

THE DAY OF DAYS

How to live is still the great problem of humanity. In a deeply troubled world, surrounded by a thousand stresses and pressures, modern man is an exceedingly fragile, besieged being who desperately needs guidance.

Because of his mortality, man's problems are urgent. Every human being begins to die the moment ^{he} ~~it~~ is conceived. Speedily one learns that there are a thousand gates to death, and if there is a right way to eternal life it must be discovered quickly. Then there is the dreadful business of choice. We know we shall reap what we sow, and more than we sow, even if ignorant of the nature of the seed. Our errors and weaknesses rebound on the whirlwind. Therefore every normal person also suffers from guilt. Not one of us is what we should be, could be, or would be. No wonder a common confession is "I'm not a man but a mess, not a man but a walking civil war!"

How then should one live? Only the Author of life can rightly answer that question, but where is He? How can I find Him? Is He to be found? We need to remember that if He were not there, we could not be here. That He is invisible should not trouble us. We cannot bear to look upon the glorious sun for more than a moment, why therefore should we expect to be able to gaze upon the Creator of that fiery orb? But the solid earth is here. And we are here with all our mysteries of consciousness, fertility, memory, DNA systems etc. How shall

we order these marvellous gifts?

Ever heard of the eighty-twenty principle? Its the key we seek. Eighty percent of what we do yields only twenty percent of our satisfaction, but twenty percent of what we do yields eighty percent. Therefore life's chief problem is that of ordering ones priorities aright. That's why Christ constantly used the word "first". See Mt 6:33; ^{7:5} 22:37; 23:26. Note this well--because God holds the universe in His hands, and us too, our first duty is worship --a duty which, if fulfilled aright, will enable us to rightly choose about everything else.

Worship is like a mighty river that can transform what would otherwise be a sterile and arid tract. Worship does for the soul what mighty rivers do for their territories. It fertilises, refreshes, cleanses, empowers, carries, and fosters life. Worship affords a quiet anchorage and gives us a passage to the great deep of eternity. It beautifies our life and by virtue of the dividing line it draws between good and evil enables us to choose aright.

But how does one worship in a century like ours? With a thousand demands made upon each one of us daily, how can one ever find time to worship? For this too God has provided. In His mercy He has built the privilege into a command for all, and that command nestles in the heart of the great Decalogue spoken by the divine Voice and traced by the divine Finger upon imperishable stone.

The fourth commandment is the church commandment. On this day of God we meet in the house of God to open the Word of God and thus behold the Son of God. It was Phillip Schaff who said

that the day of God, the church of God, and the Word of God constitute the essence of every enduring society. The best minds have agreed in every age, Where there is no Sabbath, there is soon no God, no church, no abiding family, no stable morality, no gospel, no spiritual life.¹

Strange, is it not, that we cherish a lingering rebellion against duties which are meant to make our lives as close to Paradise as possible! We make all sorts of excuses about the Sabbath though it is an heirloom of Eden, fifty two Spring days in every year, the great opportunity for family members (including the church family) to be with one another and with God.

Our Lord called Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" and risked His ministry to reform its observance. The only whole day He spent in the tomb was the Sabbath, making it the memorial not only of creation but of redemption. On the sixth day of Passion week, while hanging on the Cross tree of the knowledge of good and evil "in the midst" of a garden He had cried "It is finished" as on creation's sixth day, (Jn 19:41,30; 1 Peter 2:24; Gen 2:1-3).² Thus as Christ the Creator had woven the Sabbath into the very fabric of the universe by His measured steps that first week, so likewise He wove it into the fabric of redemption by the timing of His atonement. ^{now all may} Take and eat of the fruit of Calvary's tree and thereby enter into the rest of forgiveness and everlasting life. Heb 4

Let us ~~now~~ consider what Scripture says about the worship day, the church day, the family day, the rest day, the best day, the test day, the birthday of the world and the memorial of both creation and redemption.

GEN 2:1-3. The world is a manufactured article. We should expect

its Maker to put His ~~an~~me on it. But where? Not on the rocks, or earthquake might destroy it. Not in the heavens, or storms might obscure it. He chose to put His name on time --the indestructable and spiritual element in which man lives. Time is not tangible and therefore it is well suited to offer a test of man's perception of ~~the~~ spiritual realities ~~of existence~~. No animal can reckon time. Yet it is the essence of existence. Therefore, in the beginning God gave man a pattern for living--- six days of creative labor, and one day of rest, worship and recreation. It is just as impossible to cancel out the seventh day of rest as the six days of labor.

Because it was Christ who made the world, the seventh day must ever be the Christian Sabbath. He was not weary on that day, and therefore His rest was spiritual, a rest of rejoicing over accomplished work, a rest of fellowship with His creatures. Indeed, it was His invitation to all saying "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." The Sabbath is the only religious institution that dates from before the Fall. (Marriage is a social order.) Being for the first man it is also for the last and was not abolished with all typical ceremonies. Whoever observes it truly will gladly keep all the rest of God's commands. See Isa 56:2,4.

What a sublime act of holiness was intended by this institution of Eden! The whole rational creation standing still, as it were, looking up to God. Man's first whole day was spent with his Creator, thus resting before he worked and thereby learning that God's gifts flow from His grace not our works. It was a parable of life's chief secret ---all will be well for those who give God His place, who look long enough into ^{His} ~~the~~ face ~~of God~~ as to be guided by Him

in everything. In the holy day all man's primary questions find their satisfying answers.²

Ex 20:8-11 No one doubts that nine of the Ten Commandments were intended for all men for all time. Only that one prefaced by the warning "Remember", and best sheltered by its position among the others --that one which is the first positive law of the Ten, is the most detailed and the longest of them all-- only that one proud man presumes to doubt. The text does not say that in six days God made Palestine and therefore Jews should keep the Sabbath. The command is for all who live in the ^{whole} world ~~He has made~~. This is quite clear when we recall that every Bible memorial begins with the event it memorializes. The fourth commandment does not hallow the seventh day but points back to the beginning of time when God by His own example sanctified the world's birthday. Furthermore, the fourth commandment and the other nine were given to a redeemed people in order that obedience might be the glad response of grateful worshippers.

Isa 58:13-14 It is both interesting and important to see how the prophets towards the close of Old Testament times made less and less of ceremonial institutions such as circumcision, the Temple and its feast days and sacrifices which would all cease at the Cross, but more and more of the moral duties of the Decalogue. See, for example, Jer 7:4-24 and 17:19-27. This chapter in Isaiah also contrasts the temporary ceremonial aspects of Judaism with the eternal seventh day Sabbath. And observe closely that those who call the Sabbath a delight are also said to "delight themselves in the Lord". In other words, our attitude to the holy day

is our attitude to Him. ³

Mt 12:12 According to Jesus, it is always right to do well on the Sabbath day. He decks the day with undying freshness. Not once did He offer any hint of its coming abolition. On the contrary, He did for the fourth commandment what He also did for the third, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh, etc. He reformed their observance, even though in so doing He invited the Cross. Time and again we are told that His Sabbath reforms led the Jews to plan His death. See Mt 12:14 and Jn 5:16, and remember that no one polishes the brass on a sinking ship!

Christ, our Lord and Example, kept the Sabbath in life and death. He is recorded as working seven miracles of grace on that day ---miracles embracing each major area of life and both sexes. Three were worked in church, two in the home, one at a "hospital" (Bethesda), and one by the roadside. Thus the sacred, the domestic, the social and communal, and the lonely and isolated spheres of society were all embraced. On no other topic did our Lord argue so exhaustively. He drew from the history of Eden (Mk 2:27-28); the Pentateuch Sabbath laws (Mt 12:5); Old Testament history as found in the early prophets (Mt 12:3,4); the words of the later prophets (Mt 12:7-8); God's work in providence (Jn 5:17); daily human experience (Lu 13:15; Mt 12:11); human reason (Mk 3:4; Mt 12:12; Lu 13:15,16); His Lordship as Messiah (Mt 12:6,8); conscience (Lu 14:3; Jn 9:13-16,37-41) Approximately one chapter in every eight of the Gospels refers to the Sabbath, and proportionately the New Testament makes more allusions to it than the Old. Remembering therefore that He is the Sabbath's Lord, let none use His sceptre

as though it were an axe!

Mt 24:20 In every reference to the Decalogue the Lord assumes that it is and ever will be the summary of God's will for man. When conversing with the rich young ruler^(Mt 19:16-19) a few days before His death and setting forth the Ten Commandments as a test of allegiance He never hinted that there would be a change with His soon-coming death.⁴ On the contrary, in foretelling both the destruction of Jerusalem and the last great tribulation at the end of the world He urged His followers to ever pray that their Sabbath observance might be uninterrupted.

Some have suggested that Christ's statement in Mt 24:20 was made only in view of the fact that it would be difficult to get out of locked cities on the Sabbath. But observe *(and there were no walls around Judea)* that the words of Christ apply to those throughout all Judea, and indeed in their secondary application to believers throughout the entire world. Furthermore, from the time of the Maccabees Jews believed that Sabbath flight from enemies was permissible.

Matthew Henry's comment^{on this verse} is most pertinent:

This intimates Christ's design that a weekly sabbath should be observed in his church after the preaching of the gospel to all the world. We read not of any of the ordinances of the Jewish church, which were purely ceremonial, that Christ ever expressed any care about, because they were all to vanish; but for the sabbath he often showed a concern.⁵

Lu 23:56-24:1 Recent scholarship has pointed out that Luke's gospel revolves around seven Sabbath stories and the present passage is the seventh of these. It makes it crystal clear that none of Christ's friends knew of any word from Him that the Cross would make the Sabbath obsolete.

Our Lord's intimates knew His own habits so well that even when their dream seemed fragmented and destroyed they persevered

in doing things His way-- including Sabbath-keeping. They refused to anoint even His sacred body on the holy day. Thus the "but" of the next verse in the following chapter. The first day of the week was to them a work day as Eze 46:1 so declares.

The learned Bishop Ryle comments on this passage as follows:

This little fact (the women's Sabbath-observance) is a strong indirect argument in reply to those who tell us that Christ abolished the fourth commandment. Neither here nor elsewhere do we find anything to warrant any such conclusion. We see our Lord frequently denouncing the man-made traditions of the Jews about Sabbath observance: we see Him purifying the blessed day from superstitious and unscriptural opinions; we see Him maintaining firmly that works of necessity and works of mercy were not breaches of the fourth commandment: but nowhere do we find Him teaching that the Sabbath was not to be kept at all; and here, in the verse before us, we find His disciples as scrupulous as any about the duty of keeping holy a Sabbath Day. Surely they could never have been taught by their Master that the fourth commandment was not intended to be binding on Christians. . . . the Sabbath is not a mere Jewish institution, but a day which was meant for man from the beginning, and which was intended to be honoured by Christians quite as much as by Jews.⁶

Rev 1:10 In this passage telling us the who, the how, the where, and the when of the writing of the Bible's last book we find that God still has His day. And its the same day, for the seventh of the week is thrice called the Lord's in Ex 20:8-11 and similarly by Christ Himself. See Mk 2:27.

Would you, like John, have visions of God, of truth, of duty, of His love for you? Give God His place. Seek Him with all your heart, reverence His name, His Son, His church, His Book, and His holy day. See in every Sabbath an emblem of the rest of conscience that may be yours continually because you trust in the finished work of your Redeemer. Remember, and rejoice!

END-NOTES

1. Let none say that this is old fashioned theology. The greatest theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth, so believed. In book after book of his famous Church Dogmatics he so affirms. Barth believed the Sabbath was for all men and of everlasting validity. For example, he made the following protest:

"In general, theological ethics has handled this command of God...with a casualness and feebleness which certainly do not match its importance in Holy Scripture or its decisive material significance." Church Dogmatics, III.4, p.50.

Again we read from Barth:

"The Sabbath commandment explains all the other commandments, or all the other forms of the one commandment. It is thus to be placed at their head."

" . . .the radical importance, the almost monstrous range of the Sabbath commandment. . . . This commandment is total. It discovers and claims man in his depths and from his utmost bounds."

"De Quervain is only too right in this respect: 'Where the holy day becomes the day of man, society and humanity wither away and the demons rule.'"

"The holy day is a sign. . . ."

Church Dogmatics, III.4, pp53,57,70,73

2 Langdon Gilkey has ably pointed out the importance of the doctrine of creation if man is to find any meaning in life. See his Maker of Heaven and Earth , Garden City, N.Y. 1965, p. 279

3. See George Adam Smith's comments on this passage in his classic commentary in The Expositor's Bible, Isaiah II, pp.421-422.

4. For Christ's attitude to the Decalogue see the excellent article by G. Shrenk, TDNT, II , page 548 especially.

5. Commentary on the Holy Bible, VII , p. 355.

6 Expository Thoughts on the Gospels; Luke, II, pp. 487-488