Do we have rest in God?

Luke 6:1-11

Key Verse: 6:9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"

How are you today? I have a question. How do you feel when you come to worship God on Sunday? Excited and joyful Or you feel tired and sleepy? Are you burdened with worries and things to do? God gave us Sunday so that we can have true rest in Jesus. Frankly speaking, to me many Sundays were very tiring days. Maybe it is same with some of you. I pray that we may learn how to have true rest in Jesus through today’s message.

Sabbath means rest. Before Adam’s fall, even though Adam worked hard, he had enjoyed full rest in God because he had intimate relationship with God. People lost Sabbath which came from God, our Father. Their life became restless. With fear and worries, they had to work hard to put some food into the mouth. They had to struggle with evil people and their own evilness.

God called the Israelite to be his people. God wanted to give them rest in Him. Exodus 20:8-11 says "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

Just a few months ago before they received the laws, they were slaves in Egypt. They had to work hard all day long without even one day off a year. Now they became free from labor at every seventh day. They could not believe what they heard. God also wanted not only his people but also their slaves, aliens and even animals to have rest. We can see rest is not only a personal matter but also a matter of community. Also we can see that on Sabbath the Israelite might have worshiped God who created the heavens and the earth and everything in them.

In Jesus’ time, many years had passed since God gave the laws through Moses. It seemed that the Israelite did not have rest properly as God intended originally. In today passage, He declared “I am the Lord of Sabbath.” Jesus wanted to restore the Sabbath so that people can have true rest in God.

Part I. legalistic people never enter God’s rest.

On Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grainfields and his hungry disciples picked some heads of grains, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. This was allowed in the Jewish law. Travelers could eat freely as they walked through the field, as long as they did not harvest (Dt 23:24,25)

As the disciples were chomping on healthy whole-grains, suddenly some Pharisees popped up and said, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" The Pharisees interpreted the disciples' actions as unlawful. It was not because they were eating others' grain, but because they were doing it on the Sabbath. Exodus 20:10 contains the phrase, "On it (Sabbath) you shall not do any work...." To interpret this phrase, the Pharisees had produced pages and pages of commentary defining "work." According to their traditions, picking heads of grain is harvesting; rubbing the grain is threshing; and generally the disciples were preparing food on the Sabbath. They violated the Sabbath laws and the Pharisees accused them because of that.

Then Jesus came to their aid, and defended them. Jesus referred directly to Scripture. He asked them, "Have you never read what David did...." Jesus referred specifically to an incident with David. David fled for his life from King Saul. David went to the house of God and asked for bread. The priest had no ordinary bread, so he gave David holy bread--lawful only for priests to eat. David and his men ate it without incurring guilt.

Why did Jesus bring up this event which seems irrelevant to keeping Sabbath holy? The priest, David and his men broke God’s law. However, God did not punish the priest or David. We can learn that God valued David and his men’s lives more than ceremonial laws. In Mark 2:27, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “The Sabbath was made for man, not for the Sabbath.” God instituted Sabbath to give rest to us. However, the Pharisees, religious elites tried to be self-righteous by keeping all Sabbath laws flawlessly. Their hearts were full of judgmental mind to send those who can’t keep Sabbath laws to Hell.

This event clearly teaches that legalistic people can’t enjoy rest from God at all because they are judging others not only on Sabbath but every day. Then, how can we be not legalistic? We ourselves should be able to have rest by dwelling in God’s grace. Remember that when we were still sinners, by only his grace God called us. God is the one who opened our spiritual eyes and helped us to accept the gospel of Jesus and his righteousness! When we are accepted by God, we can fully rest in Jesus. Then the world around us looks so different. We can see its beauty and meaning newly. We can hear Nature sing a song of praise with us! We feel the presence of God in a gentle breeze. Every man and woman looks precious. We get strength to forgive our offenders. We desire to live as a holy and righteous child of God. What a true rest! No time or no room for judging.

However, many times we find we become legalistic not realizing why. Our heart and mind become stiff and lose elasticity like an old wineskin. We judge people with our standard. We push people to be as good as us forgetting that God bears with us so patiently. We grumble why only we struggle to serve God and others live as they desire and God seems does not care.

Having rest in God is not automatic. We should remember that God wants to give rest to the world through us. We should teach biblical truth continuously, feed God’s flock and love one another. It is not an easy job at all. The Almighty God had to sacrifice His son Jesus to give us rest. It is very challenging not to be legalistic but to remain as a soft wineskin who can welcome sinners. It requires daily denial, tears, and prayers. God’s love for us enables to do that. When we do so, we grow up in the image of God. Don’t forget that God worked hard for the six days and rested in the seventh day. We should work hard to grow up in his image. I believe that when we struggle to embrace sinners by Jesus’ grace we will have deeper and better Sabbath in God.

PART II. Sabbath is not individual rest.

The second event in this passage also took place on a Sabbath. Jesus went into the synagogue and taught the word of God to people. Among those in the congregation was a man whose right hand was shriveled. This man must have enjoyed Jesus' message. However, his practical life was full of agony due to his shriveled right hand. He could not work hard like others. He could not play baseball or tennis. He dared not look for a marriage partner. Because of his deformity, others would despise him and he must have felt ashamed. He spent a lot of time and energy to keep his shriveled hand hidden. It was his constant thought. Most likely, he had withdrawn from society. He must have usually sat in the back, keeping as quiet as possible. This man, in deep agony of life, was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Any other time, the Pharisees and teachers of the law would not pay attention to him. But on this day they watched closely to see if Jesus would heal him. They wanted to catch Jesus in the act, and charge him with healing on the Sabbath. Their only interest in the suffering man was to use him as bait in their trap.

When Jesus saw this man, his heart went out to him, and he wanted to heal him. But Jesus also knew what the religious leaders were thinking; he knew they wanted to trap him. Jesus could have finished his message and prayed and given the man a note to come back the next day for healing. Instead Jesus made him stand up in front of everyone and asked the people in the synagogue. “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”

Jesus’ question made the people think of Sabbath once again. For most of them, Sabbath was not a day of rest but a day of tension to keep the Sabbath flawlessly. Just imagine you are an orthodox Jew. For example, on one Sabbath, accidently you walked with a purse in your pocket. You violated the Sabbath. You can’t help an old woman carry a heavy luggage on the Sabbath. You are a mother of many kids. On one Sabbath, you bake bread habitually without recognizing that it is Sabbath. You are condemned as an ungodly mother who ignores God’s holy command to keep the Sabbath holy.

Not only the man with the shriveled hand but every one there could not have rest on Sabbath. It was because the Pharisees’ extreme interpretation of work. God’s command not to work on Sabbath was actually a great blessing. “It is okay to work only for six days a week. Just work hard for six days. Believe that your Father God provides. On Sabbath, instead of work, why don’t you study my words which give life? How about pondering upon my mystery, my goodness? Why don’t you bring your burdens or agonies to me with prayer? Isn’t it great to worship me together with your brothers and sisters as a family?”

The Pharisees ruined Sabbath, God’s gift and the people of Israel did not have rest. Jesus wanted to give back Sabbath to his people. He proved that He is the Lord of Sabbath by healing the man. Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so and his hand was completely restored. Suddenly his right hand was strong and healthy. His lifelong ailment was healed. Until that time, the man had thousands of Sabbaths. On that Sabbath, the man finally could have true spiritual and physical rest from all the burdens.

From Jesus, I learn that true rest is not a personal matter but something we can obtain as God’s people. Many times we seek only our rest. We don’t care others. I seek my success, my peace and my happiness. How can I have rest if I have abundant food but many people are starving? How can I be happy if I am healthy but my friend is dying of cancer? There are many people who have not a shriveled hand but a shriveled spirit and heart. People don’t care such people and are busy with their own dreams and things to do. The Pharisees had no problem with keeping the complicated Sabbath laws. They had great knowledge and were trained very well. They did not care ordinary people who felt much burdened about the Sabbath laws. The Pharisees did not have one gram of compassion on the man with the shriveled hand. They thought they were winners and righteous. It was a total misunderstanding of Sabbath.

If you believe that you can have rest alone regardless of other’s rest, you will fail even if you can have fake rest for a while. Let’s read verse 9 together. “Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"

A right way to find rest in God is to do good and save life. By doing so, we are involved in God’s work to restore rest in people’s hearts. We should pay attention to people who are weak and suffering with problems and help them. True rest comes only when a man meets Christ Jesus who forgives sins and gives life. Let’s find out what we can do for a lost soul and do it! Let’s pray for our friends and Bible students. Give them spiritual food, well-prepared Bible study. Spend your time and money to be a friend with them! God will grant true rest to us and them! I pray that this summer Jesus may restore true rest to many restless and wandering UofT students.