

“I Desire Mercy”

Matthew 12:1-8

A Christian man was once asked by his employer to work on Sundays. When the man protested, his employer said: “Doesn’t your Bible say that if your ox falls into a ditch on the Sabbath, you may pull him out?” “Yes,” replied the Christian, “but if the ox had the habit of falling into the same ditch every Sabbath, I would either fill in the ditch or sell the ox.”

During this COVID-19 pandemic, many are frustrated by the fact that we can’t gather to worship. We miss the joyful fellowship, encouraging and being encouraged. We miss doing our ministry, and being ministered to through song, prayer, and scripture. We miss catching up with our fellow believers. I know that worshiping through the internet is not the same, and we miss the personal touch we get when we gather to worship. I want us to look at the scripture passage to see what we can learn about what our Lord said about the Sabbath (“rest” or “repose”) or the Lord’s Day.

1. The Day of Rest is for your benefit (12:7)

“If you had known what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent.”

- When God gave the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel, one the Commandments was to ***“remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”*** (Exodus 20:8a). The Hebrew word ***“Sabbath”*** means ***“to rest or repose.”*** It was a day set apart from the other days of the week in order to rest from your work. It also included slaves and animals. It was a day to worship and relax from labor. The early Church worshiped on Sundays as their day of rest since it was ***“the Lord’s Day,”*** or the day when our Lord was resurrected. The Sabbath was made for our benefit. God knew that we needed a day to rest both physically, mentally, and spiritually.
- The religious leaders accused the disciples of violating the Sabbath laws since they picked some grain to eat. They were accused of harvesting grain. Jesus pointed out that the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humanity. It was a day of mercy. He quoted from the prophet, Hosea, when He said: ***“I desire mercy and not sacrifice”*** (Hosea 6:6). Mercy for yourself and others was more important than sacrifices, or religious rituals. One of the reasons Jesus gave was human need. King David ate holy bread in the tabernacle because he was ravished. It was supposed to be only for the priests, but David was justified because of human need. David was shown mercy, not condemnation.
- You may be frustrated that you can’t gather together to worship like normal times. You may feel

that worshiping via the internet is not real. The Sabbath was made for you, for your benefit. Take time to rest, relax, and worship. Seek God and His mercy. Don't feel guilty that you are not together with fellow believers. Don't think that worship via the internet is not real. In these current circumstances, worship the Lord where you are. Take time to rest from your work. Celebrate God's mercy to you through His Son, Jesus Christ.

2. The Day of Rest is to show mercy to others (12:7-8, 12)

"If you had known what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

"A man is worth far more than a sheep, so it is lawful to do what is good on the Sabbath."

- After the confrontation with the Jewish leaders about the disciples picking and eating grain on the Sabbath, Jesus attended a service at the synagogue. There was a man there with a paralyzed hand. The leaders asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath Day. It was a trap. Many rabbis taught that healing on the Sabbath was illegal except when saving a human life. Jesus pointed out that it is allowed to help an animal on the Sabbath, so we should most certainly help a human being on the Sabbath.

- Jesus said that not only should we help a human being on the Sabbath, but that it was acceptable for the priests to minister on the Sabbath. It is acceptable for you to minister to others on the Lord's Day. Don't feel guilty for helping or ministering to someone on the Day of Rest. Jesus unapologetically healed the man with the paralyzed hand. It was an act of mercy.
- In Mark's Gospel, Jesus said: *"The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath"* (2:27). God gave a Day of Rest for humanity and work animals, but the religious leaders had turned it into a burdensome day of do's and don'ts. Make it a priority to rest and relax on the Lord's Day. If you have to work on Sunday, make an off day your Sabbath, your rest day. It is allowed by our Lord to minister to others, to show them mercy, on the Day of Rest.

Worship where you are, and take time to rest and relax. It is acceptable to show mercy or to do ministry on the Lord's Day. We should make gathering together to worship a priority, but under these current circumstances, we worship where we are; we minister where we are. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, the Day of Rest, and He is the Lord of your life. Worship Him, and minister to others in His name. Remember God's words: *"I desire mercy and not sacrifice."*