

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2012 EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Scripture Versification 2-2:1

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 118:12

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 105:1

Scripture reading: Matthew 12:4-13

Scripture text: Matthew 12:7 and Catechism Sunday 38

My desire is for mercy and not for offerings

Sometimes we remember certain words from the Scriptures but then we do not apply them according to their true meaning.

- Such an example is the words we remember about the Sabbath, namely that it is a day on which we should not work, and then we decide it's a day to rest.
- But then we make it a day on which we rest and do all odd kind of things that have nothing to do with the Lord.

Let's focus on the Sunday as:

1. **The day to work for the Lord**
2. **The Sunday as a day of knowledge**
3. **The Sabbath as a day of poor relief/charity.**

1. **The day to work for the Lord**

Have you ever considered Sunday to be a workday as well?

- Of course Sunday is a workday. It's just a different kind of workday compared to weekdays.
- The difference lies in the fact that on weekdays we work for a living, but on Sunday we have fellowship with the Person who gives us eternal life.

The Bible clearly describes the kind of fellowship we should have with the Lord on Sunday.

- In the New Testament we read about the members of the church who joined together in prayer on the first day of the week.
- They always gathered at a place fixed for worship – either in the synagogue or on the banks of the river.
- This was public worship. From this it is clear that the church of the Modern Age (we!) should do what those first Christian churches did.

In the passage we've read, the Lord Jesus and his disciples walked through a grain field on the Sabbath.

- They were hungry. Hence they picked some heads of grain and ate them.
- This kind of behavior was strictly forbidden at the time as it was regarded as work and on the Sabbath no work was allowed.

It's also strange that this commandment is trespassed by no other than the Lord and His disciples – especially if we consider the fact that the Lord could feed 5 000 people on a few loaves of bread and some fish. He could have easily provided some food for the disciples without having offended the community.

Why does He then do so? The reason, however, soon becomes clear:

- The Lord wanted to demonstrate something about spiritual hunger.
- When a person is hungry, he will make a plan to find food, regardless of what day it is.
- What does a believer do when his soul is hungry?

The Lord then did something to show the people involved the contradictory values and falseness of their religious life.

- The Pharisees, for example, had distorted the Ten Commandments to such an extent that, according to the Pharisees' interpretation of the law, the disciples were guilty of threshing corn on the Sabbath.
- Their interpretation of the law, with all their own rules they attached to it, was in fact something they used to honour themselves and not the Lord. They actually ridiculed the commandment to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

A shift in emphasis occurred (in the church!), which meant that the people replaced the law by their own interpretation of the commandments.

- The God of the Sabbath had been done away with, leaving only a few human rulings regarding the day.
- Hence the Lord Jesus picked some grain and ate it to make them aware of the fact that they had remained spiritually hungry because they lacked true spiritual food.

2. The Sunday as a day of knowledge.

The Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the Pharisees – but He also speaks to us.

- He says we do not understand what Sunday really means. **Haven't you read . . .?** – He asked.
- Fact is that an ignoramus often pretends to be the most intelligent person who knows everything about a certain matter.

David once went into the temple and took some of the consecrated bread and ate it.

- In terms of the law only the priests were allowed to eat it.
- However, the Lord did not resent this deed.

Slowly but surely the Lord exposed the Pharisees' lack of knowledge of the Scriptures.

- The Lord emphasized two matters:
 - Firstly, it is essential to know the Bible.
 - And also, we must understand what happens in the Bible.

The Lord continued: Haven't you read that the priests who work in the temple on the Sabbath desecrate the temple and the day?

- And yet they are innocent, because the work they do must simply be done in honour of God.
- Hence, the main thing about keeping the Sunday or Sabbath holy is to honour and worship the Lord.

This immediately brings us to something that affects us now.

- We cannot read and understand the Bible as we understand it.
- We must go and read the Bible and understand it as God wrote it and wants us to understand it.
- What's more, we should not explain the Bible according to our human ambiguity with regard to our standards.

The point is every time: What does God say? What principle does He lay down? And, in respect of this Scripture text, what does He teach us about keeping the Sabbath holy?

It's so simple:

- The Lord has provided – in a very practical way – time for us to worship and serve Him properly and undisturbed.
- For this we have the Sabbath. For six days we work for a living – observing the command to cultivate the earth and manage the entire creation for God.
- But time was also set aside to enter the kingdom of heaven, serving the Lord – This is where the Sabbath/Sunday fits in.

Then we realize that it is not a day of leisure.

- It also is a day of work – just a completely different workday.
- This day is given to us to make body and spirit available only for worshipping God.

Among other things it means that – at God’s command – we shall meet in public worship where:

- together we listen to the ministry of the gospel;
- where together we use the sacraments;
- where we pray and worship together;
- and where we share in the prospect of our eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

Sunday also contains a symbolic meaning.

- It symbolizes the eternal hereafter (of God’s eternal kingdom where He will be all in all) and also our loving and peaceful company with God in these perfect conditions.

Or we can put it like this:

- This is the day on which we should consider matters regarding the hereafter, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.
- Hence the way in which we celebrate the Sabbath should resemble our need to satisfy our hunger to strengthen our faith and also our need to have communion with God.

3. The Sabbath as a day of poor relief/charity.

The Lord also blesses us on this day to encourage and strengthen us. Between the Lord and us we experience mercy.

This experience of mercy should also find expression in our relationship with our neighbour.

- This is poor relief – we give Christian offerings for the poor during public worship.
- The Lord Jesus’ words seriously reproached the Pharisees:
 - They knew very well that Jesus and his people were hungry but nobody gave them anything to eat.
 - They just stood and watched Jesus and the disciples, waiting to see how they were going to solve their problem and maybe go wrong along the way. Then they would have reason to make a big fuss about it.

We should not be like that.

- We should not be unwilling to reach out to poor people in distress.
- The mercy we receive from God should be expressed in our act of charity.

In brief:

- Keeping the Sabbath holy is to meet God at his church to listen to the ministry of the gospel.
- Keeping the Sabbath holy is to exercise our faith so that it would be strengthened.
- Keeping the Sabbath holy is to have communion with God by using the sacraments.
- Keeping the Sabbath holy is to share with others the mercy we receive from God.

Let’s read together what the Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 38 says about it:

103. Q. What does God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained [1] and that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God [2] to hear God's Word, [3] to use the sacraments, [4] to call publicly upon the Lord, [5] and to give Christian offerings for the poor.

[6] Second, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, let the Lord work in me through His Holy Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath. [7]

[1] Deut. 6:4-9; 20-25; I Cor. 9:13, 14; II Tim. 2:2; 3:13-17; Tit. 1:5. [2] Deut. 12:5-12; Ps. 40:9, 10; 68:26; Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25. [3] Rom. 10:14-17; I Cor. 14:26-33; I Tim. 4:13.

[4] I Cor. 11:23, 24. [5] Col. 3:16; I Tim. 2:1. [6] Ps. 50:14; I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 8 and 9. [7] Is. 66:23; Heb. 4:9-11.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Psalm 130:3

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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