

Life-Giving Sabbath

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting.

We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we are trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word, because we believe that God has something to say to everyone. He has something to say to people who've been Christians their entire lives.

He has something to say to people who've been Christians maybe a few months or a few weeks. And He has something to say to people who would not consider themselves Christians, people who have questions or doubts or objections to Christianity.

And so we come now, we're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection. And as we've been coming at the Gospels, we've been asking two simple questions.

Question one, who is Jesus? And question two, how do we respond to Him? Last week, we looked at the story about fasting and new wine and old wineskins, and new cloth on old garments, and we saw the newness and the joy and the celebration of the Gospel.

[1 : 26] Jesus came in confrontation with the religious leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees. And this morning, we're going to see another confrontation that Jesus has in this series, again with the religious leaders of Judaism.

This time, however, as we've looked at already this morning when it comes to the Fourth Commandment, what it means to honor the Sabbath day. And so we're going to look at what Jesus has to teach us about that, and we're going to jump right in.

I invite you to turn with me. You can turn on your phone or in your worship guide or in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word, and God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now Mark 2, starting in verse 23. One Sabbath, He was going through the grain fields, 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? And He said to them, Have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him?

[2 : 35] How he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him.

And He said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Verse 1.

Again, He entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus to see whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. And He said to the man with the withered hand, Come here.

And He said to them, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill? But they were silent. And He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, Stretch out your hand.

He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Him. How? To destroy Him.

[3 : 40] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in Heaven, we thank You again this morning, that You love us as Your children, and You help us.

You instruct us in Your Word. And so we ask simply again that You would do that, that You would speak clearly to us this morning, that we would understand our need for You and Your grace in our lives, and we would also see that You haven't left us alone.

You meet us, and You give us all the grace that we need. We ask these things, grateful again that we don't earn them or deserve them. Instead, we simply ask them. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. If you've been with us, you know that week after week as we come to our congregational prayer, no matter which elder is up here, we always pray for the women in our congregation who are pregnant.

And we praise God that we have so much life that's coming in this congregation. But I want you to take a little bit of a thought experiment with me. I want you to imagine that we're here in worship, and there's a woman who's pregnant, and maybe it's about a week before her due date, and suddenly she starts having contractions.

[4 : 54] And quickly we realize this is not a drill. It is time to get to the hospital as quickly as possible. So I'm in the middle of the sermon, but her husband and her head out, and they're on the way to the hospital.

They get on to I-25. Her husband, knowing how important it is to get her to the hospital quickly, and knowing that it's Sunday morning, and there's not a lot of traffic, decides to put the pedal to the metal. And so, in this section of I-25, right, it's 65, but let's say he's going 75.

Maybe he's going 80. Okay, and we understand why, right? His goal is to get his wife to the hospital as quickly as possible. Now, it also happens that it is near the end of the month, and there's a lot of police that are out on Sunday morning looking for someone to pull over.

Okay? So, this husband ends up being pulled over by a police officer. Police officer comes, and he tries to explain, look, we are on our way to the hospital. My wife is in the middle of giving birth.

We need to get there as quickly as possible. Police officer has several options at this point, right? Option one, he could let them go. Okay, I understand this is a difficult situation.

[6 : 00] I understand what's happening here. Proceed to the hospital. Option two, he gives the husband a ticket. If he's going over 80, he makes sure he gives him a ticket for reckless driving. What's the right choice?

Trick question. Neither of those are correct. The correct response for the police officer is to turn on his lights and tell them that all they need to do is follow him.

And then he should clear traffic for them going 85 or 90 miles per hour as long as it's safe so that this man and his wife can get to the hospital as quickly as possible.

Why? The reason is that laws are not arbitrary. As one man has said, the law reflects the heart or the values of the lawgiver.

What is the purpose of the speed limit? What is the heart or the value behind it? The heart and value behind the speed limit is that we would honor and protect life. If the police officer in this situation wants to honor and protect life, he honors that greater principle by ignoring the minor regulation and honoring the greater value.

[7 : 11] Okay? He understands that the law does not exist for itself. It has a purpose and a direction. And so in doing that, he wants to make sure the life of this child and this mother are protected and they end up to the hospital as quickly as possible.

Now on the one hand, this is a thought experiment. On the other hand, this happens all the time. So if you look this up, you'll find multiple instances of this happening. There's a news article every few years about the husband who gets pulled over for speeding while he's driving his wife, his pregnant wife, to the hospital.

And there's a variety of responses. If you look at it, most of them that I could find, the husband gets a ticket. In fact, in one situation, the police officer told him, your wife will be giving birth to the child.

You will be in jail. There was one instance though, in Kentucky actually this year, this summer, police officer turned on his lights and just said, follow me.

And he escorted them to the hospital. Right? Because he understands that there are some things that are greater than certain laws. That's the situation we're encountering here in this passage, in the illustration that Jesus uses.

[8 : 18] We find him and his disciples in verse 23, they're traveling somewhere. We're not told where. And apparently they're hungry as they're going. They're walking through a field. And so they decide to feed themselves.

Now this was actually allowed, according to Old Testament law. If you were going through a field, you were allowed to pick grains off the top. This is stated explicitly in Deuteronomy. So they're not stealing. They're doing something that's allowed.

It just happens they're doing the right thing on the wrong day. They are doing it on the Sabbath, the day when they're supposed to rest from work.

And this is considered apparently to be a type of reaping. And so they're working technically on the Sabbath when they're not supposed to. They're breaking the law. Now there's some debate in this situation about whether this is actually forbidden by the Old Testament, whether this is something that the scribes and the Pharisees made up, whether it's a law that they added.

We're not going to resolve that debate this morning. All we know is that Jesus' reaction here, his response assumes that the Pharisees are correct. Jesus responds to them as if his disciples actually are breaking the law.

[9 : 26] And he gives an example here, the example that we read earlier this morning from 1 Samuel chapter 21. He says, don't you remember? He's engaging, by the way, in a type of religious debate here.

He's meeting the Pharisees on their own turf. He knows they like to talk Bible text, so he's going to talk a Bible text to them. And he reminds them, when the great king of Israel, David, was traveling and he was in need and hungry, and his men with him, they also broke a rule.

The rule that they broke was that they took food that was supposed to be only for the priests. David, of course, not a priest. He's a king. And it's not stated explicitly in 1 Samuel 21, but it's implied or believed that that was also on a Sabbath day.

And so he points them to this similar situation. Look, you're upset about this, but David, the great king, also did this. And then he clarifies for them this principle.

Yeah, technically the law was broken. You are correct. And it was done to meet a higher law, a greater principle. In other words, they would have missed the forest for the trees if they had refused to feed these starving people because this bread was only meant for the priests.

[10 : 38] And Jesus gives us then this principle that he's been building up to. Verse 27, the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. In other words, regulations, man-made rules that don't lead to the purpose of the Sabbath need to be removed.

And what is the purpose of the Sabbath? If it's made for man and man is not made for it, it is meant to give life. It's meant to sustain and encourage. It's meant to give rest.

It's meant to protect people from working too much. And so what Jesus wants is then to honor this greater principle, the principle of life. Look, this is what's behind the law.

Yes, I know the speed limit is 65. And this woman needs to get to the hospital. Yes, I know. In your minds, technically they're reaping on the Sabbath.

And they are being given life. They're being sustained by what they're doing, picking these heads of grain. And then chapter 3, verse 4, this next story.

[11 : 38] We have these two twin stories that go together. Jesus clarifies, verse 4, what it means that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. He tells them, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?

In other words, the Sabbath has a purpose. Its purpose is to do good and to save life. That is the governing principle.

That is what matters more than anything else. That's what a good police officer understands. He understands the greater principle of the law when he stops a husband who's speeding to take his wife to the hospital.

That's what these Pharisees are meant to understand. There is something greater and more important and more powerful at work. The law does not exist for itself. It points to something good.

It points to a God who wants to give his people life. Sometimes the ultimate goal that we want is impossible within the certain guidelines.

[12 : 39] So in one of his books, General Stanley McChrystal tells the story of how at one time the Pentagon, looking to limit risk, mandated that every soldier leaving a secure base in both Afghanistan and Iraq wear body armor.

Sounds like a great idea, right? Everyone's safe. Everyone wears body armor. Well, they find out quickly that that's not helpful. Unfortunately, wearing protective gear simply wasn't always realistic. Many activities, including climbing Afghanistan's towering mountains, were literally impossible in the heavy armor.

To accomplish their missions, soldiers would now have to assume both the normal risks of combat and the added risk of disobedience. In other words, they couldn't keep the rule and honor the ultimate purpose and goal of the mission.

The same thing here is true of the Pharisees. They have missed the goal and mission and purpose of the Sabbath. The Pharisees are lying in wait. It tells us at the beginning of chapter 3, they want Jesus to do something wrong so they can catch him.

They are like someone watching soldiers to see them take off their body armor so that they can catch them doing something wrong. And they've completely missed the point, right? They are not interested at all in the mission.

[13 : 54] Accomplishing the mission at times required removing armor. For Jesus, accomplishing the mission, honoring the Sabbath, requires healing this man.

This is what it means to honor the principle. This is what it means to give and love life. And so this reminds us of priorities. When we look at God and his law, there are big things that trump little things.

Sometimes the heart and the spirit of the law is more important than the letter of the law. Sometimes you can't keep the letter of the law and honor its heart. There are major rules that win over minor regulation.

For the Pharisees, the letter of the law is more important than its purpose. The mercy is more important than red tape. The good of people is what matters.

And so if there is a principle that's meant to be behind the law, if there's a greater value we're supposed to honor, the question for us as we come to this passage is this, what is the principle behind the Sabbath?

[14 : 56] What is the principle behind the idea that God has asked and commanded his people to take one day a week for rest? Well, the principle, as Jesus gives us here, is that Sabbath is a day of life.

It's a day that's meant to give us life. It's a day that's supposed to restore us. When Jesus tells us at the end of chapter 2 that he's Lord of the Sabbath, he's saying, I'm the one who makes the rules.

I'm the one who's in charge here. I am going to restore the Sabbath, not destroy the Sabbath. I'm going to restore it, not destroy it.

I'm going to make the Sabbath great again. I'm going to make it life-giving and good. And so the Pharisees' temptation is to make this into a day of rules, right?

They have missed the point. They're making it into something that it's never meant to be. As we come, as people who live in Colorado Springs in 2021, our temptation typically is not to make it into a day of rules.

[15 : 55] Our temptation is to make it into nothing, to make it into just another day of work or consumption. But if the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath, the Sabbath is meant to save us from ourselves.

It's meant to save us from ourselves. The Pharisees here have a negative vision of the Sabbath. Jesus has a positive vision. The Pharisees have completely missed the point.

They don't care about the mission at all. They're just interested in following the rules. And so if that's the case, what is the mission? The mission that God has given to the Sabbath is that it's a day of life and rest.

When we look at the Ten Commandments and what it tells us about the Sabbath, when we look at the ideas throughout the Old Testament, there's two things that stand out. First, the Sabbath is meant to be a pause from work.

Okay, it's a pause from work. Second, the Sabbath is meant to be a pause from consumption. It's a pause from work and a pause from consumption. So we'll take those in order.

[16 : 58] Pause from work. I asked you guys this when we looked at the Sabbath in Nehemiah chapter 13 back in 2019. What do you call someone who works seven days a week?

A slave. Jesus gives the Sabbath. Yeah, you can call him a workaholic. In a biblical sense, it's a slave. The Israelites are given the Sabbath as God's gift as they're leaving Egypt.

Guess how many days a week they worked in Egypt? Seven days. God says, I'm not a slave master. You're my children. Work six days. Take a day of rest.

And so it's rooted in God's love for his people. You are not in Egypt anymore. Of course, you would think we'd accept this and receive it as something good, right? And yet it's hard.

It's hard, the Sabbath, because it requires us to actually trust in God. We're working only six days. There's a trust that God's going to still provide for us even if we don't work the seventh day.

[17 : 58] There's a trust that we're not alone in this world. We don't have to do everything. God is a good and loving Father who means to give to us. He means to provide for us and care for us. It is his gift for us.

It's also, as I mentioned during our time of offering, it's part of combating the love of money. It's part of trusting God. And I would say for us in this culture, it's part of reminding ourselves that we're human.

we don't exist just to work. We don't exist simply as people who are part of a global economy. No, we exist even more importantly as people who are loved by God and belong to God.

We exist as people who are given rest that we can enjoy and flourish in. We are people who have boundaries and limits that give us freedom. You are not a machine.

You're not a slave. There is freedom that God gives his people. Part of the freedom that we have in Christ is freedom to know that we can rest and it's okay.

[19 : 01] God is still holding the world together. He's still holding our lives together. He hasn't forgotten us. Sabbath was not made man was not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath for man.

Okay, that's our pause from work. There's also a pause from consumption. This was the emphasis when we looked at Nehemiah chapter 13. You'll remember Nehemiah was incensed but there were these people who were trying to set up their booths in the city of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

There were sellers coming in who wanted to have commerce. This also is something that's helpful to reconnect us to reality and insanity. So this is the water that we swim in so we don't realize it.

There is something insane and inhuman about a 24-7 economy. There is something insane and inhuman to the 24-7 economic cycle.

Now stock markets, they do still close. Stores do not. Remember our greater principle of the Sabbath is that it would give life. It gives life to us in this sense. You are a human.

[20 : 11] You are not just a consumer. You can pause. You can live life outside of the economic cycle for one day a week.

The economic cycle, by the way, would love nothing more than for you to exist as its slave. There's a reason that Amazon gives you one-click purchasing. It's not because they want your freedom.

Okay? They want you to serve them. We might say that man was not made for purchasing, but purchasing was made for man. And so when we halt our economic lives, we remember that there's something greater and more beautiful about life than just what we can enjoy and consume.

We have a greater hope than what we're meant to buy. Also, part of the purpose in the Old Testament, this is less true today. We don't live in Israel. We don't live in a theocracy.

Part of the goal was to actually give rest to those who are the poorest. Now, the same is true today who has the least flexibility of their work schedule. Often people who work minimum wage jobs, right?

[21 : 19] I'll give you an example. It's not a Sunday example, but Thanksgiving is coming up. Used to be stores were closed on Thanksgiving. Now, they'll open on Thanksgiving. Now, that's not directly related to the Sabbath, but go with me.

I'm making a point here. What does it mean that stores are open on Thanksgiving? Well, if you're a rich person, I guess you can shop. What if you're a poor person who works a minimum wage job? Can't enjoy Thanksgiving with your family?

That was part of the purpose of the Sabbath in the Old Testament, to give a break to slaves, to give a break to the lowest portions of society. That's why when we read our Confession of Faith, it said, also give rest to your manservant and your maidservant.

It's saying, this exists for people who are otherwise going to be crushed by the economic system. It is meant to give life to people who have the least option of a voice. Okay?

So there's this vision for society that the Bible is giving us. Obviously, it's not something that's going to exist in the world today. We live in this 24-7 economy. We are not going to stop it.

[22 : 23] We can still retreat from it. We can still be reminded that we are humans more than consumers. And so, application for us is we want the Sabbath to be something that's good and life-giving.

We want to acknowledge Jesus' principle here that it's meant to give life, that it's made for man, not man for it. Principle one, take a day off from work. If something can wait until Monday, do it on Monday.

If you can do it on Saturday, do it on Saturday. Remember, I am not a slave. I don't belong to the economy. I participate in it, I can enter into it, I can also pull out of it.

Application two, take a pause from the non-stop economic cycle. If you can buy it on Saturday, buy it on Saturday. If you can wait until Monday, wait until Monday. You are not Amazon's slave.

You are not the slave of whatever store chooses to be open. No, you exist for something better and greater than that. By the way, you want to be a rebel? It is an act of rebellion in this world to withdraw from that for one day a week.

[23 : 35] It is an act of rebellion to say, I am more than just a consumer. It is an act of rebellion to say, I am not defined by what I purchase and what I enjoy.

I am defined by something greater. I am defined by the fact that I belong to God. He is a good father. He gives me rest and life. Kids, I want you to imagine for a second, what if your parents told you, you know what, you have to take a day off from chores and homework.

You can't do that on Sunday. What would you think of parents like that? Those are terrible parents. That sounds really lousy. You have to take a day off from homework and chores?

Those are some real legalistic parents. They must not like you very much. No! That is a life-giving parent. That is a parent who wants you to have boundaries in your life. That is a parent who wants you to be able to rest and pause.

I want you to take this a step further. What if your parents told you, hey, we know that mom and dad are really busy with many things and sometimes we don't spend a lot of time with you. But we are going to take one day a week when we're not busy and we're going to rest and we are going to spend time together as a family.

[24 : 51] What would you think of parents like that? They sound like awful legalistic parents to me. No! These are parents who are taking a pause to invest in their children.

These are parents who want life for their family. The same is true for us as children of God. He wants us to pause and spend time with Him.

In some principles here, the Sabbath gives us life. It gives us freedom to rest. It protects us from ourself. It protects us from slavery. Jesus doesn't just tell us, however, that it was made for life.

He tells us something more in verse 28 of chapter 2. The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. In other words, He is the one who gives us life. He is the one who gives us rest.

He is the one who wants us to know that we are fully human, that we can pause from the insanity of the world around us. And so Jesus is telling the Pharisees, you are missing the heart of the Sabbath and you are missing who I am.

[25 : 54] You are missing both at the same time. I'm the Lord of the Sabbath, so I'm so far up the chain of command it's actually laughable that you would question me about this.

I have come to give these people life and rest. And of course as we know of people who live after Jesus has come, this is meant to point us to a greater life and a greater rest.

That we rest not only from our work, we also rest knowing that God has freed us from the penalty of the law. He has freed us from the power of sin in our lives.

When Jesus came, when He lived a perfect life on this earth, the life that we could not live, when He died a death, the death that we deserved, He came to give us full and final freedom.

He came to give us rest. He came to give us rest from the guilt of sin. He came to give us rest from feeling like it is up to us to restore and heal this world.

[26 : 51] Instead, He came and said, I am going to be the one who does the work for you. And so we rest and enjoy life now and we look forward to a greater rest and a greater life in the future when Jesus comes back.

We have and hold to both of those things and it's something that Jesus earned for us on the cross. He earned our rest. He came and gave us what we celebrate in the fourth commandment.

So remember, I told you that we have two questions. Who is Jesus? How do we respond to Him? Who is Jesus? He is the Lord of the Sabbath. He restores it to its original purpose. He gives people life.

He frees them from the tyranny of work. He frees them from the tyranny of consumption. How do we respond to Him? We receive, we embrace the rest that He's given us.

We trust in Him. We know that He's going to provide for us. We know that we can take one day off a week and it's going to be okay. God is going to make sure we have enough.

[28 : 03] Now, when most people today think about the Sabbath, they probably think immediately of Chick-fil-A. They think of Chick-fil-A because it's one of the only stores, them and Hobby Lobby, that are still closed on Sunday.

Many people, of course, think this is very quaint. Many Christians both love and hate them for it. Love them because they're closed on Sunday. Hate them because they can't get a chicken sandwich. And in a sense, Chick-fil-A is sort of a piece of a past world, right?

What you may not know, though, is that Chick-fil-A is not always closed on Sunday. In fact, there was a major news article back in 2017 because in December of 2017, there was a complete blackout at the Atlanta International Airport.

So flights were canceled. And by the way, if you know the Atlanta Airport, you know it's, I think, in terms of passengers, not size, it's the largest airport. If you've been there, you know it's chaotic. It's like Denver. You have to take a subway to get around.

And so you can imagine what happens when that subway doesn't work. There's no power and people can't get on their flights. It's total chaos. City of Atlanta didn't know what to do. Chick-fil-A, this was a Sunday, by the way.

[29 : 08] Chick-fil-A's in the airport. If you're ever in an airport on Sunday, you know Chick-fil-A's closed. What did Chick-fil-A do that day? Chick-fil-A opened up. And they opened up not to sell anyone food.

They opened up to give it away. So Chick-fil-A, on short notice, called their employees. They brought them in. They started making food and they started handing out thousands of free meals to people in the Atlanta airport.

And so they understood what we talked about at the beginning. They understood the law. They understood they valued closing on Sunday and protecting their employees and they knew the heart behind the law.

They knew that it was meant to bring life. And so they knew what Jesus tells us here. The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you are a good and gracious Father who gives us rest. You know what we need even more than we do.

[30 : 10] You don't want us to be slaves, but you've made us human and you know that we need rest. We ask that you would give us that rest and you would remind us ultimately of the rest that we look forward to in the future and we enjoy in part now the rest from the power of sin in our lives and the penalty that we would have without you.

We thank you that we earn all these things not by ourselves, but Jesus is the one who earns them for us and so we ask them in his name. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.

Amen.