

# ***The Book of Matthew***

## ***Resting in Christ***

Lesson #6 for May 7, 2016

Scriptures: Matthew 11:28-30; 12:1-2,9-14; Luke 14:1-6; John 5:9-18; Isaiah 50:6-14.

1. This lesson will focus on the relationships among creation, redemption, the life of Christ, and the keeping of God's law with a special emphasis on the Sabbath.
2. To many Christians and maybe especially to Seventh-day Adventists, the mention of God's law brings to mind the Ten Commandments. But, are those few brief words the best description of God's law that is available?

Christ was a living representative of the law. No violation of its holy precepts was found in His life. Looking upon a nation of witnesses who were seeking occasion to condemn Him, He could say unchallenged, "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" [See John 8:46.]—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 287.3. [Content in brackets is added.]

3. To correctly interpret God's law, we must see it in the light of the life and death of Jesus Christ. That applies very strongly as well to the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. All of the Gospel writers—including Matthew—talked a lot about controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees over the correct keeping of the Sabbath. What was it about the Sabbath and the way it was understood in Jesus day that led to so many conflicts between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, especially the Pharisees?
4. Read Matthew 11:20-30. Jesus began this conversation by expressing very serious condemnations against the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. He even suggested that their residents were worse than the Sodomites! How could that be true? It is certainly true that they had had more light and more exposure to the truth than the Sodomites had.
5. Why did Jesus then proceed immediately into a prayer as recorded in verses 25-30? Jesus first recognized the close relationship that exists between Himself and the Father. This would make even more tragic the previous statements about Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin! Try to imagine Jesus living and preaching in Sodom! But, then He called for even the unlearned and the simple, the subsistence farmers, to come to Him and learn the truth from Him. And what is that truth? The truth that carrying the burden of sin is beyond the capacity of any one of us. We need to relieve ourselves of that burden and, instead, take upon ourselves the yoke of Christ. But, there seems to be a conflict. Jesus called for us to rest; but, then He said we must take His yoke upon us, and a yolk is for the purpose of working.
6. Surely, the life of Jesus does not suggest that we be lazy! Could it be true that by following the example of Jesus, human beings can find a peace and a rest not possible to be found anywhere else? How was/is that rest related to the keeping of the Sabbath? What burdens are we bearing? And in what way does Jesus help us to bear our burdens? Surely, we would recognize that Jesus understands our limitations and will stand beside us and help us to bear any load that may rightfully be placed upon us.
7. The Gospels are full of incidents in which Jesus was in conflict with the Pharisees over the Sabbath. We know that the Gospels were not written until 20 or 30 years or perhaps more—especially in the case of the Gospel of John—after Jesus had returned to heaven. If the Sabbath was soon to be abolished, replaced, superseded, fulfilled, or whatever other term you may choose to use, why did Jesus spend so much time in conflict with the Pharisees over the correct keeping of the Sabbath? Jesus knew what the original intent for the Sabbath was, and He recognized that what the Jewish leaders had turned it into was a serious abuse.
8. Read Matthew 12:1-2; Luke 6:1-5; Mark 2:23-28; and John 5:9-16. The Jews knew that one of the reasons why they went into Babylonian captivity was because of their defilement of the

Sabbath. When they helped to reestablish the nation of Israel after the Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah and Ezra made it very clear that they were not going to tolerate any breaking of the Sabbath. Nehemiah was ready to seriously attack anyone trying to do business on the Sabbath! (Nehemiah 13:19-22) Unfortunately, this led later Jewish rabbis and scholars to add rule after rule after rule about how to observe the Sabbath. First of all, they noted that God did not spell out in the Sabbath commandment what *work* was! So, they did it for Him as recorded in the *Mishnah*.

The main classes of work are forty save one: {Do you do any of these things on the Sabbath?} sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing or beating or dyeing it, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying [a knot], loosening [a knot], sewing two stitches, {If a button fell off the pastor's Sabbath suit on his way to church—he does want to look tidy in the pulpit—it is too bad that he cannot sew it on.} tearing in order to sew two stitches, hunting a gazelle, slaughtering or flaying or salting it or curing its skin, scraping it or cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, putting out a fire, lighting a fire, striking with a hammer and taking out aught from one domain into another. These are the main classes of work: forty save one. *Mishnah*, page 106. {Content in curly brackets is added. Content in square brackets is in the original translation.}

In the footnote it says: "These thirty-nine acts of work are treated in various degrees of detail" in chapters eleven and following.

So, what are those details? What if you were rushing home on Friday evening and you did not quite make it home and your donkey was still heavily loaded? There is definitely a rule for that.

If [on the eve of the Sabbath] darkness overtook a man while he was on the way, he must give his purse to a gentile {while it is yet day, of course} {You see, a Gentile was not going to be saved anyway; so, let him carry things for you.}, and if there was no gentile with him he must put it on the ass {on the donkey}. When he has reached the outermost courtyard [of the town] he may take off [from the ass] such baggage as can be taken off on the Sabbath, and for what cannot be taken off on the Sabbath he may loosen the cords so that the sacks fall down of themselves. *Mishnah*, page 120. {Content in curly brackets is added. Content in square brackets is in the original translation.}

9. Remember that Jews were not allowed to light or put out a fire on the Sabbath. But, what if a Gentile was willing to light the fire for him? Are you old enough to put out the fire?

If a gentile came to put out the fire they may not say to him, 'Put it out', or 'Do not put it out', since they are not answerable for his keeping Sabbath. But if it was a minor {a young person} that came to put it out they may not permit him, since they are answerable for his keeping Sabbath. *Mishnah*, page 114. {Content in curly brackets is added.}

10. One of the most unusual rules is about bathing on the Sabbath and drying off after bathing!

If a man bathed in the water of a cave or in the water of Tiberias and dried himself, even though it was with ten towels, he may not bring them away in his hand. *Mishnah*, page 119.

One wonders what that would mean; so, there is a footnote:

From fear of offending against the principle of squeezing out, however little the moisture in them.

Then you see the point. You are not allowed to squeeze a towel on the Sabbath. But you want to dry yourself. Well, use 10 towels and none of them will get very wet, and you will not by mistake squeeze them. But, no, that is forbidden. So, the rule goes on like this:

But if ten men dried themselves with one towel {Then it would be very wet. Wouldn't it?} [wiping] their faces, their hands, and their feet, they may bring the towel away in their hands. {Well, how could that be? The footnote says:} So many would keep each other warned of the danger of squeezing. *Mishnah*, page 119. {Content in curly brackets is added. Content in square brackets is in the original translation.}

It would be much safer for 10 people to use one towel and get it very wet because they would remind each other that they must not squeeze it. But, if one man used 10 towels, even though the towels would not be very wet, there is the danger he would forget and squeeze one of them. Remember that next time you take a shower!

11. Additional rules the Jews followed (based on the *Mishnah*) as listed in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday May 2:

*If a hen lays an egg on the Sabbath, is it OK to eat it?* The majority opinion of the Pharisees was that if the hen was an egg-laying hen, then it was not OK to eat an egg laid on Sabbath because the hen was working. However, if a hen was not an egg-laying hen—if it was just a hen being fattened up to be eaten—then it was OK to eat the egg because this wasn't the hen's primary labor. (There was also a suggestion that you could eat an egg laid on Sabbath by a laying hen as long as you later killed the hen for breaking the Sabbath.)

*Is it OK to look at yourself in a mirror on Sabbath?* The answer? No, because if you see a gray hair you might be tempted to pluck it, and this would be reaping and, as such, a violation of the Sabbath.

*If your house catches fire on Sabbath, is it OK to go salvage your clothes?* The answer: you should carry out only one set of clothing. However, if you put on one set of clothing, then you may carry out another set. (By the way, if your home catches fire, it's not OK to ask a Gentile to put out the fire, but if the Gentile is putting out the fire anyway, that's OK.)

*Is it OK to spit on Sabbath?* The answer: you may spit on a rock, but you may not spit on the ground because that would be making mud or mortar.

12. Weren't the Pharisees just trying to make it clear what could be done on Sabbath? We might chuckle as we read these rules. But, do we have Sabbath rules that are in some ways similar? Have we lost the true import of the Sabbath? Or, do we fully enjoy the rest God intended? It is easy to see from the above requirements why Jesus was concerned about the Sabbath. The Sabbath was supposed to be a day of rest and delight; look what it had turned into!
13. Read Matthew 12:3-8. Compare 1 Samuel 21:1-6. In this passage Jesus was challenging us to do something that might seem a little strange or even scary to some. How are we to decide what is most important to do on the Sabbath? Does feeding the homeless or caring for the sick become more important than going to church or Sabbath school? How are we supposed to make these kinds of ethical decisions? Jesus was continually trying to rid the Sabbath of meaningless rules in order to make it once again a day of delight.

**In the days of Christ the Sabbath had become so perverted that its observance reflected the character of selfish and arbitrary men rather than the character of the loving heavenly Father.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 284.0. [Bold type is added.]

14. Can you think of any rules that you might have grown up with or still observe which might seem a little strange or foolish to others?
15. Read Matthew 12:9-14.

Upon another Sabbath, as Jesus entered a synagogue, He saw there a man who

had a withered hand. The Pharisees watched Him, eager to see what He would do. The Saviour well knew that in healing on the Sabbath He would be regarded as a transgressor, but He did not hesitate to break down the wall of traditional requirements that barricaded the Sabbath. Jesus bade the afflicted man stand forth, and then asked, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?" It was a maxim among the Jews that a failure to do good, when one had opportunity, was to do evil; to neglect to save life was to kill. Thus Jesus met the rabbis on their own ground.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 286.2.

16. How could the Pharisees have become so confused in their thinking that they would allow people to go to considerable effort to pull livestock out of the ditch but they would not allow a human who was suffering to be healed? A careful study of the history of the early Christian church reveals several important facts about the keeping of the Sabbath.

17. The fifth century historian Socrates Scholasticus wrote:

Almost all churches throughout The World celebrated the sacred mysteries (the Lord's Supper) on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, refuse to do this.—*Ecclesiastical History*, book 5, p. 289 as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday May 5.

18. Scan briefly through the following passages: Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 4:16-30; 6:6-11; 13:10-16; 14:1-5. If one were to take the time to review all the passages in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament about Sabbath observance, it would become very clear that none of the New Testament writers ever supported a change of the day.

19. In fact, the first unambiguous use of the term *Lord's day* for the first day of the week—in this instance, the resurrection Sunday—appears in the little apocryphal book called *The Gospel According to Peter* which was composed around A.D. 175.

<sup>9</sup>And in the night in which the Lord's day was drawing on, as the soldiers kept guard two by two in a watch, there was a great voice in the heaven; and they saw the heavens opened, and two men descend from thence with great light and approached the tomb. And that stone which was put at the door rolled of itself and made way in a part; and the tomb was opened, and both the young men entered in.... <sup>12</sup>and at dawn upon the Lord's day Mary Magdalene, a disciple of the Lord, fearing because of the Jews, since they were burning with wrath, had not done at the Lord's sepulcher that things which women are wont to do for those that die and for those that are beloved by them—she took her friends with her and came to the sepulcher where he was laid. *The Gospel According to Peter* 9,12 (175 A.D.); *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9.

20. Read Matthew 12:12 again. What did Jesus have specifically in mind when He said it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath? What would Jesus have included in the category of *good*?

21. Read Isaiah 58:7-14. Surely, these verses make it very clear that the Sabbath was never intended to be a burden; it was intended to be a delight. But, down through the years, few subjects of a religious nature have resulted in more conflicts than the day for Sabbath observance. Clearly, we are to be disengaged from our usual business on the Sabbath.

"With or without religion," someone said, "you would have good people doing good things, and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion." In the 1600s, French mystic Blaise Pascal famously warned "men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." Though they are somewhat overstated, there is unfortunately some truth to these sentiments. This truth can be seen in the context of the week's

lesson, in regard to the Pharisees and the Sabbath. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, May 6.

22. Ellen White wrote:

When Jesus turned upon the Pharisees with the question whether it was lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill, He confronted them with their own wicked purposes. They were hunting His life with bitter hatred, while He was saving life and bringing happiness to multitudes. Was it better to slay upon the Sabbath, as they were planning to do, than to heal the afflicted, as He had done? Was it more righteous to have murder in the heart upon God's holy day than love to all men, which finds expression in deeds of mercy?—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 287.1.

23. As we consider what God wants and especially what He has in mind for the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, read the following passages: Matthew 9:10-13; Psalm 51:16-17; Hosea 6:6; **Micah 6:6-8**; and Isaiah 1:10-20. In light of such passages, why are so many of our Christian friends adamant against the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath? What are our best arguments in favor of keeping the seventh day as Sabbath? Or, is our behavior on the Sabbath a more powerful argument? How many of us spend our time doing good on the Sabbath? With our families and friends? For the poor, needy, and homeless? How do we keep the Sabbath? In what ways could we have a deeper and more meaningful and richer Sabbath experience?

24. What things do you think about and focus on during the Sabbath hours? Do you think about creation? The release of the slaves from Egypt—and our release from sin? The meaning of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—all of which are connected with Sabbath observance? Shouldn't these things lead us to joyfully celebrate the Sabbath rest?

25. What are the things that cause us worry and stress during the week? Can we set those aside on the Sabbath? What kind of rest does Jesus offer us? Does guilt and our sins form a kind of burden that is too hard to bear? What is different about the Sabbath? Is it God's presence?

26. Most religions seem to focus on: "Do this; don't do that." *True Christianity* as defined by Jesus Himself is to come to Him, lay aside our burden of guilt and sin, and accept His rest. (Matthew 11:28-30) Does His rest involve not doing something? Or, doing something?

27. Is the Sabbath the best day of the week for you? Why is that? Is it because of who you spend time with? Because of what you do? Is it a truly restful change from your usual schedule for the week? Is the Sabbath an opportunity for us to truly cast our burdens upon the Lord? (Psalm 55:22) How do we do that?

In these words [Matthew 11:28-30] Christ is speaking to every human being. Whether they know it or not, all are weary and heavy-laden. All are weighed down with burdens that only Christ can remove. The heaviest burden that we bear is the burden of sin. If we were left to bear this burden, it would crush us. But the Sinless One has taken our place.... He invites us to cast all our care upon Him; for He carries us upon His heart.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 328.5-329.0. [Content in brackets is added.]

28. How does Christ actually "bear" our sins? How is that related to the Sabbath rest that He promised us?

29. Our lesson suggests that only Jesus can offer that kind of rest. Is that true? Is there any other individual in the universe who can offer us freedom from sin and guilt?

30. Think of the biggest burdens that you bear during the week. Are they related in any way to selfishness, greed, or impurities in your life or thinking? Perhaps financial worries? Concerns about family or friends? How can the rest on the Sabbath help us to turn to Jesus and let Him

carry those burdens? If we have not learned how to come to Jesus as a Friend and place on Him our every burden, then perhaps, we have not learned about the rest He is offering us. It is not an invitation to a life of ease and indulgence! It is an invitation to a life of service and an escape from legalism into the freedom offered through God's grace.

31. Can you remember a time when you thought of the Sabbath as a burden? Or, at least an inconvenience? Why was that? What other priorities did you have in mind at that time? Were they really more important than the rest that Christ has offered? The Bible describes God's law as a gift of joy and delight. See Psalm 119:24,35,47,70,77,92,143,174. Isaiah 58:13 calls the Sabbath a delight; Paul echoed that idea in Romans 7:22.
32. All through the Bible, the Sabbath is connected with the great acts of God: Creation; "re-creation" and freedom from slavery in Egypt; the great answers that God gave to the issues in the great controversy by the death, rest in the grave over Sabbath, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and finally, our salvation in our future home where we will celebrate every Sabbath with our Lord. (Isaiah 66:23)
33. In light of all of that, is it clear why Jesus called Himself the Lord of the Sabbath? (Matthew 12:8) Everything that makes the Sabbath important and meaningful is a result of His actions!
34. One of the things which led to the greatest controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees was His claim that God was His Father and that they worked together even on the Sabbath. In what ways does God work on the Sabbath?

God could not for a moment stay His hand, or man would faint and die. And man also has a work to perform on this day. The necessities of life must be attended to, the sick must be cared for, the wants of the needy must be supplied.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 207.1.

Every pulsation of the heart is a rebound from the touch of the finger of God. He watches over us by day, and under his wings we find shelter by night. His preserving care is over us, whether we wake or sleep. He is as a sentinel to guard us from Satan's power, or we should be taken captive by him. Jesus is our constant friend.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, December 2, 1890 par. 15.

35. The Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus because they had enough insight to realize that if He continued doing what He was doing, it would completely destroy their system of rules, and it would finally overthrow their authority. They felt it was a life or death matter for them.
36. Read Romans 13:10. Is it really true that love is the fulfillment of all law? Which commandment would not be fulfilled by love?
37. How did the Sabbath—which was intended to be a great celebration of creation, of redemption, and of salvation—end up being such a burden in the days of Jesus? How and why had it lost its meaning and become a criterion for judging others?
38. Many of the people to whom Jesus spoke were subsistence farmers. Is the Sabbath just a delight for subsistence farmers who can rest from their hard work in the fields every other day? Or, is it supposed to be a delight for modern-day Christians with our very different lifestyles?
39. What does the Sabbath mean to you?

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