

Son and Salvation or Sabbath

HN/SS 5/09/04 am

Reading: John 5:1-23, Luke 6:1-26 (Matthew 12)

Study: John 5:8-18

Psalms: 45(2nd):1-4, 45(1st):5-8, 105:1-5, 71:1-5

One of my aunts went out shopping one day and came home with this most beautiful new lounge suite. It was just perfect in the room, matching the newly painted walls and new carpet. It was something to be admired. You might have thought that she would have invited us all around to admire her new lounge. But no! We did come to visit of course but when we came, there was this old brown cloth thrown over the new lounge. And no one was allowed to sit on the lounge. All my life this lounge was covered with this horrible brown cloth. We never got to see the beautiful lounge that she had.

There was a man who had been crippled for 38 years. For 38 long years, he could only crawl about the city and sit on his mat begging. One day Jesus found him by the pool of Bethesda. He saw him lying there in such a pitiful state. Jesus said to him, *Arise, take up your mat, and walk. And at once, he took up his bed and walked* – after 38 years!

The Jews saw this man walking along the street – not crawling as he usually did. In fact, he was carrying his mat rather than lying on it. He had been healed; he had been made well. A man had come by and made him well. Were the Jews happy to see this man walking? Did they say to him let us go up to the temple and give thanks to God. NO. Tragically NO. They arrested him for breaking the Sabbath.

In the prologue to this gospel, we were told *the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (1:17). These Jews did not know the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ. They knew the Law of Moses. *We know God spoke through Moses* they said (9:29). They were zealous for the Law of Moses but they were blind to the truth. They were blind to the truth who was in their very midst. They were blind to the grace of God and the power of God displayed so wonderfully before their very eyes.

What about today? Can men still be so blind today? Are there people so zealous for God that they are blind to his working in their midst? Are there believers shut out of the church because they do not follow the rules of the church? I know churches where new believers coming for baptism are treated with great suspicion.

In the New Testament church, *the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved* (Acts 2:47). But he finds it extremely hard to add to some churches today because men have made their own rules. They have become blind to the grace and power of God to not only heal bodies but also save souls.

You may have read the testimony of that woman in Pakistan who was powerfully saved out of Islam. She wanted to be baptised and went to the local missionary – but he was suspicious and was not prepared to baptize her. She went to the church in the city but again the pastor was suspicious – was she truly converted. Besides having a convert from Islam in his church could mean problems for him.

Rather than rejoicing in the healing of this cripple and giving thanks to God for this testimony of his love and power, the Jews accused this man of breaking the law because he was carrying his mat on the Sabbath.

Breaking the Sabbath

Let us see what blinded the eyes of the Jews to this great work of God in their midst. *The man was made well, took up his mat, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.* He was carrying his mat on the Sabbath. The Jews, the ecclesiastical police, had caught him in the act and he was in big trouble.

If only it had been any other day! Of course Jesus healed people on other days but this healing is recorded here for the purpose of teaching the Jews and us who Jesus is. *These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name* (John 20:31).

Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Saviour of the world – as John and the Samaritans have already testified. He is the Son of God, the God who gave the law to Moses (Hebrews 3:3 – *he who built the house has more honour than the house*). His is not answerable to Moses and the law. He came to fulfil the law, including the Sabbath. *And beginning at Moses and all the prophets Jesus expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself* (Luke 24:27).

God gave the law and it is good, but the Jews had come to see the law as an end in itself. Keeping the law was their aim in life. And the Jewish leaders saw it as their responsibility to see that others also kept the law. They were called to enforce the law so they believed.

They became thoroughly legalistic. They believed that righteousness came through keeping the law. They sought righteousness; they sought to be right with God, *by works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone* (Romans 9:32). And down through the ages men have continued to stumble on this stumbling stone. Yes there are still those who believe we are saved by works of the law, not the least of which is keeping the Sabbath.

This man who Jesus healed was charged by the Jewish leaders with breaking the Sabbath. *Sabbath it is; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat*. The Law of Moses as we read it in Exodus 20 says *Six days you shall labour and do all your work but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work*.

For most this seems clear – on the seventh day you are to rest from the work you engage in on the six days, as are your servants and animals. It is a God-given day of rest and a day to remember the Lord. But for the legally minded such a law is way too broad. For the sinful heart trying to justify itself this is totally inadequate.

The Jewish teachers therefore came up with no less than 39 classes of work forbidden on the Sabbath and within these classes were even more specifications (see Mishnah tractate *Shabbath*). It was specified that a man might not go out on the Sabbath wearing only one sandal unless he had a wound on his foot (Shabbath 7:2). The reasoning was that this would give rise to suspicion that he was carrying the other under his cloak (a forbidden work). If he was wounded however nobody would think he had another sandal with him.

So this man that was made well by Jesus fell foul of the Jews for carrying his mat on the Sabbath. Apparently if he carried it in a certain way, a way that was not normal it would not have been classified as work and so not illegal on the Sabbath- the Jews knew how to get around the laws when they needed to.

Jesus blamed

The healed man was in serious trouble – there were severe penalties for breaking the Sabbath, even death. But he pleaded that it was not his fault for the man who healed him had told him *Take up your bed and walk*. Indeed the Jews were also interested in this man who taught others to break the Sabbath. But who was that man.

After these things Jesus found the man he had healed in the temple and said to him '*see you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you*'. It was Jesus who healed him, but he did not know. Jesus came to him to reveal himself and tell him the gospel. Jesus came that not only his body but also his soul be healed. *Sin no more*, lest you come under the judgment of God at the last day is probably what Jesus meant.

Yet the ungrateful man, out of fear of the Jews, went off to tell them about Jesus. They were very pleased of course and made plans to persecute and kill Jesus for breaking the Sabbath.

They saw Jesus as a threat to their whole religious structure or institution. What they had been brought up in and

what they had worked tirelessly to preserve was a under threat. The word 'break' here in 5:18 comes from the word 'to loose'. He was not just breaking the Sabbath but was threatening to destroy their whole system of religion for it was founded upon the law.

And they were right. Note that Jesus did not start to argue with them about the finer parts of the law. He did not say 'no this man is permitted to carry his mat on the Sabbath – your section xyz is wrong'. He did not say 'No that is not what the law says'. What they said to Jesus at first we are not told – just that they persecuted him. They probably grabbed him and shouted all sort of abuse and threats at him.

But *Jesus answered them saying my Father has been working until now, and I have been working*. He did not argue about the law for that was not where his authority lay. His authority came directly from his Father. He was indeed above the law; he was greater than Moses was.

God rested after the six days work of creation, but he continues to uphold all things by the word of his power. *In him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28). God sustains us in life every moment. In particular he is working through acts of mercy. Jesus often confronted the Sabbath legalists with this truth. He healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath (Luke 6).

Jesus is *Lord of the Sabbath*, a truth that the Jews would not accept, and a truth, which some Christians today do not accept. They put the Law of Moses before Jesus, just like the Jews. Many others of course put themselves before Jesus and regard themselves as Lord of the Sabbath. No. Jesus of Lord of the Sabbath.

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