

Sunday's Coming; Are you? John 5

One of the unique features of the Jewish religion is the observance of the Sabbath. No other world religion had a day of celebration and worship set apart from the rest of the week. Human life was characterized by the drudgery of work - work - and more work - more like slavery 24-7. Christianity and Islam based their Sunday and their Friday prayer day on the Jewish practice of observing the Sabbath.

The bible teaches that God commanded his people to keep the Sabbath. Sabbath was God's idea. In Leviticus 23 God speaks to Moses from Mount Sinai, "Moses! Say to the people, there are six days when you may work, but the Sabbath day – the seventh day – is a day of Sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; it is a Sabbath to the Lord." In Exodus 34:21 God adds, "even during the busy plowing season and the busy harvest season - when timing is everything and you don't have enough of it - you must rest." You must trust God. All seven feasts that God commanded his people to celebrate through the year were Sabbath days - sacred assemblies and no work. God felt so strong about this practice of not working and worshipping in sacred assembly that God included this regulation in the 10 commandments. This Sabbath command has the clean-up spot in the first table of the law. It is also the longest and the only commanded that gives the reason why the command should be kept.

And the question that the Spirit of God addresses to us today is this. Are you observing the Sabbath? And why? And why do you - why do we who are Christians - do our Sabbath keeping on Sunday? Sunday's coming, are you?

There are two versions of the ten commandments in the Bible. In Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5. In Exodus God explains that the reason the Sabbath is so special is that God worked for six days in creating the heavens and the earth, and God rested on the seventh day. And so God blessed the seventh day and made it holy. By Sabbath keeping we are imitating God. According to this Exodus command we observe the Sabbath so that every week we can participate and experience in small way, in an anticipatory way, the very goodness of God. You may remember that when God finished creating, God saw what he had made and it was very good. Everything was created by God for his glory. The Sabbath day was the day that the creation itself was ready to start praising God. The Sabbath was given by God as a gift so that we his children can participate in God's rest, God's joy, and God's glory. Celebrating the Sabbath was a way of living into the life and rhythm of God, and reminding us of God's purpose and our purpose in life.

In Deuteronomy 5 this Sabbath command has the same fourth spot. It's the last and longest command that helps us Love God above all. In this Deuteronomy command, keeping the Sabbath was a weekly reminder that God set his children free from slavery in Egypt. In Egypt, Israel was caught in the oppression of a pagan culture. And under that

oppression they were forced to slave away 24-7 365 days of the year, building cities and pyramids for the glory of the Pharaoh, and the glory of Egypt. It was a life of suffering and pain. They were paralyzed from doing what God intended. They were living a life resulting from sin. And that was not what God intended for his people or for his creation. So God set his people free. Free to serve. Free to bring glory to him. Free to celebrate and participate in the liberating life and work of God. This was God's gift in the Sabbath command, to participate in the life God intended. A life of joy, shalom, wholesomeness, health, freedom, dancing.

It was on a Sabbath Day, and not just a regular Sabbath day, it was a Jewish Feast Sabbath day, that Jesus intentionally goes out of his way to heal this man paralyzed for 38 years. Like the Sabbath, the temple was a place where you could experience the power and the presence of God. Temples in Jesus day were not just churches. God is not limited to churches. Temples were also banks, and hospitals, and theaters and retreat centers, and employment centers. Sabbaths created holy time and temples created holy space.

The temple in Jerusalem also had an attached hospital wing near the temple entrance. Surrounding a pool and held up by five massive pillars the Bethesda Hospital housed many invalids. The Blind, lame, paralyzed. The addicts, bi polar and schizophrenics. These people were not allowed into the temple but lay outside often begging and hoping that somehow the power of God would heal them and they would be allowed to come into the temple, the holy space and experience the shalom of God. Bethesda means House of mercy. But for 38 years the Sabbaths and the temple and the house of mercy held empty promises. And I am sure this man had given up all hope and all desire to get well. He was comfortable with his life on welfare. He adapted to his invalid life.

And so on this Sabbath day as Jesus enters the temple, he sees this paralyzed man and learned that he had been in that condition for a long time. As long as the Israelites wandered in the desert because of their sin. And Jesus says to the man, Sunday's coming, are you? Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be whole? Do you want to experience the life God intended? Do you want to experience true Sabbath and come into the temple of God?

"I have no one to help me," he said, "so why should I dream and hope for the impossible. This is my lot in life." Jesus said to this man, "Arise! Pick up your bed and walk! Arise.

This is the word the Bible used for Lazarus and Jesus when they were raised from the dead. Jesus raised this paralyzed man of 38 year from the death of paralysis and invited him into the promised land of LIFE with God. This was Jesus' third sign. It was a sign that a new day was dawning, It was the early budding of life in the new creation. Through the WORD of LIFE Jesus spoke people were raised to enter a new promised land. A land without tears or mourning or crying or pain or paralysis.

This sign stirred up violent opposition to Jesus and in the end cost him his life. You see even in Jesus day most people observed Sabbath as a law of Moses. As a burden to bear. As a command to obey. No picking up of beds, no making food, no long walks, no swimming, no sports, no homework. No work of any kind. Paralysis makes us holy. Slavery to law makes us holy. No thought of participating in the shalom of God, no thought of freedom to serve. No thought of bringing glory to God and participating in the life and work of God. Just a self help project of making me holy, of making me look good.

Jesus as the WORD of God made flesh speaks a new creation into existence. A new way of living, a new way of thinking. On the seventh Day God rested from creating the heavens and the earth. But that does not mean God stopped working. In the face of a fallen creation, in face of hospitals full of sick children, in the face of severe famines and severe injustice, in the face of massive unemployment, in the face of millions of people living in broken homes and million caught in the clutches of addiction God is at work. God is making all things new. Sunday's coming, are you?

Jesus explains that God is not at rest contrary to public opinion. A resting God is not the meaning of Sabbath. God is busy at work. God was busy making the heavens and the earth. God was busy saving a people from slavery. And God continues to be busy. In Jesus God is busy doing even greater things than in the past. God is doing things beyond our imagination. Amazing things, like raising the dead and giving them life. Sunday's coming, are you?

"I tell you the thuth, says Jesus, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and will live. A time and a place has now come, a glorious time and glorious place has come when all those who are in their graves will hear the WORD made flesh and come out. They will arise and live in a new creation and enjoy the fullness of life with God. I AM the resurrection and the LIFE, Jesus said. Sunday's coming, are you?

Do you want to get well? Do you want to participate in this new creation? Do you want to arise and live? Do you want to overcome the paralyzes of sin, and the tears of suffering?

Christians do not observe the Sabbath. Christians do not stop their work once a week to remember the creation, of even the rescue from slavery. Christians observe and celebrate Sunday. The Lord's Day. On the first day of the week God said to the dead body of Jesus laying in the tomb, "Arise pick up your life and walk. And it was so. Jesus is the first fruit of the new creation.

Every Sunday we celebrate Easter and participate in the new creation work of God. Every Sunday we gather to worship, anticipating and enjoying a foretaste of the life to come.

The eternal Sunday that is coming. We gather to work and to pray for that Sunday life to become real among us. Jesus said that Sunday time is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of Jesus and live.

The Church is a Sunday focused community. A community that gathers around the Word of God, so that lives can be transformed, so that the blind come to see, the lame come to walk and the paralyzed come dance into that sacred space and time in the presence of God.

Do you want to get healed? Do you want to live a Sunday – a resurrection focused life? A life in sync with the glorious purposes of God? A life lived in anticipation of the new creation?

Many people are quite happy living in the condition they have been in for a long time. They wander around in the desert of sin never reaching the promised land. We may have adapted quite well and even be content to let sleeping dogs lie. To let the things in our lives that paralyze us, and keep us from God's purpose in our lives to let them just lie. And we can be quite good at making excuses. I have no one to help me into the waters of God life.

Sunday's Coming, are you coming too?

Jesus said, I AM the resurrection and the life. I AM the way to that Sunday life, in that sacred space of the temple. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good and participated in the work of God will arise to life, and those who have done evil and ignored the work of God will arise to judgment.

Sunday's coming, are you coming too?