

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The sermon: THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN

Scripture: Mark 2:23-28

And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the Sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shew-bread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.

He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.

What should the Christian's attitude be towards the Sabbath day and its observance? This is a question of growing concern in this day when many ignore the weekly day of rest completely, when others spend it upon themselves exclusively, and when others use it for business purposes or for sports and commercialized amusement.

In any discussion of Sabbath observance, several things must be kept clearly in mind. Though God himself rested on the seventh day, he never commanded Adam to keep any kind of a Sabbath. Furthermore, God's seventh day was Adam's first full day of life; therefore Adam could not have rested on that day after six days of labor. There is no Biblical record of any Sabbath keeping by any of the patriarchs between Adam and Moses. There is no Biblical record that Israel kept any Sabbath before Moses, and indeed such an observance would have been impossible during the slavery in Egypt.

When the command to keep the Sabbath was given, it was given to Israel only, and was a part of God's covenant with them as a people. In the 31st chapter of Exodus, God speaks to Israel through Moses, commanding the observance of the Sabbath, and adding in the 17th verse: "It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever." Deuteronomy 5:2,3, speaking of the giving of the ten commandments at Horeb quotes Moses as saying: "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive at this

day." It was a new covenant, one unknown to their fathers. No other nation or people was ever instructed by the Lord to live according to this covenant.

Jesus kept the law of Moses until it was fulfilled and abrogated by his death and resurrection, because he was of the house of Israel. But he never kept the Jewish Sabbath after his resurrection. Nowhere in any of his recorded teaching do we have a commandment or even an exhortation to keep the Sabbath. He often deliberately broke the petty rules for Sabbath keeping laid down by the Pharisees. No apostle or other New Testament writer commands the keeping of a Sabbath, or condemns Sabbath breaking. The council at Jerusalem which considered the troublesome question of whether Jewish law applied to Gentile converts to the church, never once mentioned the question of Sabbath keeping.

Although Paul preached many times on the Jewish Sabbath, because that was the most convenient time for him to find a crowd in the synagogues, there is no record that I can find of any meeting of the New Testament church on the seventh day. It was on the first day of the week that Jesus rose from the grave. The first day of the week was kept by his disciples in memory of this release of all mankind from the bondage of sin and death, as Israel had kept the seventh day as a memorial of their release from the bondage of Egypt. It was on the first day of the week that Jesus appeared to Mary, and to Peter, and to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. It was on

the first day that he appeared to the ten (Thomas being absent); and again it was on the first day -- the Lord's day -- that he appeared to the eleven, with Thomas present. The day of Pentecost, when the Christian church received its baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, fell on the first day of the week. Acts 20:7 tells us that it was on the first day of the week that the disciples came together to break bread. I Corinthians 16:2 says that on the first day of the week they were to collect their offerings for the relief of the poor.

Many of the early church fathers, who lived and wrote during the first and second centuries, plainly advocated the observance of the first, or Lord's day sabbath. Had we time we could quote at length from such authorities as Ignatius, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian of Carthage. At no time during the first two centuries is the observance of the first day of the week attacked or brought into question by any responsible church authority.

If the old Sabbath has been abrogated and done away, and we have no command in the New Testament to observe any Sabbath, why do Christians keep the Lord's day Sabbath today? Although Christians are no more obligated by law to keep a Sabbath, the keeping of the Lord's day is given to them as a right and a privilege, with blessings for its observance. The law of Christ is that we should love God, and love our neighbor as ourselves. Because we love God, we use the Lord's day in which to worship him, to learn of him, to remember the gift of his Son, to offer up our vows, our devotions, our sacraments, and our oblations to him. In order to do this, we rest from our daily labor. Because we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will not expect another to give up his day of worship and rest in order that we may be entertained, amused, or needlessly served.

Necessary work should not be neglected on the Lord's day, nor should anything be allowed to go to waste for lack of attention. Human needs, such as the needs for electricity, water, and other public utilities, police and fire protection, and the care of the sick, need not be neglected. But the Lord's day is the Lord's day, and not man's day, and the man who habitually uses it with no regard for his Lord has profaned the day. It is not a day on which to transact business, or carry on routine labor, or

to seek commercial recreation, amusement, or sports which cause others to lose their day of rest in order to serve us unnecessarily.

The acts of the New Testament church set the pattern for our use of this day. Paul wrote to the Hebrew Christians warning them to forsake not "the assembling of yourselves together," as the manner of some is. On the Lord's day the Christians met to break bread and to observe the Lord's supper. On the Lord's day they listened to the reading of various apostolic epistles, and to the elders' exposition of those epistles and other scriptures. They offered up their prayers and sacraments. They contributed to congregational expenses, and to the care of the poor. Since the death penalty for non-observance of the Sabbath has been done away together with the old Sabbath law, each was free to keep the day and reap its benefits and blessings, or to ignore the day and lose its benefits. As Paul wrote to the Romans: "He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it."

"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The legalistic Pharisees had made the Sabbath a burden and a care. Much of their opposition to Jesus stemmed out of the fact that he refused to keep the kind of Sabbath they prescribed. He laid down the principle that any institution is sacred only as it ministers to human needs. When Sabbath laws begin to hinder men in their growth towards God, rather than helping them, it is time to ignore or change the laws. When a government adopts the attitude that man exists to serve the state, and not the state to serve man, it is time to alter or abolish that government. If even the Church, which is designed by God to serve human need, begins to impoverish men that the church might grow rich, or to demand the implicit obedience of men that the church may build up its power, then that church is not worthy to live. The validity of any institution is determined by the manner in which it serves men.

The Lord's day which is the Christian Sabbath, is appointed unto man as a day of rest, of worship, of spiritual re-creation in a spirit of joy and thanksgiving. Those who thus observe it will find their lives blessed, their powers increased, and their souls enriched with the riches of eternity.