***Recapturing the Big Picture* – Bible Conference 2015**

**“The First Gospel & the Second Advent: *Sabbath*”**

Devotional presentation – third session

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Introduction

“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it, thou shalt not do any work. Thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant nor thy maidservant nor thy ox nor thy ass, nor the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. Wherefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11).

Seventh-day Adventists are Sabbath-keepers.

Exodus 20:8-11 is one of our favorite passages in all of Scripture.

Because my parents helped me memorize it in the King James Version before I could read the words, I find it very difficult to read or recite out loud in any other translation.

Seventh-day Adventists are Sabbath-keepers.

It’s right in our name.

We believe in the seventh-day Sabbath.

Many of us can argue the Sabbath’s on-going validity using Bible texts in both the OT & the NT.

Seventh-day Adventists are Sabbath-keepers.

But after we’ve finished arguing the issue of the correct day of worship, *what does it mean* that we are Sabbath-keepers?

Q That we don’t eat out on Sabbath?

Q That we *used* to not eat out on Sabbath?

Q That we feel a bit guilty when we eat out on Sabbath?

I’ve heard the argument:

It is far more work to fix a meal, than to go to a restaurant.

As one who has witnessed my mother make countless Sabbath meals for family and guests... the logic seems valid.

However, notice that the commandment doesn’t focus on the *work* part, as much as on the *people* part...

...that is, those who are forbidden to work.

You—your children—your slaves—strangers—even your animals

The Sabbath hours eliminated the social distinctions created by work:

By definition, a slave worked on behalf of his or her master.

Sons and daughters did whatever work a parent asked.

Animals were kept, fed in order to do hard work.

Strangers in town were probably there precisely to find work and food for

their families

But this first giving of the Sabbath commandment reminded the people of Creation week: “for in six days, the Lord made heaven and earth...and rested the seventh day...”

Sabbath was the day when all living creatures experienced life in the

presence of God!

“And it was good.”

In the second giving of the Sabbath commandment, found in Deuteronomy 5, the list of those forbidden to work on the Sabbath is extended and emphasized even more!

“Observe the Sabbath day and 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 a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deut 5:12-15).

Notice the way equality on the Sabbath is emphasized...

On the Sabbath your slaves rest with you...as does the resident alien living in your towns...

...those who must work night and day just to survive...

They, like you, rest.

Q How would it be possible for the slaves and the resident aliens to stop working?

Q What must this have meant for social interactions on that day?

Notice that in *Deuteronomy’s* telling of the commandment, people keep the Sabbath in memory of the experience of redemption—freedom from oppression and slavery in Egypt.

The second giving of the Sabbath commandment says:

*You* who know what it is like to work like a slave seven days/week...

Your society will be structured in a new way...

One day in seven *everyone* will rest...and that experience, that built-in cycle to your lives...is a regular reminder of your own freedom from bondage...

If that weren’t enough for the children of Israel to remember the huge difference between life in bondage and exile and life with Yahweh... there were other cycles of seven...

Every seventh year... the Sabbatical Year... they were to let their *fields* rest... why? Exodus 23:12... “so that the poor of your people may eat.”

Leviticus 25 records the voice of God saying that all the food from my land during the Sabbath year is for eating... for you and those who live with you—slaves, hired hands, bound laborers. Also, on the seventh year debts were forgiven. Deut 15 anticipates the people’s reactions to the poor who ask for loans just prior to the seventh year...Yahweh’s voice repeats over and over: “do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor...but rather, open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”

Then every 7 x 7 years... every 49th year.. was to be a celebration of liberty throughout the entire land! *Everyone* was set free.

Notice how their understanding of Jubilee year changed how they lived during the other years:

“If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. They shall remain with you as hired or bound laborers. They shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. Then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold” (Lev 25:39-42).

Sabbath celebrated as Jubilee—as the year of the Lord’s favor—meant the restoration of economic equality. Debts gone. No longer servants working someone else’s land, but their own land returned to them, regardless of how it had been lost.

For Israel, the Sabbath was a rich tradition...

... a reminder of Creation, and the experience of the presence of God

... a reminder of Redemption, and freedom from bondage

... a reminder of Jubilee, and the restoration of economic justice

Generations after Israel received these commands emphasizing social equality and

restoration...

It was a Sabbath day.

Mark begins his story of Jesus’ ministry on a Sabbath in a synagogue of the town of Capernaum. In Mark, Capernaum will be the headquarters of Jesus’ Galilean ministry.

It was Sabbath.

Mark 1:21 They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24and he cried out,

‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.’

25But Jesus rebuked him, saying,

‘Be silent, and come out of him!’

26And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another,

‘What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’

28At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

* Jesus teaches
* Jesus casts out demons
* Jesus heals a woman
* After sundown, Jesus heals every sick person in the village of Capernaum.

What is this Gospel saying about the Sabbath?!

* Notice the focus on Jesus’ teaching and his authority…
* As well as his ability to release people from bondage to demons and illness.

It’s like the whole village experienced a re-creation…a new Exodus… Jubilee year!

Throughout this gospel, Mark shows Jesus in conflict with demonic forces.

There is a battle going on.

Satan doesn’t want to give up the people he has bound up.

The elite landowners don’t want to give up cheap labor.

Rome doesn’t want to give up its tax revenues.

The merchants in the temple courts don’t want to give up their way of getting ahead financially.

Mark is doing something quite radical as he places these forces together… and shows that Jesus is come to free people from all that keeps them in bondage.

So that corrupt systems are presented as aligned with demonic forces.

God’s reign and Satan’s reign are at odds…the ministry of Jesus clarifies the differences between the two kingdoms –

* Satan’s kingdom controls people, de-humanizing them.
* God’s kingdom seeks to liberate.
* Satan’s kingdom treats people like Pharaoh in Egypt treated people: like commodities for work and production – tools with which to further the masters’ wealth and power;
* God’s kingdom calls people to community and covenant

One of the things that might surprise us about Mark’s gospel is that the work of challenging such systems and demons continues—even intensifies—over the Sabbath hours!

The Sabbath is for freedom and restoration!

The next time the Sabbath is mentioned it is after the first series of challenges to Jesus in this gospel…

2:1 – 3:6 – (surrounded by summary statements)

Q Story of the man brought through the roof – can Jesus really forgive sins?

Q Story of Jesus asking a tax collector to be a disciple – Why does Jesus eat with tax collectors and other sinners?

Q Story of Sabbath behavior (plucking grain and healing a man) – Is Jesus really Lord of the Sabbath?

Forgiveness – inclusivity – Sabbath

Mark is doing something profound here… he is re-working Isaiah!

Beginning in Isaiah 40 – forgiveness for Israel following exile

* “A voice cries out: in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord” (40:3);
* “Get you up on a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings” (40:9);
* “O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings… do not fear; say to the cities of Judah: here is your God!” (40:9);
* “I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (43:25);
* “He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities” (53:5);

Then, beginning in Isaiah 56 – there is an inclusivity beyond anything Israel had known before:

* No longer separate the foreigner from the people (56:3);
* Include the eunuch (56:4);
* The foreigners are to join themselves to the Lord
* …all who keep the Sabbath…these I will bring to my holy mountain.
* “for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (56:7);

Forgiveness – inclusivity – Sabbath

Mark 2:24The Pharisees said to him,

‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’

25And he said to them,

‘Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? 26He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.’

27Then he said to them,

‘The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; 28so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.’

3Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3And he said to the man who had the withered hand,

‘Come forward.’

4Then he said to them,

‘Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?’

But they were silent. 5He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man,

‘Stretch out your hand.’

He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Mark presents Jesus as living in harmony with the Isaiah visions…

After exile (in Egypt, in Babylon, in Rome), there is forgiveness and home coming!

Foreigners and eunuchs and tax collectors and all sinners are welcomed!

And all of them keep the Sabbath!

But notice:

6The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Adventists often preach about getting into trouble because of our Sabbath keeping, that is, our seventh-day keeping of God’s Sabbath.

Notice that Jesus gets into trouble for his Sabbath keeping, that is, how he keeps it.

Why the difference?

Why don’t we expect to get in trouble over *how* we keep the Sabbath and not just over which day we keep?

The last time Sabbath is mentioned prior to the passion week is found in …

6:1 - He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. 2On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said,

‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’

And they took offence at him. 4Then Jesus said to them,

‘Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’

5And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went about among the villages teaching.

The conversation after church was: Wow, what a terrific sermon! And I really enjoyed his Sabbath School lesson! But – but who is this?

We know his family… who does this preacher think he is?

Incidentally, thanks to this passage in Mark, we learn that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters.

In Mark’s gospel, except for the first Sabbath of Jesus’ public ministry, all other Sabbaths described included controversy between Jesus and the Jewish religious authorities.

And then we come to the cross.

What does it mean to our community of faith that Jesus rested from the work of salvation over a Sabbath?

The work of creation was done – and God rested.

The work of redemption was done – and God rested.

Because God’s work was done – we can rest…we can enter into his rest… isn’t that the wonder of Hebrews 4?

Mark’s gospel mentions the Sabbath two more times:

15:42-43 – “When evening had come, and since it was the day of preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus”

According to Matthew and Luke, a Joseph was present to welcome Jesus into the world.

According to Mark, a Joseph was present to bury Jesus.

However, according to Mark, the Sabbath must have been getting very close, because Joseph doesn’t do more than wrap Jesus’ body in a linen cloth and placed it in the tomb.

Two Marys were watching this, and were determined to do a proper burial when Sabbath was over.

And that’s the last time Mark mentions the Sabbath -

16:1 – “When the Sabbath was over…Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, so that they might go and anoint him”

The two Marys brought a third friend, Salome, with them.

And they’re not sure how they’ll get the stone back so that they can go it… but, it was already opened!

And they went inside and were extremely shocked and alarmed at what they saw – no body, except that of a young man telling them to “not be alarmed… Jesus of Nazareth has been raised…and go tell the others Jesus will meet you in Galilee.

The empty tomb means that Sabbath rest and resurrection somehow go together!

The ultimate bondage Satan has on us—death—is defeated!

The chains of death are gone.

The trappings of death—corpses, linen clothes—are gone… it’s just an empty cave!

Which means that every Sabbath since resurrection day is a Sabbath to celebrate release from Satan’s bondage!

That is precisely how one keeps the Sabbath!

Sabbath-keepers know that all oppression, all that keeps people bound is of Satan.

But the Kingdom of God is about freeing bound people…helping them be free and recover their voices…

Sabbath-keepers act in the face of tragedy and sickness and injustice...

Sabbath-keepers act when they see people bound by the demons of addiction...

Sabbath-keepers act when homes and hopes are washed away...

Sabbath-keepers act when a bound person enters our sanctuary, or our counseling center, or our classroom...

Sabbath-keepers act in ways that heal bodies and restore justice...restore hope...

Sabbath-keepers teach people to read...and hold peace conferences...

...because Sabbath-keepers know that all oppression, all that keeps people bound is of Satan.

But the Kingdom of God is about freeing bound people...helping them remove their chains, stand up straight and recover their voices.

171 years ago, Advent believers wept because October 22 had come and gone and they were not in the presence of God.

It was a “great disappointment” not because they were wrong about a date.

It was a “great disappointment” because they longed for God’s presence.

They believed God’s presence would eliminate...

the injustice of slavery in America...

the wars around the globe...

the sickness suffered by so many children and women and men...

They believed God’s presence would end death forever...and families would be reunited in a new kingdom of peace and justice....

After those days of weeping at God’s absence, they came to embrace the Sabbath

tradition.

They gradually realized that the Sabbath was the experience of God’s presence

now.

The Sabbath was a reminder of creation — life in the presence of God.

The Sabbath was a reminder of Exodus and return from Exile.

The Sabbath was a reminder of home coming for people of all nations.

The Sabbath is a reminder that the tomb is empty. And we are free.

Amen.

(Note: In preparation for this paper, I appreciated the work by Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, 2014)