

“The Least of These”: Ministering to Those in Need Sabbath: A Day of Freedom

Lesson #3 for July 20, 2019

Scriptures: Exodus 16:16-18; 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Matthew 12:9-13; Leviticus 25:1-7; Mark 2:27.

1. The Sabbath day was created at the end of creation week. What do you think God and the angels did with Adam and Eve on that Sabbath? God created not just a day on which to rest but also the very idea of *rest* and all that it means to those who recognize God as Creator and Restorer. Did the angels wonder, at first, why God created two different kinds of beings?
2. Isn't it obvious that God's definition of *rest* in this case does not just involve sleeping? What is included in God's definition of *rest* as described in the Bible?
3. So, why do you think the Sabbath became such an important issue between God and the Israelites—and us, for that matter? Remember that it will be the final sign of the seal that we belong to God. (Revelation 7:1-4)
4. What do you think was God's original plan for the Sabbath? If God could come to your church on Sabbath morning and talk to your congregation about how we should spend Sabbath, what would He say? Would He talk about enjoying the Sabbath?
5. Originally, of course, in the Garden of Eden, God and the angels came and celebrated with Adam and Eve! Think what a wonderful time that must have been.
6. Unfortunately, it is very easy when talking about the Sabbath to slip into discussions of do's and don'ts. While these issues might be important, what the Sabbath should mean to us in our relationship to God is much more important. God intended for the Sabbath to be the *queen of the week*. The Sabbath blessing is to spill over to every other day of the week.
7. From Mount Sinai God asked the children of Israel to remember the Sabbath. They had been in slavery for at least 100 years, and perhaps longer. Were any of the Israelites able to keep the Sabbath during their time in Egypt? At first, they were welcomed guests; but, they ended up being slaves. At what point do you think the keeping of the Sabbath may have been challenged?
8. As we know, Exodus 16 talks about the giving of the *manna*. The *manna* was given every morning of the week except Sabbath morning. They were told to pick up a double portion on Friday which would not rot by the following day but would be ready to eat on Sabbath.
9. Did the angels have anything to do with the provision of the *manna*? What did all the Israelite's animals eat? Did God give them any instructions about the eating of meat along with their *manna*? Did they get any fruits or vegetables during those 40 years? They could have been in Canaan in 2 weeks. How would you like to be given the same thing to eat every day for 40 years? Were there various ways to prepare the *manna* that provided some variety? The Hebrew word *manna* means “what is it?” Did they ever use any other name for *manna*?
10. Read Exodus 16:16-18. What was happening as the story unfolded? Did the angels take some of the excess from those who had excess and give it to those who did not have enough?
11. Read 2 Corinthians 8:10-15. Paul was making an appeal to the Corinthians to give generously for the support of the poor brethren back in Judea. He suggested that the day may come when they would be in need and the people in Judea would be able to share with

them. Then, he quoted a portion of Exodus 16:16-18 as verification of his suggestion.

12. Does that principle apply to anything that we do in our day?
13. The giving of the *manna* proved to be a challenge for the Israelites. At first, they wondered what it was! But, after a while, they longed for the food of Egypt. (Numbers 11:5-6) But, more than that, every day they had to trust that God would give them food the following day. There was no chance to hoard, store up, and not trust in God. Every day, the pantry was empty!
14. The whole story of the *manna* is a remarkable story. Clearly, it was given before the Mount Sinai experience and the giving of the Ten Commandments. What were the children of Israel supposed to learn from that experience?
15. What can we learn from their experience with the *manna*? Why does God ask us to prepare on Friday what we are going to eat for Sabbath? Isn't it that God wants our cooks to be able to celebrate a restful Sabbath along with the rest of us?
16. Read Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. These two renderings of the Sabbath commandment are similar except for the reason given for celebrating. Why do you think Moses changed this one explanation when repeating the law? Was his memory faulty?
17. Standing back a little way from these two passages and taking a broader view, it should be obvious that in Exodus we are taught to celebrate the Sabbath because of God's creation and all that it means to us.
18. In Deuteronomy 5:12-15, God was reminding the children of Israel not only that He was their Creator but also that He was the One who had rescued them out of Egypt and had sustained them for 40 years in preparation for their entry into the land of Canaan. Thus, we see that God is not only our Creator but also our Restorer and Redeemer.
19. Think of the various kinds of worship experiences that the children of Israel were exposed to in Egypt. The Egyptians had many false gods and many strange ways of worshiping them. Did any of the children of Israel manage to keep their faith pure during all those years? Did any of them manage to observe the Sabbath during those years? At the time when they left Egypt, did the Israelites have any idea about the plan of salvation as we understand it today? If not, what did the plan of salvation mean to them at that point?
20. God clearly instructed them that they were to talk to their children about the Sabbath and God's care for them every day. And they were to teach their children about a God who wanted to have a personal relationship with them; not a God made of metal or stone with no capacity to do anything except sit there! Furthermore, *Yahweh* asked them to dedicate one day of each week for their time together. This was to be a time to celebrate the new kind of society which was to be established with God as their King.
21. So, would you say that the keeping of the Sabbath has made you better? Kinder? More caring? Even more compassionate toward others? Do you celebrate God on the Sabbath?
22. It is clear that the Sabbath commandment is much longer and gives a great deal more detail than any of the other commandments. Why did God need to give all those details? Couldn't He just have commanded them to keep the Sabbath? Why do you think the commandment focuses on those who are lower in the chain of authority? Were they more likely to be required to work on the Sabbath even while the heads of households were resting? Sigve K. Tonstad suggested that the Sabbath commandment:

“prioritizes from the bottom up and not from the top looking down, giving first considerations to the weakest and most vulnerable members of society. Those

who need rest the most—the slave, the resident alien, and the beast of burden—are singled out for special mention. In the rest of the seventh day the underprivileged, even mute animals, find an ally.”—*The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 126, 127.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, July 16].[‡]

23. Clearly, the Sabbath commandment enjoins a time of the week, one day, in which everyone even the beasts of burden are to be treated to rest, and the humans are to be treated as equals. Even foreigners who lived among them were to be treated fairly.
24. Surely, this was a significant departure from the way the nations of the Middle East had related to each other before that time. As Seventh-day Adventists, are we comfortable with the idea that we are all equal? Don't we think that since we are Sabbathkeeping Christians, we are very special? Don't we expect to be among the 144,000?
25. It is pretty clear that in the beginning, the Sabbath was meant to be a time of rest and celebration for the entire universe. Just imagine how it has changed down through the generations. Often, it has become a restrictive time of human traditional rules and edicts. Jesus, of course, opposed those restrictions vigorously.
26. Why do you think Jesus did a number of His most remarkable miracles of healing on the Sabbath? Was that intentional? We know that Jesus healed many other people not mentioned specifically in the Bible. Ellen White suggested that, at times, He would pass through villages and heal every sick person in the whole village.

The people of Nazareth knew that He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by Satan. **About them were whole villages where there was not a moan of sickness in any house; for He had passed through them, and healed all their sick.** The mercy revealed in every act of His life testified to His divine anointing.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 241.1.[†]

27. Review the miracles performed by Jesus that were stated to be on the Sabbath: See Matthew 12:9-15; Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:38-39; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; and John 5:1-18; 9:1-41. These are stories of many who had long-standing issues like the man who had a paralyzed hand, the man with an evil spirit who came to the synagogue, the woman who had an evil spirit and had been bent over for 18 years, the man whose legs and arms were swollen, the man who had been ill for 38 years, and the man who had been born blind. The miracles on the Sabbath also included acute issues like Simon's mother-in-law. All these healings on the Sabbath infuriated the Pharisees particularly.
28. Matthew 12:14 tells us: "Then the Pharisees left and made plans to kill Jesus." Did the Pharisees really believe that Jesus would destroy their whole system which had been set up? What kinds of evil spirits caused the illnesses which are mentioned in these stories?
29. On another occasion, we are told:
John 5:18: This saying made the Jewish authorities all the more determined to kill him; not only had he broken the Sabbath law, but he had said that God was his own Father and in this way had made himself equal with God.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., John 5:18). New York: American Bible Society.
30. One of the very significant things about the Sabbath is that we are freed from our responsibilities of the week. This allows us to do what we think is most important. So, what

is that? How many of us focus on how we can help others?

According to the fourth commandment the Sabbath was dedicated to rest and religious worship. All secular employment was to be suspended, but works of mercy and benevolence were in accordance with the purpose of the Lord.... To relieve the afflicted, to comfort the sorrowing, is a labor of love that does honor to God's holy day.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,* November 30, 1876, par. 5; *2SP** 193.2; *4Red** 45.4; *Welfare Ministry** 77.1; *ML** 231.3.

31. Sometimes, we suggest that Sabbath should be used for reaching out to others. But, the Israelites were living in the midst of their nation with few others close around them. What kind of good works on Sabbath did God ask them to do? Were there opportunities for them to evangelize others?
32. In our last lesson, we talked about the jubilee year. In this lesson we are focusing not only on the seventh-day Sabbath but also on the seventh-year Sabbath. See Leviticus 25:1-7.

Leviticus 25:1-7: The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and commanded him² to give the following regulations to the people of Israel. When you enter the land that the LORD is giving you, you shall honour the LORD by not cultivating the land every seventh year.³ You shall sow your fields, prune your vineyards, and gather your crops for six years.⁴ But the seventh year is to be a year of complete rest for the land, a year dedicated to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.⁵ Do not even harvest the corn that grows by itself without being sown, and do not gather the grapes from your unpruned vines; it is a year of complete rest for the land.⁶ Although the land has not been cultivated during that year, it will provide food for you, your slaves, your hired men, the foreigners living with you,⁷ your domestic animals, and the wild animals in your fields. Everything that it produces may be eaten.—*Good News Bible*.*

33. So, what does a year of rest do for the land? The land reconstitutes itself. What did the people do during that year? If there was no farming to do, what did they do? Do we have any records in the Old Testament of a time when they actually did that as a nation? Were individual Israelites doing it even though others were not? Having a Sabbath year every seven years allowed the farmland to lie fallow for the year. It has been recognized by many authorities that this has a very beneficial effect on the land.
34. Also, on that seventh year, every Israelite slave was to be released. Outstanding debts were also to be forgiven.
35. **Deuteronomy 15:1-11:** “At the end of every seventh year you are to cancel the debts of those who owe you money.² This is how it is to be done. All who have lent money to a fellow-Israelite are to cancel the debt; they must not try to collect the money; the LORD himself has declared the debt cancelled.³ You may collect what a foreigner owes you, but you must not collect what any of your own people owe you.
⁴ “The LORD your God will bless you in the land that he is giving you. Not one of your people will be poor⁵ if you obey him and carefully observe everything that I command you today.⁶ The LORD will bless you, as he has promised. You will lend money to many nations, but you will not have to borrow from any; you will have control over many nations, but no nation will have control over you.

⁷ “If in any of the towns in the land that the LORD your God is giving you there is a fellow-Israelite in need, then do not be selfish and refuse to help him. ⁸Instead, be generous and lend him as much as he needs. ⁹Do not refuse to lend him something, just because the year when debts are cancelled is near. Do not let such an evil thought enter your mind. If you refuse to make the loan, he will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will be held guilty. ¹⁰Give to him freely and unselfishly, and the LORD will bless you in everything you do. ¹¹There will always be some Israelites who are poor and in need, and so I command you to be generous to them.”—Deuteronomy 15:1-11, *Good News Bible*.*

36. Did some Israelites lose a lot of money because of these provisions? Or, if they had followed them, would they have learned that the entire society would be blessed?
37. What difference should keeping the Sabbath make to the other six days of your week? If you are greedy, selfish, and uncaring from Sunday through Friday, does it really matter what you do on the Sabbath? Doesn't our real character shine out on the Sabbath just as it does on other days? It may manifest itself in slightly different ways; but, it is still there.
38. So, what should we do on the Sabbath?

Jesus stated to them that the work of relieving the afflicted was in harmony with the Sabbath law. It was in harmony with the work of God's angels, who are ever descending and ascending between heaven and earth to minister to suffering humanity....

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. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God's holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour's pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 206.3-207.1.

39. If our job is to relieve the pain of those who are suffering, does that mean doctors should use more pain medication on the Sabbath? Is there any way by which we could reveal to the world the advantages of keeping Sabbath? Does the world need to be reminded that we have a Creator? And a Restorer? And a Savior?
40. During those 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, are we to understand from Exodus 16:16-18 that each person ended up with a portion of *manna* appropriate for his needs. Does that mean that no one was skinny? And no one was fat?
41. In some of the more developed nations of the world today, there is a huge amount of food wastage. Some 40% of all the food bought annually in the United States ends up being wasted—some 35 million tons! Doesn't that hint at the fact, as God has said, that if no one ate too much and if food was distributed fairly, that everyone would have enough to eat?
42. God made provision for the widows, orphans, and the poor to at least have something.

Leviticus 19:9-10: ⁹ “When you harvest your fields, do not cut the corn at the edges of the fields, and do not go back to cut the ears of corn that were left. ¹⁰Do not go back through your vineyard to gather the grapes that were missed or to pick up the grapes that have fallen; leave them for poor people and foreigners. I am

the LORD your God.”—*Good News Bible*.*

43. And how did Jesus feel about people who are hungry? See Matthew 6:34-44.
44. Read Luke 12:16-21. Surely, this warns us against the habit of hoarding.
45. Is it clear in your mind exactly how we are to get ready on “preparation day” for the Sabbath and, then, enjoy the Sabbath?
46. What principles should guide us in the use of our Sabbath time? We do not have the capacity to perform miracles as Jesus did. But, we could bring comfort and cheer to those who are suffering.
47. Review again John 9:1-41. Is there a treatment for spiritual blindness?

John 9:39-41: ³⁹ Jesus said, “I came to this world to judge, so that the blind should see and those who see should become blind.”

⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were there with him heard him say this and asked him, “Surely you don’t mean that we are blind, too?”

⁴¹ Jesus answered, “If you were blind, then you would not be guilty; but since you claim that you can see, this means that you are still guilty.”—*Good News Bible*.*

48. After studying this lesson and reviewing all the Sabbath requirements, read Leviticus 25.

Leviticus 25:39-46: ³⁹ If a fellow-Israelite living near you becomes so poor that he sells himself to you as a slave, you shall not make him do the work of a slave. ⁴⁰He shall stay with you as a hired servant and serve you until the next Year of Restoration. ⁴¹At that time he and his children shall leave you and return to his family and to the property of his ancestors. ⁴²The people of Israel are the LORD’s slaves, and he brought them out of Egypt; they must not be sold into slavery. ⁴³Do not treat them harshly, but obey your God. ⁴⁴If you need slaves, you may buy them from the nations round you. ⁴⁵You may also buy the children of the foreigners who are living among you. Such children born in your land may become your property, ⁴⁶and you may leave them as an inheritance to your sons, whom they must serve as long as they live. But you must not treat any of your fellow-Israelites harshly.—*Good News Bible*.*

49. Does it seem like God was favoring the Jewish people because of His friend Abraham? Was that fair? How were slaves treated in the countries around Israel?
50. We have now studied in some detail about all three of the Sabbaths. Should we as Seventh-day Adventist Christians be observing all three of the Sabbaths?
51. But, what about those whose job during the week is healing? Some early Adventist doctors felt that they should not charge for services they rendered on the Sabbath. And guess what? Pretty soon, more and more of their patients wanted to be treated on the Sabbath! Other doctors suggested that maybe they should pay a double tithe on the money they earned on the Sabbath. What do you think?
52. Don’t you think we should practice observing the Sabbath correctly because we will be doing it for the rest of eternity? See Isaiah 66:23.

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