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THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN.

– MATT. 12:1-13. – FEBRUARY 21 –

Golden Text: – "It is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days."

FOR A TIME our Lord's ministries were attractive. The "common people heard him gladly," and "wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth." But by and by the scribes and Pharisees, the prominent people, socially and religiously, of that time and country, began to feel envious of him. Our Lord's conduct and teachings were in sharp contrast with their own, which were largely tinctured with hypocrisy. The more popular the Lord became with the people the more envious were those who considered themselves the religious, the intelligent, the God-respecting Jews. They despised others, calling them publicans and sinners. They evidently realized that although the promises were made to their nation as a whole, yet when the time would come for the establishment of the Kingdom only the true Israelites would be accepted as participants in it. They flattered themselves that they would be this favored class and correspondingly held aloof from the "common people."

There is a considerable similarity between the classes of scribes and Pharisees in our Lord's day and the so-called orthodox Christians of our day. In some denominations particularly there is evidenced this same spirit of despising others outside the favored cults. We are not meaning to say that there were no good Pharisees, nor are we meaning to say that there are no good people amongst those professing "orthodox" views today. Quite the contrary: but we do claim that orthodox and social and financial lines do distinctly mark and separate the people. We hold that the Lord is no respecter of wealth or of men's persons, but that he looketh at the heart, and that the pure in heart and the sincere in consecration are acceptable to him regardless of color or social or other standing amongst men.

We see at the present time that the Truth is gleaned in every quarter – gathering some from amongst the wealthy [R3316 : page 42] and intelligent, some from amongst the outwardly pious and strict, some from amongst the poor, and some "publicans and sinners."

NOT MANY GREAT, WISE OR SELF-RIGHTEOUS.

It is noteworthy that quite a good many WATCH TOWER subscribers are prisoners in penal institutions. These men became culprits under the traditions of men taught by the scribe and Pharisee classes of today, who have since found the Lord precious to their souls, and his Truth sanctifying to their heads and hearts. Reports received from the Columbus, Ohio, penitentiary from a Brother who is serving a life sentence there for crimes committed before his eyes were opened to the Present Truth, tells of the work done in that prison during the past year. Over one hundred and fifty copies of Volume I. DAWN (and some of succeeding volumes) have been in circulation in the prison, besides thousands of tracts and sample WATCH TOWERS. We have now thirteen regular WATCH TOWER subscribers in the institution. Four public meetings were held during the year, besides numerous private conferences on the precious Gospel of God's dear Son.

"THERE WAS A DIVISION OF THE PEOPLE CONCERNING HIM."

Thenceforth, during our Lord's ministry, the scribes and Pharisees and doctors of the law continually opposed him. And it is noteworthy that it was their attacks upon him that brought forth some of the most precious truths of our Lord's ministry. As some one has said on this subject, "The flint of opposition struck out divine fire that has never ceased to burn. It was like the cannon ball from the enemy at Sebastopol, which opened a spring of cold water for the besieged garrison." And thus it is still: those who today make an attack upon the Truth only cause its beauties and harmonies to be the more clearly discerned by those whose eyes of understanding are

opened and whose hearts are in a proper attitude to appreciate the Truth. Thus our Lord's ministry and the ministry of all his faithful people since has been in the nature of a testing. The light shined in the darkness and the darkness opposed it and comprehended it not, but was nevertheless reprov'd by it.

Our lesson tells us some of this opposition. Pharisees who were unjust in their dealings in daily life, and who our Lord declared were ready to devour widows' houses, by taking advantage of circumstances to buy them in cheaply at forced sale, etc., and who he declared made long prayers in public for show, that they might be thought religious – these same people were great sticklers for the Sabbath day, and being amongst the Lord's most violent opposers they found fault with his more reasonable interpretation of the Sabbath law. Our Lord's conduct and language respecting the Sabbath show that he dealt with the matter from the standpoint of principle rather than of technicalities.

GOD'S LAWS ARE MEANT FOR BLESSINGS.

The Sabbath was made for man – was made for the benefit of mankind, for men's physical, mental and moral rest and recuperation and strengthening. The Pharisees viewed the day as though God specially desired to have the Sabbath day observed, and had created man for that particular purpose. Evidently they were in error, and our Lord had the proper conception of the Law and fulfilled it accurately.

As the disciples with the Lord walked through the field of grain, feeling hungry, they rubbed some of the kernels in their hands to separate the chaff, and blowing the latter away they ate the grain. Under the strict divisions which the Pharisees had framed this would be counted as threshing and winnowing the grain, and would be forbidden as violating the day of sacred rest. Our Lord defended the disciples against the charge, and in proof pointed out to these Pharisees how David, when pursued by King Saul, had procured

from the priest the unleavened cakes on the Sabbath day, and that this was a clear violation of the Law, which forbade any other than the priest to eat that bread. Our Lord wished his hearers to see that the emergencies of the case justified the deviation from the rule. It was a case of necessity – it was to preserve life.

Another illustration he gave was that of the priests serving in the temple every Sabbath day, and how the Law specifically provided for the labor which they would perform, and hence that such labor could not be considered a profanation of the Sabbath. He then called attention to the fact that these disciples who were with him and serving him were doing still more consecrated work than the priests and Levites in the temple, because he – the representative of the Father – was greater than the temple; hence anything made necessary in the service of the Master should not be considered a violation of the Sabbath Law.

Turning the matter upon the accusers our Lord declared that they did not understand the principles underlying the divine arrangement, else they would not have been seeking an accusation against persons who were innocent. He would have them see that the whole difficulty lay in their own hearts. They had evil thoughts and wished to find fault and had erred, whereas if their hearts had been in the proper condition they would have been full of feelings of mercy and compassion.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD'S REQUIREMENT IS MERCY.

This fault-finding disposition, that is ready to accuse and condemn everybody, indicates a wrong condition of heart – one which all the Lord's people should be on guard against. It is not the spirit of mercy and kindness and love which, as the Apostle explains, thinketh no evil. It is a spirit out of harmony with God's disposition, for, as our Lord explains, God desires mercy rather than slaughter; and those who are ready to condemn others give evidence

that they lack the Lord's spirit of mercy and forgiveness. [R3316 : page 43]

This was the offense which our Lord charged against two of his noblest disciples in the early part of their discipleship. When the people of Samaria refused to sell the disciples food, because the Lord did not stop with them and perform miracles amongst them, as he was doing amongst the Jews, the disciples, James and John, were indignant, and said to the Lord, "Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and destroy these men and their city?" but Jesus answered, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them." So with all of the Lord's disciples: their continual study should be to avoid that hypercritical disposition to sentence and to destroy other people while desiring mercy for themselves. The rule which the Lord establishes is that we must expect from him mercy only in proportion as we shall exercise this grace toward others.

LOVELESS CRITICISM PERVERTS THE MIND.

As illustrating this tendency to fault-finding and how it grows upon one, a story is told of a young lady who once expressed to Hogarth, the great satirist, a wish to learn to draw caricatures. Hogarth replied, "Alas, it is not a faculty to be envied. Take my advice and never draw a caricature. By the long practice of it I have lost the enjoyment of beauty. I never see a face but distorted, and have never the satisfaction to behold the human face divine." So it is with those who unsympathetically practice fault-finding and criticising others' faults; they become so proficient in the matter that they never see good qualities, but merely the deficiencies. Their own happiness is thus injured, as well as the happiness of others. It is well that we should be able to note defects – that we should not be blind to them entirely; but we may here well apply our year-text, and remember that we ourselves are most profited in noticing in others whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever

things are reputable, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, rather than by noticing and thinking upon their defects and ignoble qualities.

"THE SON OF MAN IS LORD OF THE SABBATH."

We do not understand this to mean that our Lord claimed authority to set aside the Sabbath day, which God had appointed to the Jews in the Law – in the ten commandments. We do understand it to mean that as the Father's representative, as the great Teacher, he was competent to expound what constituted the proper observance of the Sabbath. To as many as received him his word on the subject would constitute the highest law – the highest interpretation of the divine law, far exceeding any dignity, rules and regulations of the Jewish Talmud or system of law interpretations and definitions. To his followers his words still constitute the highest law, and by his grace we are able to comprehend the meaning of his statement that the entire ten commandments are comprehended in the one word, Love – love for God supremely and love for our fellow-man.

This talk about the Sabbath and our Lord's defense of his disciples doubtless occurred while they were on the way to the synagogue. It was a part of the Pharisaic interpretation of matters that no food should be eaten by any true Jew until after he had gone to the synagogue and worshipped. This probably accounts for the disciples being hungry and eating of the ripe grain *en route*.

In the synagogue was a man with a withered hand, and the Jews wishing to find ground for an accusation against the Lord before the congregation, the latter was asked the question whether or not it would be lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. Since our Lord's healing was not done by manual labor, but merely by the word of his mouth, the captiousness of his adversaries is most evident. Their hearts were wicked, even while they were apparently arguing for a more strict observance of the divine law. Let us learn from this that the heavenly

Father is not pleased to see us even defend what we believe to be right in a captious and unjust attitude of mind. Mercy, goodness, love, are the elements of character which he desires to see in the spiritual Israelites, and without which we cannot long continue to be his children.

Our Lord soon answered the query and showed the weakness of his opponents. They knew well enough that nothing in the Mosaic Law could be construed by them to [R3317 : page 43] interfere with pulling an ox or an ass out of a pit on the Sabbath, even though it might require considerable exercise, – a good deal of labor for several persons. How foolish then for them to find fault with our Lord, who by one word could rebuke the disease and help one of their brethren of the seed of Abraham. After thus rebuking them and explaining that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, our Lord healed the cripple.

We have no space here to enter into a discussion of present-day Sabbath observance – to point out the distinction between the seventh-day Sabbath, which was given by the Lord to the Jewish nation and to it only, and the Christian privilege which we enjoy at the present time, of worshipping and praising the Lord and studying his Word and being free from business cares and responsibilities on the first day of the week. This subject, however, is treated quite at length in *MILLENNIAL DAWN, Vol. VI.*, which we trust will soon be in the hands of all the interested readers of this journal.

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