

“No Sabbath Slaves”

The Sabbath day is front and center in both the Old Testament and Gospel readings for today. As we apply this Word of the Lord to ourselves – there is a phrase from Deuteronomy 5 that we dare not overlook.

As the Lord gives the Ten Commandments to His people – and specifically in regards to the Third Commandment – the Lord says, through His servant Moses – “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.”

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy Remember what it was like in Egypt – when your increasing numbers caused the Pharaoh to fear that you would take over the land – and so he placed harsh taskmasters over you and made you to be slaves.

Remember how he just kept increasing the workload – increasing the quota of bricks that you were to make. And not only did you have to make more bricks, but you had to go out and collect the materials to make the bricks. An ever increasing burden laid upon your backs – an almost impossible task.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt – but the Lord delivered you – and gave you rest.

The Lord’s gift of the Sabbath – which means “rest” – goes all the way back to the beginning. In the beginning God worked for six days, creating the heavens and the earth and everything in them – and then He ceased from His work – set aside the seventh day, making it holy – a Sabbath day, a day of rest.

There was no work on that first seventh day – Sabbath day. The work of creation – “it is finished.” God ceased from what He had done for six days – the seventh day set apart for rest.

After the Fall into sin – Sabbath is needed all the more. Now there is pain in childbearing – a struggle in being a faithful wife. Now there is pain and toil – thorns and thistles – and sweat of the brow. Now there is need for physical rest.

Cease from what you are doing the Lord says. Six days do your work – and set apart the seventh day for rest. You need it – and so do your son and daughter, servants, and animals. Remember you were slaves – and I gave you rest.

So why have YOU returned to Egypt – to slavery – to a burdensome toil and almost impossible task? Work! Work! Work! You work more than needed – and part of the reason for that is because you desire a certain lifestyle. You're constantly "keeping up with the Joneses" – you can't control yourselves – you don't live within your means.

Add to that – you work just as hard (if not harder) – at your play! So you're always complaining about having no time – being so busy – your calendar is full. But that's your fault. You control much of what you fill your days with. Sure, you don't feel like you control your calendar – but you have more control than you think.

You've fallen into the trap. You've willingly stepped on that hamster wheel and just keep running – never thinking that maybe you should slow down, or stop. You have willingly become slaves – and God says, that's not good.

Remember, I delivered you. Observe – remember – my Sabbath. I give you rest. Don't reject my gift.

You've heard the phrase – "there's no rest for the wicked." But God says that there is a Sabbath rest for sinners. We need both physical and spiritual rest! So, stop your work. Cease from your labors. Set apart the day – to hear God's Word – the Good News that His forgiveness delivers you from your slavery to sin – delivers you from your harsh taskmasters – and gives rest to your soul.

Jesus has done all the work of deliverance and salvation for sinners – and says, "It is finished." You have peace with God.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus and His disciples have an encounter with some Sabbath slaves – the Pharisees. These religious leaders had in essence returned to Egypt – they had become slaves to THEIR Sabbath observation.

God says that we are “not to do any work” – and the Pharisees wanted specifics. What does that mean? What can we do, and not do? What defines work? So they came up with their own regulations. One could walk approximately 2 miles on a Sabbath day – but to go any further, was work – and a breaking of the Sabbath.

When Jesus spit in the dirt and made mud to apply to the blind man’s eyes in order to heal him – they said He broke the Sabbath because the mixing of the mud was like kneading dough (which they also said was a breaking of the Sabbath).

When Jesus’ disciples picked the heads of grain to eat because they were hungry – the Pharisees said they were working on the Sabbath day, and therefore, had sinned against God.

The Pharisees had become slaves to the Sabbath. It was the taskmaster who ruled their lives. They thought being obedient servants would earn God’s favor – but Jesus says – “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

The Lord gives the Sabbath to serve man! It’s for his good – for healing the blind, feeding the hungry, forgiving sinners. The Pharisees considered their observance of the Sabbath worth God’s favor – but in reality, they had become slaves to the unending task of restoring themselves to God.

The Lord of the Sabbath Jesus comes to you who are bound by your sin – worn and wearied from your labors – and gives you rest. Stop working yourselves to death. Learn to be content with what I have given to you. Cease from your busy-ness – come apart from the world and sit for a while – and listen to my Word.

Remember, I have delivered you from your slavery. My blood cancels all your debt – my life was sacrificed for your life – my death destroys your death – and my grace is sufficient for all your needs.

“It is finished.” Come with me ... and rest.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.