THE SABBATH (Matthew 12:9–14)

It is very interesting to read through the Gospels and to see all the times that the writers wrote about Sabbath incidents⁷ between Jesus and the religious leaders. *Why would all four Gospel writers write so many stories about Jesus' struggles with the leaders if the Sabbath were about to be removed?* This point becomes even stronger when we remember that the Gospels were written down many years after the ministry of Jesus. Bible thinkers disagree over the exact dates that the Gospels were written. But most Bible thinkers place them at least 20 to 30 years after the death of Jesus. If the seventh-day Sabbath had been replaced by Sunday, this change is certainly not hinted at in any of the Gospels about Jesus' life. So, we have powerful proof that the seventh-day Sabbath was not removed or changed. In fact, Jesus never commanded any change to be made to the Sabbath, according to the four Gospels. If we focus on Jesus' commands and example, the Gospels show us that the seventh-day Sabbath is still binding and valid (true).

Read Matthew 12:9–14. What is the issue here? Why would that be another reason for disagreement?

“Upon another Sabbath, as Jesus entered a synagogue,⁸ He saw there a man who had a withered hand. The Pharisees watched Him, eager to see what He would do. The Saviour knew well that in healing on the Sabbath He would be seen as a law breaker. But He did not waste any time. He broke down the strict rules that blocked the Sabbath. . . . There was a well-known saying among the Jews that a failure to do good, when one had opportunity, was to do evil. To fail to save life was to kill. So, Jesus met the rabbis on their own ground.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 286.

Again, as in the past Sabbath incident, Jesus wanted to point people to the higher purpose of the law, to the higher purpose of the life of faith. These men would have been satisfied to leave that man with his pain and suffering rather than break their own man-made rules for the Sabbath. These rules had gotten so twisted that the rabbis would have pulled an ox out of a ditch on the Sabbath rather than save a fellow human being from suffering.

We need to be careful in making sure that our practice of faith does not block the way of living our faith according to God's will.



To fail to save life was to kill.

DEFINITIONS

7. incidents—unexpected and usually unpleasant events or things that happen.

8. synagogue—Jewish place of worship.

KEEPING THE SABBATH (Matthew 12:12)

As should be clear from the Gospel stories, Jesus did not remove the Sabbath. Instead, He renewed the meaning of the Sabbath. He freed it from the unnecessary loads people had put on it. Hundreds of years later, Christians were still resting and worshiping on Sabbath. The fifth-century historian Socrates Scholasticus wrote: “Almost all churches throughout The World celebrated the sacred mysteries (the service of the Lord’s Supper) on the Sabbath of every week.”—Adapted from *Ecclesiastical History*, book 5, page 289. There are many reasons why all these events about the Sabbath were written down in the Gospels. But it was not to point anyone away from the Sabbath.

Read again Matthew 12:12 and focus on the wording: “ ‘Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath’ ” (NKJV). What does that mean in the situation that Jesus was addressing? And what does that also tell us that Sabbath keeping should include?

Jewish law did permit giving medical attention on the Sabbath to a person whose life was in danger. But Jesus took it further. Healings, even healings that could be done on another day, are permitted on the Sabbath. Look at what Jesus said later in Matthew. “ ‘Every teacher of the law who has been taught about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house. He brings new treasures out of his storeroom as well as old ones’ ” (Matthew 13:52, NIV). No question, Jesus was clearly bringing out new treasures, too.

Read Isaiah 58:7–13. How do these verses help to explain what it means to truly follow the Lord and to live out the principles (important rules) of the law, including the Sabbath? How does our knowledge of the three angels’ messages help us to better understand the meaning of the words “repairer of the breach”?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Someone said, “With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things, and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion.” In the 1600s, French thinker Blaise Pascal famously warned, “Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious beliefs.” This thinking is somewhat twisted. But there is, sadly, some truth to these thoughts. This truth can be seen in the meaning of the week’s lesson about the Pharisees and the Sabbath. “Jesus turned upon the Pharisees with the question whether it was lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill. He also challenged them with their own wicked purposes. They were hunting His life with bitter hatred. But He was saving life and bringing happiness to crowds of people. Was it better to kill upon the Sabbath, as they were planning to do, than to heal suffering people, as He had done? Was it more righteous [holy; just] to have murder in the heart upon God’s holy day than love to all men, which shows itself in actions of mercy?”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 287.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What does Jesus mean when He says, “ ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’ ” (Matthew 12:7, NKJV)? As you figure out your answer, consider these verses too: Matthew 9:10–13; Hosea 6:6; and Isaiah 1:11–17.
- 2 Why, given the powerful proof we have from the Bible, do you think that so many Christians, even many very faithful people who love Jesus, are so stubborn in refusing to accept the Sabbath? What are things that we could do, besides showing them proof from the Bible, that could help these people be more open to the Sabbath truth?
- 3 How do you keep the Sabbath? In what ways could you do more to get a deeper and richer experience from keeping the Sabbath?
- 4 Jesus said, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Ask yourself a question: In what ways can you help to make the load lighter and loosen the yoke of those around you?