

Is It Lawful To Heal On The Sabbath?

Luke 14:1-11

(Adapted from a sermon by Rev. Jeffery A. Ahonen)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

Jesus asked a simple question. And yet the teachers of God's Word would not answer that simple question in His presence. Is it against the law that God gave to His people concerning the Sabbath Day to bring healing to a sick person? Is it against God's Law to do a good work for someone who is in need on the Sabbath?

They could not reply.

These men who worked full time in the teaching the Word of God to the people, found it impossible to speak. Why? Because they were like we are. They had no answer to give when God confronted them with their sin. They knew they had no excuses to give. There was nothing to say in defense of their actions. And so they kept silent. These men, who were entrusted with the teaching of God's Word to the people of God, had failed in their duty. They had not taught the Word about the importance of the Sabbath Day in the right way – and they knew it.

The first teacher of the Law, God's Prophet, Moses, had taught this quite clearly, just as clearly as God first spoke it to Moses when God wrote it with His own finger upon the first tablet of the Ten Commandments. As recorded in the Book of Exodus, the 20th Chapter:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. (Exodus 20:8-11).

Now the teachers of the Law did get one important part of this commandment right. They correctly taught the people the importance of resting from their labors on the Sabbath day. In fact, that is the very definition of the Hebrew word, Sabbath; the word literally means "rest." The Sabbath is a day of rest for the people of God and for their entire households. God Himself established the pattern for us when He rested at the end of His week of creating work. God blessed that day and declared it to be holy, for us. Just like our Father, we children are to rest for a day from the labors of our hands and feet and mouths and minds.

Yes, this part they taught rightly. In fact, the teachers of the Law were very good at teaching the importance of the Sabbath rest. They had gone to great lengths explaining how to observe the Sabbath. The teachers knew that people did not, and could not, simply lie around on sofas watching football and NAASCAR all day long. So the teachers gave rules on how far you could walk in your travels on the Sabbath Day and how much cooking you could do without actually "working," and other ways to continue to live without violating the *letter* of God's Law for this

blessed holy day.

But in focusing all of their attention on the details, they missed the big picture. They were very good at teaching the *letter* of the law, in fact, they made up all sorts of things to try and teach the *letter* of the law. But, they were very poor at understanding and teaching the true spirit of the law.

These teachers failed to grasp the lesson of their own teacher, the Holy Spirit Himself. God does not entrust the teaching of His Word to men alone, for God knows that men broken by sin are not capable of teaching divine things. So, God gives His Holy Spirit to His teachers--just like He gives His Holy Spirit to His disciples--so that God Himself, by His Spirit, retains control of the teaching and the learning of His Word.

The teachers of the Law that Jesus confronted on that day were not hearing God's Word through the Holy Spirit. They were not being careful students and good disciples. As such, they could not be good teachers. They could not reply to the question when Jesus asked, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" They had to remain silent, and without excuse.

They should have known that the answer to Jesus question is, "Yes." "Yes, it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. It is *not against* the law that Moses gave to God's people concerning the Sabbath Day to bring healing to a sick person. It is *not against* God's Law to do a good for someone on the Sabbath. Because that is the very *spirit* of the law regarding the Sabbath Day. It is a day of rest – for the very purpose of healing."

While the Commandment was given at Sinai, forty years later, as God's people prepared to enter the promised land, Moses, by the Holy Spirit's guidance again taught God's people concerning the Third Commandment. Much is identical to Mt. Sinai, but hear it again and listen to how this ends:

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day (Deut. 5:12-15).

On Sinai, God included the remembrance of our creation as only part of the reason for our Sabbath Day observance. As they enter the promised land, even more importantly, this day is about the remembrance of deliverance from slavery by God's mighty hand and outstretched arm.

Dearly beloved of God, it is about the remembrance of our deliverance from our slavery to sin and death and Hell by the mighty hand and the outstretched arm of Jesus, nailed upon His cross.

Through this law God's Holy Spirit was already teaching Old Testament Christians about the salvation that the Son of God, Jesus, would bring into this fallen world. The Law was preparing God's people to humble themselves in sorrow and contrition, repenting of their sins, that they might be exalted and raised up to new and everlasting life by the Holy Spirit through the healing Gospel of forgiveness.

This is the spirit of the law that was absent from the teaching of the teachers of the Law. This is the Spirit that Jesus brought back into the teaching of the Word of God. It is the Spirit He demonstrated in the power of the Gospel. In the presence of the silenced teachers, Jesus healed. With a mighty hand and outstretched arm, He freed the man from the slavery of sin exhibited in his body. By this Jesus demonstrated that it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. In fact, that is the true spirit of the Sabbath.

That is the spirit in which you ought to observe the Sabbath. It is to be a day of healing, the day of your healing.

“Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on the Sabbath, will not immediately pull him out?” Only a person who completely lacks compassion for the helpless will ignore such a sad situation. A man of compassion will come to the rescue, even on the Sabbath Day.

And so your God comes to rescue you. God pulls you out of your pit. He pulls you out of the pit of despair over that great sin which enslaves your conscience and keeps you from making any reply in His presence. He proclaims all your sins forgiven, small and great.

He pulls you out of the pit of depression over the sad state of affairs in this broken world, reminding you that He remains in control. He pulls you out of the pit of anxiety over the trials and tribulations in your life and in the lives of your loved ones, assuring you that He works all things for the good of those whom He loves and those who trust in His return.

That is the gracious work of His Spirit for you on this day, for this day is the day that we enter into the Lord's Sabbath. You Shabbat, you rest in in the Lord as you gather in His rest. It is here that you receive rest from the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ Himself.

Rest was bought for you through the sacrifice of Jesus for us. He suffered the sickness of your sin so that you might be healed. He rested in the tomb on the Sabbath, that you might be given a new and eternal life. His resurrection from the dead brings true rest to our sin sick world.

From the very day of Jesus rising from the dead, Christians have celebrated the healing His resurrection brings by observing our Sabbath rest on Sunday. It is the day we show our faith in God, exhibiting our fear of God and love for God by not despising preaching and His Word, but holding it sacred and gladly hearing and learning it. When we gather, we rest in The Word, in Christ. And it is that Word which His Spirit uses to bring us healing--even for all eternity.

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? Of course! God has made it a law for Himself to do that very thing for you. He heals you today by bringing to your remembrance how He delivered you from

your slavery to sin through the Red Sea of your Baptism, drowning your spiritual enemies in those waters and delivering you safely through those waters as His own righteous child.

He gives you Sabbath rest and healing in the word of forgiveness He declares to you again today.

He places into your mouth, from His mighty hand, His very flesh that was pierced and the very Blood He shed for you, feeding you forgiveness, and raising you to life and salvation.

Healing you this Sabbath, Jesus prepares you for another week of labor. Your Father prepares you on this day of rest, through His Word and by His Spirit, for another week of loving service to those with whom you and I share this world.

You are prepared for another week of laboring in love for your spouses and children and grandchildren in your households. You are equipped for another week to carry out ever more faithfully your God-given vocations in offices and stores, in factories and workshops, in schools and hospitals, on farm roads and freeways. You are pulled up from the pit today, that you might pull others up with you on this day, and every day of the week, through your words of encouragement and your works of compassion, that God might exalt them--even as He exalted you today--with healing, now and forever. Amen.