

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A Sabbath Day's Miracle, A Witness of God's Power to Save

Based on John 5:1-17

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New Testament Survey

by

J. Isaac Richards

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Introduction and Thesis Statement

In the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20) [1] records one of seven Sabbath miracles performed by Jesus as recorded in the gospels. [2] In the healing of the paralytic man by the pool of Bethesda, Jesus illustrates (in a practical and tangible sense) God’s love for fallen humanity, and seeks to restore the true meaning of the Sabbath which had been obscured through the burdensome traditions imposed on the nation by the Jewish leaders of that time. [3] In the beginning, God made “the Sabbath...for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27), thus showing that man was the crowning act of His creation – made in His image – and a day of rest given as a blessing and benefit to mankind.

The Sabbath was a joyous holy day of spiritual refreshment and reverent worship. It seems to have been popular, an opportunity to imitate the Creator, being devoted to contemplation and community worship. Those who delighted in the Lord in this fashion were promised that they would “ride on the heights of the land” (Isa. 58:13–14). ...Jesus observed the Sabbath, not only worshiping but also teaching in the synagogue on that day (Mark 6:2). The incidents regarding his disciples plucking ears of grain and of his healing on the Sabbath did not digress from the Sabbath law but rather indicated that Jesus knew the commandment very well. Not only his disciples but also Paul and the early Jewish Christians observed the Sabbath. [4]

In the following thesis, we will observe the main characters in this story, find God’s original purpose for mankind, explore the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in restoring the image of God in man, and find practical application for Sabbath observance and engaging in works of mercy today. May the reader be blessed as we explore John’s Gospel through proper hermeneutical exegesis, and as we invite the Spirit of Him who once walked the dusty streets of Galilee and Jerusalem to guide us “into all truth” (John 16:13).

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Authorized King James Version* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1991).

[2] See: Jo. 5:1-15; 9:1-41; Mk. 1:21-28, 29-31; 3:1-6; Lk. 13:10-17; 14:1-4.

[3] Gill, John *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Kindle edition. Washington, D.C.: OSNOVA. (2012): Commentary on John 5:10.

[4] Treier, Daniel J. & Elwell, Walter A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academics. (2017): 1392-1393.

Observation

Formal Translation vs. Functional Translation

The following dissertation was written using observations from both formal (literal/formal equivalence) and functional (dynamic equivalence) translations of the Bible. These terms may be defined as follows:

Dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence, terms coined by Eugene Nida, are two dissimilar translation approaches, achieving differing level of literalness between the source text and the target text, as employed in biblical translation. The two have been understood basically, with dynamic equivalence as sense-for-sense translation (translating the meanings of phrases or whole sentences) with readability in mind, and with formal equivalence as word-for-word translation (translating the meanings of words and phrases in a more literal way) keeping literal fidelity. [5]

For the purpose of this study, the following Bible versions were read by the student:

Authorized King James Version (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1991), *New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), and the *New Revised Standard Version* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Identification of Basic Elements

In order to aid in proper interpretation, the basic elements of this story may be categorized as follows:

1. Main characters
2. Plot
3. Story structure
4. Questions asked in narrative

Main Characters

Paralytic man (invalid), Jesus, and the accusing Jews.

Plot

A man with a certain type of disabling infirmity had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. According to a customary belief of that time, multitudes of “impotent folk” lay at a pool called

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynamic_and_formal_equivalence

“Bethesda” near the sheep gate in Jerusalem, where it was believed that an angel would “trouble the water” of the pool thereby imparting supernatural healing properties to the water (Jo. 5:2-4).

John 5:2 is to be translated, “There is in Jerusalem by the Sheep [gate] a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda having five porticoes.” A location north of the Temple square for this (twin) pool (cf. Sir 50:3), whose name has been passed along (Jn 5:2) in a rich variety of variant forms (Bēthesda , Bēthzatha , Bēthsaida [House of Fish—i.e., baptismal symbol?]), is consistently attested both by ancient reports from Christian pilgrims (ELS 460ff.) and by modern excavations. The five stoai (not necessarily porticoes with pillars) were probably located on the four sides and along the dividing wall of the two pools. Steps allowed to descend in the pool but how the waters came to be disturbed (Jn 5:7) is as yet un-certain. [6]

Being the Sabbath day (Jo. 5:9), as well as an annual festal day (Jo. 5:1), Jesus, along with a multitude of religious pilgrims from around Israel who had come to attend this Jewish feast, were gathered in Jerusalem (Ex. 23:14-17). Jesus meets this man lying by the pool of Bethesda and, inviting the invalid to look to Him in faith, heals him of his infirmity and further commands him to “rise, take up thy bed, and walk” (Jo. 5:8). As this healing takes place on the Sabbath day, both the act of healing as well as the man carrying his bed cause a stir among the Jews. They accuse the man of violating the Sabbath and demand an explanation. The man explains that the One who bade him to arise and walk also commanded him to take up his bed. He later identifies Jesus as the One who gave this command. The Jews, therefore, persecute Jesus for supposedly breaking the Sabbath. Jesus explains that, as His Father works on the Sabbath, so He also works. This explanation we will study into later in this thesis.

Story Structure

Our story structure may be broken down into the following elements: Introduction, Inciting Incident, Rising Action, Climax, and Resolution. We will briefly look at each of these aspects of our story structure in this study.

Our **Introduction** begins with an opening scene of a Jewish feast day with multitudes gathered in Jerusalem for worship. A large company of “impotent folk, of blind, halt, [and]

[6] Green, Joel B. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. (2013): 53.

withered” (Jo. 5:3), sat by the pool of Bethesda waiting for a miraculous moving of the waters which were considered to have healing virtue.

The **Inciting Incident** takes place when Jesus heals the man and commands him to take up his bed and walk (Jo. 5:8). The Jews of this time period, being influenced by the Pharisees who had encumbered Sabbath observance with a multitude of man-made traditions [7], accused the man of breaking the Sabbath. Sabbath violation was considered to be a capital offense. [8] [9]

Rising Action continues as the Jews confront the healed man, demanding of him who told him to take up his bed, thus “bearing a burden” (Jer. 17:21) on the Sabbath day. The man is able to positively identify Jesus as the man who healed him.

We come to a **Climax** in this scene as the Jews begin to persecute Jesus and seek to kill Him for their perceived violation of the Sabbath.

A **Resolution** (at least theologically, if not in reality before the Jews) is reached when Jesus, in answer to his accusers, states in His defense that He works because His Father (God) works. This statement, full of significance, we will also explore in more detail in the future.

Questions Asked in Narrative

Many questions may be asked in this narrative. The more obvious questions – the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How – we will investigate in the next section. However, there are other questions which may be inquired into in order to develop a fuller understanding of this particular gospel narrative:

- What led to the invalid’s infirmity in the first place?
- Why did Jesus go to Jerusalem on the Jewish feast days?
- What was Jesus’ motive for healing on the Sabbath, knowing that a conflict could ensue?

[7] Gill, John *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Kindle edition. Washington, D.C.: OSNOVA. (2012): Commentary on John 5:10.

[8] Nichol, Francis D. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Vol. 5. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association. (1956): 950-951.

[9] See Ex. 31:14-15; 35:2.

- Why did the Jews persecute Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath?
- What did Jesus mean in saying that His Father worked and He also worked on the Sabbath?
- Did Jesus give an example of Sabbath breaking? Or was this a lesson of true Sabbath observance?

These questions we will seek to answer in this thesis.

Basic Observations

For the sake of simplicity, we will here delineate the following basic observations in the reading of this text and then seek to discover their deeper meaning in the section that follows on interpretation, keeping in mind the following important principle: “What historical and cultural matters or geographical references are present in the story that need to be unpacked with further study?” [10]

Who? – The *who* has been previously discussed but will be elaborated on a bit more here. The identity of the invalid is unknown, but it is assumed that he was a Jew since he was a dweller in Jerusalem at the sheep gate near the temple. The fact that the Jewish leaders confronted him regarding him carrying his bed on the Sabbath shows that he was not a Gentile, but rather that they confronted him by reason of their rigorous enforcing of the Sabbath laws upon people of their own nation.

Jesus of Nazareth is introduced in this story as the Messiah, the One sent from God and equal with God. His claims to do what His Father does in working on the Sabbath (Jo. 5:17) shows that He assumed the title and prerogatives of the Creator. His power to heal on the Sabbath showed that He was above the Sabbath, the “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:28), and indeed the giver of the Sabbath in the beginning (Jo.1:1-3; Gen. 2:1-3).

Finally, the Jews in this story are assumed to be the religious teachers of the day; namely the Pharisees, for in other places in scripture we see that it is this sect of the Jews that continually

[10] Cartwright, John *Everyday Bible Study: Growing in the Christian Faith*. 2nd ed. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic. (2019): 217.

accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. [11]

What? – The *what* is the story itself. A man is sick and in his desperation is seeking help for healing. No one has mercy on him. No one helps him into the water where he believes healing can take place. The Pharisees care more for brute beasts than for men who are made in the image of God. [12] Jesus, heedless of the unnecessary and burdensome rules of the Jews, and knowing that this divine act would place His own life at risk, heals the man on the Sabbath day, thus setting the stage for a conflict with the religious rulers.

Where? – This event took place in Jerusalem, the capitol city of Judah, near the sheep gate by the Jewish temple, at a pool called Bethesda. [13] [14]

When? – The Gospel of John states the following facts regarding this narrative: “after this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” (Jo. 5:1). Although not explicitly identified, it must have been one of the three Jewish festivals where all Jewish males gathered at Jerusalem by God’s command [15], for Jesus traveled there Himself from Nazareth to attend. Which specific feast day this was is not clear. [16]

Why? – *Why* was this man sick in the first place? Although no definitive answer is given, there is a possibility that it was because of his own sinful life that disease came. This may be inferred by Jesus’ later statement to the man after he was healed: “Behold, thou are made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” (Jo. 5:14). *Why* did Jesus heal the man? This question is probably the easiest to answer, and we will allow the words of Jesus Himself to make

[11] See: Mt. 12:2; Mk. 2:24; 3:1-6; Lk. 6:2, 6-7; 13:14; 14:1-6.

[12] See: Mt. 12:9-14; Lk. 13:14-16; 14:1-6.

[13] Jo. 5:1-2

[14] Green, Joel B. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. (2013): 53.

[15] See: Ex. 23:14-17; Dt. 16:1-16.

[16] Gill, John *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Kindle edition. Washington, D.C.: OSNOVA. (2012): Commentary on John 5:1.

us to understand His mission:

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Lk. 19:10).

“When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.” (Mt. 8:16-17).

“The Lord then answered him, and said...ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” (Lk. 13:15-16).

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.” (Lk. 4:18)

It is in Christ’s very nature to heal the sick and bring mercy to the suffering. It was His mission to serve and to save. *Why* did Jesus choose to heal on the Sabbath day? It was His purpose to sweep away the meaningless rules and ceremonies of the Pharisees and to restore the true meaning of the Sabbath that God had given in the beginning when a day of sacred rest was given as a blessing to mankind. “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” (Mk. 2:27).

How? – *How* the conflict arose was through Jesus exercising His power to heal and to save on the Sabbath day.

While it was allowed by Jewish law to treat a man who was acutely sick, the treating of a chronic case such as this was forbidden. Thus an ancient Jewish commentary, written many centuries after Jesus’ time, but which undoubtedly reflects the situation in His day, declares: “Is a person allowed to heal on the Sabbath? Our masters have taught: Mortal danger overrides the Sabbath; but if it is doubtful whether he [a sick man] will regain health or not, one should not override the Sabbath [on his account]” (Tanchuma B, cited in Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 1, p. 624). Jesus’ choice in the present instance of a man who had been ill for 38 years seems to have been made purposely to demonstrate the fallacy of such Jewish legal restrictions. [17]

Thus the stage was set for the drama which unfolded that fateful Sabbath day where Jesus’ life was plotted against by the Jews who sought to kill Him, while He used His power to heal the sick and to save.

[17] Nichol, Francis D. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Vol. 5. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association. (1956): 950-951.

Interpretation

Determining the Main Point

By gathering information from our basic observations, and through identifying basic elements of this story line, we can now determine the main point of the passage in question which can be summarized by the words of Jesus: “if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (Jo. 8:36)! Christ came to set men and women free from disease of body, mind, and soul; to free humanity from the bondage of sin; to loose the lawful captives from the tyranny of Satan’s power; to free believers from the burdensome man-made regulations surrounding the Sabbath so that they could be free to worship God “in spirit and in truth” (Jo. 4:24); to free men’s consciences from religious bigotry and control; “to preach deliverance to the captives” (Lk. 4:18); and to grant liberty to the oppressed. In the words of the great apostle Paul: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Gal. 5:1).

And yet this freedom in Christ gives no license to continued sin and rebellion. Jesus’ words to the healed paralytic ring true for us today: “sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (Jo. 5:14). The truly converted man or woman who has experienced the new birth will be able to say with the Psalmist, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart”! (Ps. 40:8). Indeed, the New Covenant promise states God’s desire and purpose to give us a new heart, with new desires, to write His law in our hearts, and to put His Spirit within us to empower us to live holy, obedient lives.

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. (Heb. 10:16-17).

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them...and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezekiel 36:26-28).

And so the truly converted man or woman is obedient to the Lord, not to be saved (for salvation is by God's grace alone through faith alone – Eph. 2:8-9), but because they love Christ. As it is written:

If ye love Me, keep My commandments. (Jo. 14:15)

And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. (Ac. 5:32)

Purpose

In answering the questions brought up within this narrative, we discover several interesting facets in this story which reveal deeper meaning and motives for Christ healing an invalid on this particular day. It is obvious from all the gospel narratives that Christ's purpose on earth was to heal the sick and to seek and save the lost. Jesus explicitly stated this is as His mission many times during His earthly ministry. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10). "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28). But this answer seems overly simplistic in light of the fact that Jesus specifically sought an opportunity to heal a man on the Sabbath day, well knowing that it would bring deadly conflict with the Jewish leaders and imperil His own life.

As the Creator of the worlds [18], it was Jesus that made the Sabbath in the beginning. [19] As an obedient Son [20] He also kept the Sabbath during His earthly life and ministry. It was His regular custom as a Jew to attend the synagogue on Sabbath [21], to preach on the Sabbath [22], and to heal on the Sabbath. [23] His acts of healing put the Sabbath back into its proper place as a

[18] See: Jo. 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:2.

[19] See: Gen. 2:1-3; Jo. 1:3; Mk. 2:27-28.

[20] Heb. 5:8.

[21] Lk. 4:16.

[22] Lk. 4:31-32.

[23] See: Jo. 5:1-15; 9:1-41; Mk. 1:21-28, 29-31; 3:1-6; Lk. 13:10-17; 14:1-4.

blessing and benefit for mankind. [24] His earthly life and example was such that it gave no impression to His own disciples that He ever taught a disregard for, or disobedience to, the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. Even after His crucifixion the record is clear that His disciples continued to keep the Sabbath [25], as did the early Christian church (both Jew and Gentile) [26], as well as the apostle Paul. [27] Therefore, it is inaccurate to assume that Jesus was attempting to desecrate the Sabbath in order to supposedly “transfer the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday” [28], as some of the Anti-Nicene fathers would later claim in their writings in order to separate themselves and the Church from Judaism in times of Roman persecution. Jesus was instead lifting the unnecessary restrictions that the Jewish leaders had imposed upon the Sabbath in order to restore the Sabbath as it was originally intended by God: to be a blessing and benefit to mankind.

This is what is meant by Jesus’ words that “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” (Jo. 5:17). In other words, just as God does not cease His creative work on the Sabbath, but actively sustains all nature by His power on all days of the week; so, too, does Christ work by His power to bring healing and salvation to men. “Who being the brightness of his (God’s) glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (Heb. 1:3). John Gill, in his commentary, says the following about this verse (Jo. 5:17):

He who is my Father, not by creation, or adoption, but by nature, though he ended all his work on the seventh day, and rested from what he had done; yet he did not cease from working at all, but has continued to work ever since, on sabbath days, as well as on other days; in upholding and governing the world, in continuing the species of beings, and all creatures in their being; in providing for them, and in dispensing the bounties of his providence to them; in causing his sun to shine, and showers of rain to descend on the earth; and in taking care of, and protecting even the meanest of his creatures: and much more men; and still more his own people...

[24] See: Mk. 2:27; Isa. 58:13-14.

[25] Lk. 23:52-56.

[26] See: Ac. 13:42-44; 15:19-21; 16:11-13.

[27] See: Ac. 17:2; 18:4, 11.

[28] Geiermann, Peter, C.S.S.R., *The Converts Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*. (1957), p. 50.

"Also I work"; as the Syriac and Arabic version reads; i.e. in conjunction with him, as a co-efficient cause in the works of providence, in the government of the world, in upholding all things in it, in bearing up the pillars of the earth, in holding things together, and sustaining all creatures: or I also work in imitation of him, in doing good both to the bodies and souls of men on the sabbath day, being the Lord of it: I do but what my Father does, and therefore, as he is not to be blamed for his works on that day, as none will say he is, no more am I. So Philo the Jew says,

"God never ceases to work; but as it is the property of fire to burn, and of snow to cool, so of God to work."

And what most men call fortune, he calls the divine Logos, or word, to whom he ascribes all the affairs of providence. [29]

To further elaborate on the aforementioned point regarding the claim that, by this act of healing, Jesus' somehow changed or abrogated the Sabbath, I submit the following evidence also from learned scholars from both the Protestant and Catholic traditions:

Anglican/Episcopal

And where are we told in the Scriptures that we are to keep the first day at all? We are commanded to keep the seventh; but we are nowhere commanded to keep the first day The reason why we keep the first day of the week holy instead of the seventh is for the same reason that we observe many other things, not because the Bible, but because the church has enjoined it. [30]

There is no word, no hint, in the New Testament about abstaining from work on Sunday into the rest of Sunday no divine law enters.... The observance of Ash Wednesday or Lent stands exactly on the same footing as the observance of Sunday. [31]

Baptist

There was never any formal or authoritative change from the Jewish seventh-day Sabbath to the Christian first-day observance. [32]

There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but that Sabbath day was not Sunday. It will be said, however, and with some show of triumph, that the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week

[29] Gill, John *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Kindle edition. Washington, D.C.: OSNOVA. (2012): Commentary on John 5:17.

[30] Williams, Isaac *Plain Sermons on the Catechism*, vol. 1, pp. 334, 336.

[31] Eyton, Canon *The Ten Commandments*, pp. 52, 63, 65.

[32] Carver, William Owen *The Lord's Day in Our Day*, p. 49.

Where can the record of such a transaction be found? Not in the New Testament, absolutely not.

To me it seems unaccountable that Jesus, during three years' intercourse with His disciples, often conversing with them upon the Sabbath question . . . never alluded to any transference of the day; also, that during forty days of His resurrection life, no such thing was intimated.

Of course, I quite well know that Sunday did come into use in early Christian history.... But what a pity it comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism! [33]

Congregationalist

It is quite clear that however rigidly or devotedly we may spend Sunday, we are not keeping the Sabbath.... The Sabbath was founded on a specific Divine command. We can plead no such command for the obligation to observe Sunday There is not a single sentence in the New Testament to suggest that we incur any penalty by violating the supposed sanctity of Sunday. [34]

The Christian Sabbath [Sunday] is not in the Scriptures, and was not by the primitive Church called the Sabbath. [35]

Disciples of Christ

"But," say some, "it was changed from the seventh to the first day." Where? when? and by whom? No man can tell. No; it never was changed, nor could it be, unless creation was to be gone through again: for the reason assigned must be changed before the observance, or respect to the reason, can be changed! It is all old wives' fables to talk of the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day. If it be changed, it was that august personage changed it who changes times and laws *ex officio* - I think his name is Doctor Antichrist. [36]

The first day of the week is commonly called the Sabbath. This is a mistake. The Sabbath of the Bible was the day just preceding the first day of the week. The first day of the week is never called the Sabbath anywhere in the entire Scriptures. It is also an error to talk about the change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. There is not in any place in the Bible any intimation of such a change. [37]

[33] Hiscox, Edward T. A paper read before a New York ministers' conference, Nov. 13, 1893, reported in *New York Examiner*, Nov.16, 1893.

[34] Dale, R.W. *The Ten Commandments*. New York, NY: Eaton &Mains, p. 127-129.

[35] Dwight, Timothy *Theology: Explained and Defended* (1823), Ser. 107, vol. 3, p. 258.

[36] Campbell, Alexander *The Christian Baptist*, Feb. 2, 1824, vol. 1. no. 7, p. 164.

[37] *First Day Observance*, pp. 17, 19.

Lutheran

We have seen how gradually the impression of the Jewish sabbath faded from the mind of the Christian Church, and how completely the newer thought underlying the observance of the first day took possession of the church. We have seen that the Christians of the first three centuries never confused one with the other, but for a time celebrated both. [38]

The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intentions of the apostles to establish a Divine command in this respect, far from them, and from the early apostolic Church, to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday. [39]

Methodist

Take the matter of Sunday. There are indications in the New Testament as to how the church came to keep the first day of the week as its day of worship, but there is no passage telling Christians to keep that day, or to transfer the Jewish Sabbath to that day. [40]

The Sabbath was binding in Eden, and it has been in force ever since. This fourth commandment begins with the word “remember,” showing that the Sabbath already existed when God wrote the law on the tables of stone at Sinai. How can men claim that this one commandment has been done away with when they will admit that the other nine are still binding? [41]

Presbyterian

The Sabbath is a part of the Decalogue - the Ten Commandments. This alone forever settles the question as to the perpetuity of the institution Until, therefore, it can be shown that the whole moral law has been repealed, the Sabbath will stand The teaching of Christ confirms the perpetuity of the Sabbath. [42]

Roman Catholic

But you may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify. [43]

[38] *The Sunday Problem*, a study book of the United Lutheran Church (1923), p. 36.

[39] Neander, Augustus *The History of the Christian Religion and Church*, Henry John Rose, tr. (1843), p. 186.

[40] Rall, Harris F. *Christian Advocate*, July 2, 1942, p.26.

[41] Moody, Dwight L. *Weighed and Wanting*. New York, NY:Fleming H. Revell Co., pp. 47, 48.

[42] Blake, T.C., D.D. *Theology Condensed*, pp.474, 475.

[43] Gibbons, James Cardinal *The Faith of our Fathers*, 88th ed., pp. 89.

Some theologians have held that God likewise directly determined the Sunday as the day of worship in the New Law, that He Himself has explicitly substituted the Sunday for the Sabbath. But this theory is now entirely abandoned. It is now commonly held that God simply gave His Church the power to set aside whatever day or days she would deem suitable as Holy Days. The Church chose Sunday, the first day of the week, and in the course of time added other days as holy days. [44]

"Question: How prove you that the Church hath power to command feasts and holy days?

"Answer: By the very act of changing the Sabbath into Sunday, which Protestants allow of, and therefore they fondly contradict themselves, by keeping Sunday strictly, and breaking most other feasts commanded by the same Church." [45]

The Catholic Church...by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday. [46]

Nowhere in the Bible is it stated that worship should be changed from Saturday to Sunday Now the Church ... instituted, by God's authority, Sunday as the day of worship. This same Church, by the same divine authority, taught the doctrine of Purgatory long before the Bible was made. We have, therefore, the same authority for Purgatory as we have for Sunday. [47]

Regarding the change from the observance of the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Sunday, I wish to draw your attention to the facts:

1) That Protestants, who accept the Bible as the only rule of faith and religion, should by all means go back to the observance of the Sabbath. The fact that they do not, but on the contrary observe the Sunday, stultifies them in the eyes of every thinking man.

2) We Catholics do not accept the Bible as the only rule of faith. Besides the Bible we have the living Church, the authority of the Church, as a rule to guide us. We say, this Church, instituted by Christ to teach and guide man through life, has the right to change the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament and hence, we accept her change of the Sabbath to Sunday. We frankly say, yes, the Church made this change, made this law, as she made many other laws, for instance, the Friday abstinence, the unmarried priesthood, the laws concerning mixed marriages, the regulation of Catholic marriages and a thousand other laws.

It is always somewhat laughable, to see the Protestant churches, in pulpit and legislation, demand the observance of Sunday, of which there is nothing in their Bible. [48]

[44] Laux, John *A Course in Religion for Catholic High Schools and Academies* (1936), vol. 1, P. 51.

[45] Ferres, Daniel *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (1916), p.67.

[46] *The Catholic Mirror*, official publication of James Cardinal Gibbons, Sept. 23, 1893.

[47] Scott, Martin J. *Things Catholics Are Asked About* (1927),p. 136.

[48] Kraemer, Peter R. *Catholic Church Extension Society* (1975). Chicago, Illinois.

We do not make any theological claims by including these quotes, except to show that it was not the design or intent of Jesus by His example of healing on the Sabbath to abolish that day as a sacred day of worship for His people; for indeed the Sabbath continued to be kept holy by his disciples, the apostles, and by Christians throughout the Church age down to the present.

Principle

We may summarize this thesis by the following thought: God cares for the people He has made in His own image. Though fallen into sin and subject to disease and death, God sent His Son to pour forth heaven's healing stream, to bring blessing and life and salvation to mankind. Christ opened the way of access to God, and by His authority as Lord sweeps away all human interpositions and traditions which seek to place themselves between man and the worship of his God.

Correlation

Fitting the Narrative

From these principles, as enumerated above, springs the well of action for all true Christian effort to preserve civil and religious freedom in governments today for the free exercise of religion. It is the same principle of liberty of conscience that sparked the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. And it is the Baptist principle of soul competency at work. But further, it is the principle of action for all true Christian missions which seeks to relieve human suffering, and to bless and save their fellow men. It is the living principle of the "everlasting gospel" which must be preached "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people". (Rev. 14:6).

This passage of scripture fits within the metanarrative of scripture in practically illustrating the Fall and Redemption. The invalid's squalid and helpless condition well represents the human condition without Christ. "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags"; "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds,

and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.” (Isa. 64:6; 1:6). Thus the prophet Isaiah illustrates with vivid language the condition of fallen man into the pit and mire of sin which has befallen our race since Eden’s gates. But the plan of redemption wrought out by the Godhead – the “counsel of peace” which would be “between them both” [49] (that is, the Father and the Son), would accomplish for man what he could not accomplish for himself. The Redemption of the fallen race was the ultimate purpose and all-consuming goal of Christ in coming to earth. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Reflecting Other Truths of Scripture

The principle of redemption is seen throughout scripture. Indeed, it is the “crimson thread” that connects Genesis to Revelation, and God to man. Jesus Christ is the “lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). The first intimation of redemption from sin was in the declaration given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden of a promised Redeemer who would “crush the serpent’s head” [50], and the subsequent clothing of the naked pair with a coat of skin (Gen. 3:21). This coat of skin necessitated an animal sacrifice which typified Christ. [51] The deliverance of Israel from Egypt also represented redemption from slavery to the tyranny of a cruel master. Pharaoh in his sullen insubordination to God represented Satan, the adversary of souls. As Pharaoh refused to let the people go, and as it took God’s mighty power to deliver His people from bondage; so Satan refuses to abandon his “lawful captives” (Isa. 49:24), and is represented in vision as standing at the right hand of God’s people to resist them (Zech. 3:1); and so, too, does it

[49] Zech. 6:13.

[50] Gen. 3:15, *New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.

[51] Gill, John *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Kindle edition. Washington, D.C.: OSNOVA. (2012): Commentary on Genesis 3:21.

take God's mighty power through Christ to break the chains of bondage to sin and to set the captives free. "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not....That He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword....Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers....Then He is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a Ransom." (Job 33:14, 17, 18, 22, 24).

The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

As has been explained throughout this dissertation, the entire narrative of the selected passage in question is wholly about the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Himself, in the flesh, who comes to this man and heals him of his infirmity. It is the word of Christ, spoken in authority, that bids the man to rise and walk and brings soundness to his flesh. It is the work of Christ in healing the body – by relieving physical suffering and ailments – that He shows His power to forgive sin and to heal the soul. [52] No type is here employed; no representation of Jesus in earthly figures or sacrifices is used in this passage to illustrate what Christ would come to accomplish. No, it is Jesus Himself, in His own divine person, who comes to this man lying on his mat, sick and suffering, without hope in this world, and with cheerful demeanor and tender heart speaks words personally to his soul that will forever change the course of his life. And it is the same today. The words of life that Jesus speaks to the souls who trust in Him have power to change hearts and lives. To the sin-sick soul, despairing of hope, without God or friends in this world, Jesus bids "rise, take up thy bed, and walk" (Jo. 5:8). Jesus never forces a soul to trust on Him. As the invitation came to the poor invalid, "wilt thou be made whole?" (Jo. 5:6); so Jesus invites all who are thirsting for the water of life to drink freely. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without

[52] See: Mk. 2:5-12.

money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” (Isa. 55:1-3). “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17).

Application

In our study of the scriptures, it is important to find personal application for what we read. Christianity is not a “spectator’s sport”; rather, it is a living, breathing, personal relationship with God and Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “and this is life eternal, that they might *know* thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (Jo. 17:3). The word used in this passage for “*know*” is the Greek word “*ginosko*”, which defines a personal and intimate knowledge of the subject. In other words, we must each *know* (or experience, or have a saving knowledge of) God and Jesus Christ *personally* in order to have the assurance of eternal life. And this we can have through faith. The scriptures are the divinely appointed means whereby we may gain this saving knowledge of Christ. [53]

With that said, let us see how we can now apply the following questions to our study of the scriptures.

The Question of Duty

As followers of Christ, it is our duty to relieve the poor and suffering. In the Old Testament, God commanded relief for the fatherless and widows, and promised to defend them against injustice. [54] The laws of gleaning and harvest, and the release of all debts every seven years,

[53] See: 2 Tim. 3:15-17.

[54] See: Ex. 22:22-27; Ps. 68:5; Jer. 49:11.

were God’s appointed means of bringing relief to the poor and downtrodden. [55] These principles continued in the New Testament Christian Church with widows being cared for in the “daily distribution of food”. [56] Throughout the Christian Era, it has been the special place of the Church to be used as God’s helping hand in representing the character of Christ to the world. It is the sacred duty of everyone who takes upon him or herself the name of Christ (2 Tim. 2:19) to actively seek for opportunities to be a blessing to their fellow man. “Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.” (Prov. 31:9). “But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.” (Isa. 11:4). “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic. 6:8).

But our duty does not end with our fellow man. Our first and primary duty is to God. Setting aside specific time to spend with God in daily devotions, Bible study and prayer, is the essential prerequisite to obtaining that spiritual power which will enable us to be a blessing to mankind. Sabbath observance is a part of spending time with God. God requires His children to set aside one day in seven for special worship, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Heb. 10:25). It is our fellowship with one another in the Body of Christ that we learn that patient forbearance and charity that will help us to reflect the character of Jesus to those whom we seek to do good.

The Question of Character

The question of character may be considered in light of the *contrast* of character in this narrative. On the one side we see the merciful and lowly Jesus, God’s chosen Messiah, sent from

[55] See: Ex. 23:10-11; Dt. 15:1-11.

[56] Ac. 6:1. *New Revised Standard Version*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977.

heaven to reveal the character of God to man, and engaging in works of mercy to a lost and dying world. Everywhere Jesus went, He brought life and health and blessing. Gatherings of sorrow were turned into scenes of joy as the dead were brought back to life, the blind given sight, the lame made to walk, the lepers cleansed, and the sick healed. Men and women oppressed by Satan and bound by demons were delivered, and the moral image of God was restored in man. On the other side stood Satan, the great adversary of souls. The Jewish leaders were filled with the spirit of him who is the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10), and like their “father the devil” who “was a murderer from the beginning” (Jo. 8:44), they sought to destroy the Son of God. This scene was played out again and again during the early history of the Christian church and long Dark Ages of papal supremacy, when the Church of God suffered under the hand of persecution by Roman legionnaires, and saints bore witness to their faith in Christ with their own blood. To every soul on earth the question must come – as it did in the days of Elijah – on whose side we shall stand. “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.” (1 Ki. 18:21). “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” (Jos. 24:15). Each of us are making daily decisions that will affect our eternal destiny. We are either living for Christ and partaking of His Spirit, or we are living for self and Satan and partaking of the spirit of “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” (Eph. 2:2). Our daily choices will be the final determining factor of whether we will win eternal life or eternal damnation; for while we are most certainly saved by “grace...through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”, yet the scripture is plain also that “a man may say, thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.... for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” (Ja. 2:18, 26). And so our *daily choices form habits, habits form character, and character determines destiny.*

The Question of Goals

With these solemn conclusions in mind, and in view of eternity, let us align our goals in harmony with the Man of Nazareth: “for ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” (2 Cor. 8:9). That is, “rich in faith” (Ja. 2:5): “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (Ibid.). Our goals should be such as to put the highest priority on the most important things, which are actually not *things* at all. For while short-sighted men place their value and priorities on the *things* of this world, God places His value and priority on *people* in this world. Thus the admonition of the “beloved disciple” (Jo. 21:20) still rings just as true today as it did when written over 1,900 years ago: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” (1 Jo. 2:15-17).

The Question of Discernment

Because of sin, this world is inherently unjust. Man seeks to oppress his fellow man. It is part of the sin condition. But God seeks to redeem man from the Fall and to pay the debt he owes. This work was accomplished by Christ on the cross. When we discern our duty to our fellow man, we become part of the great plan of redemption: first by accepting the redeeming blood of Jesus in behalf of our own sins, and then as ambassadors for Christ beseeching others to be “reconciled to God”. (2 Cor. 5:20). We should always remember our duty to humanity to seek to relieve the poor and suffering, and to point them to the One who can supply all their need in this life and for the life to come.

Conclusion

In the healing of the paralytic man by the pool of Bethesda, Jesus demonstrated God's love for fallen humanity in a practical and tangible way. He swept away the senseless and burdensome traditions imposed by the Jewish leaders surrounding Sabbath observance and restored the true meaning of a day of restoration and rest. He showed that man is valuable in God's sight and more important than rigorous rule-keeping if it obscures our ability to bless and help our fellow human beings. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Mk. 2:27-28). Thus Jesus showed that man was the crowning act of His creation – made in God's own image – and a day of rest given as a blessing and benefit to humanity.

In this thesis, we discovered God's original purpose for mankind, explored the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in restoring the image of God in man, and found practical application for Sabbath observance and engaging in works of mercy today. This thought is well summarized in the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah:

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rearward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: and the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not...If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." (Isa. 58:6-11, 13-14).

It is the author's sincere prayer that the reader will be challenged to come "to the help of the LORD against the mighty" (Jud. 5:23); to rededicate themselves as a co-worker with God and co-laborer

with Christ in seeking ways to be a blessing to their fellow members of the human family; and to find peace, joy, blessing, and rest in keeping the Sabbath holy to the Lord. May God bless each one of you as you make earnest inquiry of the Master: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Ac. 9:6). “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.” (Isa. 6:8).

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