

Connect360: A Sabbath Miracle

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- *Lesson 7 in the BaptistWay Press Connect360 unit “Miracles: The Transforming Power of Jesus” focuses on Matthew 12:9-13.*

God did not rest on the seventh day of Creation because he was tired (Genesis 2:2-3). The purpose of his time out was to reflect on all he had accomplished and enjoy the satisfaction of work that was finished precisely to plan. He created the Sabbath for our benefit so that we could do the same—rest from labor to consider all that God has done and rejoice in his sovereignty, providence, and love. Unfortunately, the Pharisees in Jesus’s day twisted the Sabbath law’s intention. According to their interpretation, the law had become a slave master that held God’s people hostage to its excessive demands.

At the time of assembly, Jesus and his followers entered the synagogue these same Pharisees attended. Christ’s heart was turned to worship, but theirs to entrapment. Knowing that a disabled man would be there, and aware of Jesus’ reputation as a healer, the Pharisees seized the opportunity to provoke Jesus into a public violation of Sabbath regulations. To their way of thinking, Jesus had only two choices: heal the man today and break the law or keep the law and heal him tomorrow.

The Pharisees’ entire position in this argument rested on the question of what constituted work. According to their Sabbath guidelines, for instance, a person could eat food but not kindle a fire or cook. A person could get dressed but not repair torn clothing or sandals. The Pharisees’ concept of Sabbath observance hinged on actions and protocol rather than attitudes of the heart.

For the benefit of people

When Jesus addressed the Pharisees, he used a standard if-then, lesser-to-greater argument form that they would understand. What rational person, Jesus reasoned, would fail to rescue one of his animals from danger, even on a Sabbath. If saving an animal can be allowed, then how much more should aid be rendered to a human being in similar circumstances. If the Sabbath was established to do good for people, then surely doing good on the Sabbath would result in blessing rather than condemnation.

Jesus wanted these men to understand that the Sabbath was made for human benefit, and not to enslave people to works of the law. The whole concept of Sabbath implies mercy, not judgment; rest, not oppression; peace, not contention; gratitude, worship, and praise rather than legalism. Strict obedience to humanmade rules doesn't impress the Lord. "These are the ones I look on with favor," God said through the prophet Isaiah, "those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

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