“Now It Was Sabbath”
August 21, 2013
Text: John 5:9b-15

In John 5, we have seen that Jesus healed a sick man at the pool of Bethesda, & that He did it on a Sabbath Day.

As we’ll see in today’s text, Jerusalem’s religious authorities got upset & accused our Lord of breaking the Sabbath Law by His doing so, because the Sabbath was to be a day of rest. But Jesus did not violate the Sabbath by His doing miracles on that day, because for Him, as God, it was refreshment/rest—not work—to do good on the Sabbath.

E.g. when Jesus arrived at the well in Sychar (John 4), He was physically exhausted, but He engaged in conversation w/ a Samaritan woman about the water of eternal life, & revealed to her that He was the long-awaited Messiah.

She believed in Jesus & He saved her soul.

When the disciples finally arrived back at the well, they expected to find Him still suffering from fatigue/hunger.

Instead, He told them=> “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work” (4:34).

He hadn’t eaten anything, but His ministry to the Samaritan woman had completely refreshed His spirit.

Doing deeds of mercy was a source of rest for Jesus, so it was entirely appropriate for Him to do them, on a Sabbath.
It also caused recipients of such merciful deeds to glorify God, another activity that was highly appropriate for a Sabbath. E.g. it was a Sabbath when X healed the bedridden man at the pool of Bethesda, & told him to rise, take up his bed, & walk.

When the Jewish religious leaders discovered the man doing those things, they were shocked by it. According to their legalistic system of rabbinical rules/regulations, they construed those activities as work, which was a violation of the Sabbath. They had figured out 39 categories of work, and carrying things was 1 of them.

It made no difference in their view that the man’s bed was simply a light mat that could easily be rolled up, & carried away. Nor did it matter to them that before Jesus healed him, the man had suffered for 38 years, unable to get up from his bed. And the fact that Jesus Himself had been refreshed/rejuvenated, not fatigued by His ministering to this man, was also irrelevant, from their p.o.v.

Above/beyond all that, what God meant when he wrote the 4th (Sabbath) Commandment (Ex 20:9-10) didn’t pertain to this situation.
He had said=> “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work.”

The “work” God was talking about was making one’s living by the sweat of one’s brow, a/w/a marketing and engaging in trade, not merely carrying a rolled-up mat under one’s arm.

We see that clearly in Nehemiah’s words in=>

Neh 13=> “In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

They were bringing all these things to a marketplace.

Then Nehemiah adds=> So I admonished them on the day they sold food” (13:15).

In Jer 17:21-22, we again find that “work” refers to daily labor & everyday/commonplace activity.

The Sabbath was to be set aside as a day for God’s people to cease from such daily labor, in order to contemplate/glory Him.

If the hearts of the Jews in Jesus’ time had been right w/ God, the miracles He did on the Sabbath would have resulted in a storm of praise going up to heaven from grateful hearts that were reveling in His grace/mercy.

X’s healings didn’t break God’s Law, but were done entirely within the spirit of that Law.
What they broke was one of the 39 categories of manmade, legalistic/rabbinical regulations & that infuriated the Pharisees.

**Rabbinical regulations prob. started out reasonably enough & were created w/ good intentions.**

Someone might have come to a rabbi & said, “I don’t want to violate the Fourth Commandment, but I’m not sure what God meant by the word ‘work.’”

The rabbi’s discussed what constituted “work,” & over time, their answers filled whole volumes, with definitions of what was/was-not “work,” in specific situations.

But ultimately, their distinctions between “work”/non-work just became meaningless hair-splitting.

E.g. this from the Mishnah=> “It is unlawful to carry a handkerchief loose in the pocket.”

It was OK to pin it to your pocket, or to tie it around your waste, making it part of your clothing, since wearing clothes wasn’t considered work.

But carrying it loose in your pocket, where you might hold/carry it in your hand—that was work.

**Jesus’ healing a miserable invalid at Bethesda’s pool would not be considered a violation of the Sabbath, except among rabbis whose zeal to uphold the rabbinical rules had blinded them to the spirit/intent of God’s Law.**
The Sabbath was to be a day set apart for glorifying/worshiping Him, as one rested in Him.
What could have accomplished that, better than God-incarnate healing people so that they would praise/worship Him w/ hearts full of love/gratitude?
That is the very purpose for which we too have gathered here this morning on the 1st day of the week=>
To sing hymns of praise, to learn about God’s glory from His Word, & to pray to Him in the name of His blessed Son.
To talk about the great love of Jesus for His people, because of which He died to save our souls from sin, and reconcile us to God, bringing us into a loving relationship w/ Him.

This morning’s text is all about the Pharisees accusing Jesus of breaking the Law of the Sabbath, & beginning a hate campaign that would ultimately lead to His crucifixion.
It starts out w/ an Objection, which soon leads to Intimidation, followed by an Injunction, and ending in Capitulation.

* Objection

[John 5:9b]=> “Now it was [the] Sabbath on that day.”
This is the key to the whole incident, and the main reason why John included it in his Gospel.
It will lead to conflict between Jesus & Jewish religious leaders.
That in turn, will escalate into an even deeper disagreement over Jesus’ equality w/ God, which will ultimately lead those leaders to start seeking a way to take Jesus’ life.

Over time, X will repeatedly confront Israel’s religious leaders w/ His right to rule as their Savior/Messiah. They will be forced to decide whether they’re going to recognize Him as such, or reject/eliminate Him.

And they will finally decide that He must be crucified.

**The Pharisees had superimposed on God’s Sabbath Law their own rigid/manmade restrictions.**

They didn’t treat it as a day in which to gratefully worship God. They viewed it simply as a day when work was prohibited, in order to prove one’s Jewishness, & to gain merit before God through obedience to His Law.

This was so important, in their minds, that they made man a slave to the Sabbath, whereas God’s original intent was that the Sabbath become a blessing to man.

**Jesus continually confronted them over the Sabbath issue.**

* E.g. in Mt 12, Jesus’ disciples picked heads of grain on a Sabbath, as they walked through a planted field, rubbed the grain in their hands to dislodge the husks, and ate it as a sort of snack (Mt 12:1-8).
This was perfectly legal, but the Pharisees objected that their doing so, was working on the Sabbath.

X declared to them=> “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

Those were fighting words from the Pharisees’ p.o.v.

* In Lk 13, X was in a synagogue on the Sabbath, when He healed a woman who’d been doubled over for 18 yrs. The synagogue official complained indignantly=>

“*There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day*” (Lk 13:10-14).

The heartlessness of such a response was incredibly inhuman.

* In Jn 9, Jesus healed a man’s blindness by spitting on the ground to make mud, applying the mud to the man’s eyes, & sending him to wash in the pool of Siloam. As a result, the man was healed.

Because it was on a Sabbath, & the Pharisees thought that mixing up mud was actually work, they said of X,

“This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath” (Jn 9:14-16).

How amazingly perverse the Jewish religion had made the Jewish people under the influence of legalism.
Jesus deliberately healed on the Sabbath to confront the spiritually bankrupt Jewish religion w/ its errors/hypocrisy. The religious leaders had substituted their own traditions for the commands of God. And God incarnate was standing right there in their presence, forcing them to choose between Him, & their own ignorant arrogance.

**When X healed the invalid at the pool of Bethesda, He told the man to get up off his mat, role it up, & walk away.**

When the hostile Jewish leaders saw the man doing all that, they objected, again based on their interpretations of Sabbath Law.

This was their Objection=>

[Verse 10]=> "So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, ‘It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.’"

**As we saw last time, a Jewish feast was being celebrated at the time.**

The whole city of Jerusalem was full of gladness as its celebrants ate portions of meat from their sacrifices and drank some of the wine.

Jesus was spending His holiday doing something He loved to do, walking among the sick/poor, searching out those who needed His help, & who needed His tender heart’s mercy.
By His example He was teaching His disciples (including us) not to forget the needy in our own happiest times, but to reach-out & help alleviate their sorrows.

The most painful days of the year for some of those folks can be holidays, like this feast day.

Having received Jesus’ help, the newly healed invalid had every reason to rejoice, for the first time in 38 years, & to really enjoy this national feast.

The Jewish leaders, might have congratulated him on his good fortune, & rejoiced w/ him over God’s blessing him, though His Son.

Instead, they approached him w/ scowls on their faces, angrily spending all their emotional energy demanding to know why he was had dared to do something their rules didn’t permit.

They took no notice of the man’s cure at all, & seemed to willfully ignore what Jesus had done for him.

In the same way, people of this world today tend to ignore the eternal joys/blessings of a believer’s salvation.

If they don’t deny it altogether, they consider it something so trivial that it’s not even worthy of their notice.

They may see someone whose life was once a disaster, but is now transformed for good by the power of the H.S.
They blithely set aside that miracle of God’s grace, as if it were nothing, and to go on to attack some biblical truth they don’t like/agree-with.

But we believers must persistently remember/celebrate the blessings that X has wrought w/i us, through the H.S., changing our nature, & renewing us in the spirit of our minds.

And we must worship and praise our God because of what He has done for us.

The healed invalid had found himself in a difficult dilemma. He doesn’t seem to have been a very courageous man.

It’s hard to blame him, given the fact that for the past 38 years he had been totally at other people’s mercy.

His answer to Jesus’ question about whether/not he wished to get well, reflected a mindset of dependency=>

“Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up” (5:7).

He had come to view his healing as totally dependent on other people’s help.

He’d always had to carefully avoid making enemies, & the Pharisees who confronted him now were potentially dangerous enemies.

In verse 15 he will seek to ingratiate himself to them, even doing so at Jesus’ expense.
We aren’t altogether surprised that he sought to defend himself from them by placing the blame on Jesus.

As Leon Morris says—“The man was not the stuff of which heroes are made.”

[Verse 11] => “But he answered them [the religious leaders], ‘He who made me well was the one who said to me, ‘Pick up [your pallet] and walk.’”

It’s possible that this man was suggesting that anyone who had the power to heal as Jesus did, also had the authority to tell him to pick up his bed and walk, even on a Sabbath.

He may even have been saying that he wasn’t in a position to defy anyone who had such power & who had healed his body.

But that’s about as much courage as he would have been able to muster against the Pharisees’ cold-stares and icy/intolerant-voices.

To claim that he was mounting an argument against them, asserting that, if Jesus had the authority to heal, He also had greater authority to interpret the Law than they had, would be giving him way too much credit.

The next scene, as the Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking the Law of the Sabbath, might be called=>

* **Intimidation** (so the Pharisees now kicked it up a notch, from objections to outright intimidation).

[Verse 12] => “They [the Jewish leaders] asked him, ‘Who is the
man who said to you, “Pick up your pallet and walk”?”

Here we clearly see the judgmental nature of these Jews, which would have been very intimidating to this weak ex-invalid. They didn’t ask, “Who healed you?” but “Who told you (who authorized you) to violate our Law by picking up, & carrying your bed?”

They were clearly looking for a fight.

It was so obvious that they were starting to formulate a legal accusation against someone, that even the man whom Jesus had healed must have picked up on it.

They were fully aware that they were intimidating him, and they used their heavy-handed demeanor to bully him, a weak man who was easily intimidated/bullied under any circumstances.

“Your pallet” is added for understanding—the leaders’ actual question only focused on what was (in their view) the man’s 2 active violations of the Law=> “pick up” (to carry) and “walk.”

Their only interest was, Wsho told this man he was free to break their rules like that?

I.e., who was to blame for what they saw as his crime?

Who had advised him to violate of what they considered the sacrosanct traditions of the
elders (which they had exalted above God’s own Law)?

This was exactly the kind of religious arrogance/impudence Jesus was seeking to deal with, by challenging their rules, esp. their Sabbath rules.

In Mt 23, He did so in no uncertain terms=> “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, & have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice & mercy & faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. / You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (23:23-24).

Unfortunately for the Jews at this point, they failed to acquire Jesus’ identity from the man whom Jesus had healed.

He simply wasn’t able to give it to them, because he didn’t know it, himself.

[Verse 13]=> “But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place.”

The lit. wording is=> “Jesus slipped away being of the crowd.”

Jesus was not different from other men in appearance, & that made it possible for Him to blend in w/ a crowd, and slip away unnoticed.

* Injunction

At this point, John’s narrative takes a surprising turn.
We learn that the man Jesus healed had been so deeply involved in some unnamed sin, that it was prob. the cause of his sickness.

You might not think an invalid could commit so serious a sin, but this man had.

The injunction we encounter at this point was Jesus’ enjoining (or exhorting) him to stop sinning in that way.

[Verse 14]=> “Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘Behold, you have become well; do not sin [stop sinning] anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.’”

In His omniscience, Jesus saw this man’s sin, just as He had the sin of the woman at the well.

Q: Is some people’s illness due to sin in their lives? Yes!

(both for believers/on believers).

The unbelieving man Jesus healed here proves that can be the case.

Tragedy/illness in some people’s lives is the result of God afflicting them because of their sin.

In fact, some people die because of their sins.

The Bible provides ample evidence of this among believers.

E.g. David said=> “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. / For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer” (Psa 32:3-4).

Heb 12:6 reminds us that “those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives” (that “scourging” can include sickness).
God scourges them for the same reason a parent spans his child=> To correct/improve his character/behavior.

God’s discipline/chastening of believers can even involve what I Jn 5:16 calls “a sin leading to death.” Ananias/Sapphira death in Acts 5 would illustrate that.

In I Cor 11, Paul warned the Corinthians that some Xns in their church were taking communion in an unworthy manner.

He added=> “For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep” (11:30).

I.e., a number were dead.

**But while God chastens believers w/ suffering, He sometimes inflicts illness/death on unbelievers as a judgment.**

Not that every non-believer who suffers sickness/death is being punished by God.

Nor does every non-believer’s sin inevitably lead to tragedy/death.

But in some cases, it does.

Because of their sinfulness, He utterly destroyed the people of Sodom/Jericho in the OT.

* In Gen 15:16, God told Abraham that his descendants would return to Canaan & destroy its inhabitants (the
Amorites), because their sinfulness would by then have reached an intolerable level of completion. God destroyed that whole civilization because of its sinfulness.

* Perhaps the best example of God’s destroying sinners because of their sin, was Noah’s flood. God nearly destroyed the whole human race because of its sinfulness.

The sick man in our own text was in danger of becoming an example of this same principle, so Jesus warned him that if he didn’t stop sinning, something “worse” might befall him.

* By that, Jesus may have been referring to illness even worse than that from which he’d suffered for 38 years.

* Or Jesus may have been telling him that, if he didn’t repent of his sin & believe in X for salvation, he would spend eternity suffering something far worse, in hell.

The man doesn’t appear to have reacted well to this warning, because we next find him siding w/ the Jews against Jesus.

That brings us to the 4th scene in this story—>

* **Capitulation** (yielding to an enemy on his terms)

The man capitulates to the Jews, providing them the information they wanted—Jesus’ name/identity.

[Verse 15]=> “The man went away, and told the Jews that it was
“Jesus who had made him well.”

Commentators disagree over the man’s motive for doing this.
* Some give him the benefit of the doubt and argue that he simply wasn’t too intelligent, so he didn’t foresee that the Jewish leaders’ animosity would be turned against Jesus. But in view of their harsh intimidation, which he himself had experienced earlier, that’s difficult to believe.
* Some view the man’s actions at this point as the inexcusable & brazen treachery of an ungrateful traitor—another Judas.
* In my own view, the man was just cowardly, & so desired to ingratiate himself to these powerful religious leaders, that, in order to do so, he would willingly turn his back on a Man who had rescued him from 38 years of misery.
* Maybe he had been taught from childhood to revere/trust his Jewish leaders—no matter what.
* Maybe he had learned from his time at the pool of Bethesda that, in this world and this life, it’s really every man for himself.
* Maybe he was offended by Jesus’ confronting/warning him about his sin, & viewed it as an insult, & he reacted out of wounded pride.

Whatever the reason was, this man capitulated to the Jewish authorities, & having learned Jesus’ name, gave it to them. In fact, he even had to track them down in order to find them, so he could give it to them.
Was Jesus taken by surprise by this?

No, in His omniscience, He knew beforehand that this man would inform His enemies that Jesus had told him to pick up & walk, even though it was a Sabbath.

Charles Spurgeon argued that at least he didn’t do it w/ malice.

He identified Jesus as the One “who had made him well” rather than “the one who told me to pick up my bed and walk” (the phrase used by the Jewish leaders).

There’s a great lesson Jesus teaches us in all this=> When we encounter those who need our help, we should respond from the heart, even knowing they may turn on us and take advantage of us.

In a fallen world, that’s to be expected sometimes.

Jesus taught us to “bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you,” and that’s the way He had lived Himself (Lk 6:28).

Here was a man who seems to have brought his sickness on himself, with his own sin.

Many people feel justified in despising a man who has AIDS because of his homosexuality, or an alcoholic who suffers from sclerosis of the liver.

At worst, they may think, “Serves him right.”

At best, they may smugly quote Gal 6:7=>

“Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”
But Jesus taught us a different way=> never to restrict our gifts, our love, our blessings/help, giving them only to those who deserve them.

Never to let our own petty sense of justice withhold our own good deeds of benevolence, from the “undeserving.”

After all, Jesus saved us when we too were undeserving.

In fact, we too were His enemies.

So we worship Him, and seek to emulate Him w/ unconditional love, and deeds of lovingkindness toward those who need our help.
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1. Doing deeds of mercy was a source of rest for Jesus, so it was entirely appropriate for Him to do them on a Sabbath.

Jn 4:34; Ex 20:9-10; Neh 13:15; Jer 17:21-22

2. The Sabbath was to be set aside as a day for God’s people to cease from labor in order to contemplate and glorify Him.

3. Jesus’ healing a miserable invalid at Bethesda’s pool would not be considered a violation of the Sabbath except among rabbis whose zeal to uphold their rabbinical rules had blinded them to the spirit and intent of God’s Law.

4. This morning’s text is all about the Pharisees’ accusing Jesus of breaking the Law of the Sabbath and beginning a hate campaign that would ultimately lead to His crucifixion…

* Objection

[John 5:9b]

5. The Pharisees had superimposed on God’s Sabbath Law their own rigid, manmade restrictions.

Mt 12:1-8; Lk 13:10-14; Jn 9:14-16

6. Jesus deliberately healed on the Sabbath to confront the spiritually bankrupt Jewish religion with its errors and hypocrisy.

[Verse 10]

7. A Jewish feast was being celebrated; Jesus was spending His holiday doing something He loved to do—searching out those to who needed His help.

8. The healed invalid doesn’t seem to have been a very courageous man; for thirty-eight years he had been totally at other people’s mercy.

[Verse 11]
* **Intimidation**

[Verse 12]

9. Here we clearly see the judgmental nature of these Jews, which would have been very intimidating to this [10 weak] ex-invalid.

10. This was exactly the kind of religious arrogance and impudence Jesus was seeking to deal with by challenging their [12 rules].

Mt 23:23-24

[Verse 13]

* **Injunction**

11. The injunction we encounter at this point was Jesus’ enjoining or exhorting him to [10 stop] sinning.

[Verse 14]

Ps 32:3-4; Heb 12:6; 1 Cor 11:30

12. While God chastens believers with suffering, He sometimes inflicts illness and death on unbelievers as a [18 judgment].

Gen 15:16

* **Capitulation**

[Verse 15]

13. The man was cowardly, and so desired to ingratiate himself to these powerful religious leaders that he would willingly turn his back on a Man who had [16 rescued] him from 38 years of misery.

Lk 6:28; Gal 6:7

14. Jesus taught us never to restrict our gifts, blessings, or help, only to those who [16 deserve] them.