

OCCASIONAL NOTES

Strangers Rest Evangelical Church

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“For The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath Day”

(Matthew 12:8)

By Mark Mullins

In the last edition of the Occasional Notes, I wrote about the timelessness of the Ten Commandments and I explained the importance of a moral law that does not change, for it reflects the nature of God who does not change. We also saw that it reflects one covenant of grace that has operated since the fall of Adam in its various administrations. We saw, importantly, how the Old Testament law can be divided into moral, civil and ceremonial. The whole law was fulfilled in Christ but the moral law alone remains binding on the Christian.

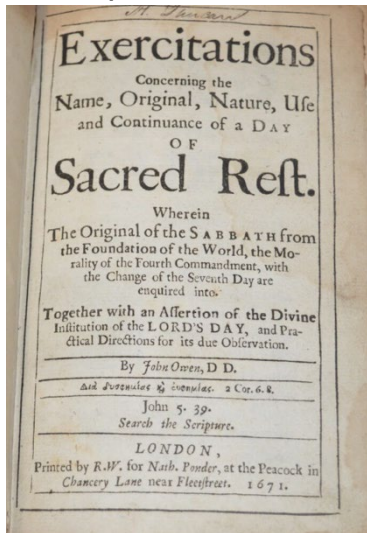
I would like to return to the Fourth Commandment in this edition because it has been contended by many that this law does not represent a moral command but is part of the ceremonial law that no longer applies to Christians.



John Owen, the Puritan, had this to say about the neglect of Sabbath day duties which has been “no small nor ineffectual means of promoting that general profaneness and apostasy from strict and holy walking before God, which at this day are everywhere so justly complained of.”¹

¹ *Exercitations concerning the Name, Original, Nature, Use and Continuance of a Day of Sacred Rest* by John Owen, 1671.

It is my intention to demonstrate that there is



still a Sabbath keeping required of Christians although it is different, as reflected by the change of day and the fulfilment of the ceremonial laws in Christ, to that which

was required under the Law of Moses.

Institution of the Sabbath at Creation

In Genesis 2:3 we read that "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made".

In one sense the sabbath was not a day that God made for himself because God, who inhabits eternity, does not operate in a 24-hour cycle. There will be no sabbath day in heaven but a continual rest in God. Therefore, when God rested on the seventh day He did it for our benefit and as a pattern for our lives rather than His. We would have to describe God resting on the sabbath day as an anthropomorphism: that is God speaking in the language of men. Nevertheless, we are to understand it as though God did indeed rest on the seventh day. As Iain Murray has commented, God did not rest on

account of tiredness but in order to behold His creation. His rest was in satisfaction and delight in beholding its reflection of His own glory and character. Having been made in God's image, Adam and Eve knew that their behaviour was to be patterned after God's own behaviour; they were to delight in what God delighted.²

John Elias (who we will return to later) pointed out that just as God rested not for tiredness but to survey His work, so we are not to rest carnally on the Sabbath but in remembering and considering God's work and worshipping Him as a result.³

There are two points that arise here. First, God blessed the sabbath. This means that the sabbath is a blessed day like no other. God has appointed us to meet and bless him and He has promised to meet and bless us. He could not have blessed it for His own good but for ours. The words 'bless' and 'sanctify' are invariably used in scripture for God's blessing of man. It reminds us that the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:28).⁴ Do you remember what the sabbath was like before you believed? I recall that Sundays were boring days and I didn't know what to do. It stood as a reproach to my unbelief. How can God bless the day to unbelievers? If the day can only be enjoyed by those who worship God then the unbeliever will be unable to enjoy the blessings of that day. As we know from John 4:23, the worshipers that

² Murray, Iain, at Christ Covenant Church, South Carolina, 'The Lord's Day,' uploaded to Sermon Audio 1 June 2008

³ "John Elias: Life, Letters and Essays" by Edward Morgan at p233

⁴ Iain Murray, at Christ Covenant Church, South Carolina, 'The Lord's Day,' uploaded to Sermon Audio 1 June 2008.

the Father seeks are those that “shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”

Evidence of man’s Sabbath-keeping before Moses

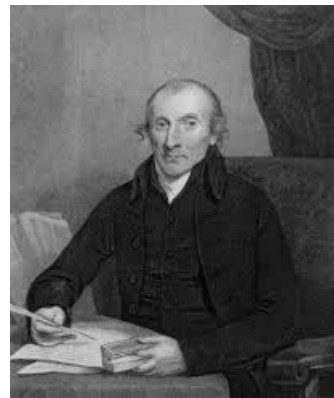
As we have already seen there are those who complain that there is no evidence of a sabbath being kept from Adam to Moses. However, we must bear in mind that the book of Genesis spans some 4,100 years of history in just 50 chapters. We do not hear of circumcision after Joshua until the New Testament but we do not conclude that circumcision ceased to be practised in the intervening period.

In any event, there are indications that the Sabbath was indeed observed in the intervening years. In Genesis 4:3, Cain and Abel brought their offerings on the sabbath. According to Matthew Henry the Hebrew for “in the process of time” is “at the end of days” which could either be at the end of the year or at the end of the week on the seventh day. It was plainly at a set time of worship.

There are two other points to consider. The first we covered in the last edition of Occasional Notes. In Exodus 16:23 Moses told the people to bake what manna they gathered on the sixth day. His words are instructive: “This is that which the LORD hath said, tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that

which ye will bake today and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.”

It would appear that the sabbath was not new to the people of Israel. The Lord had first told Moses in verse 5 to prepare twice as much as their daily requirement on the sixth day. If the sabbath was new to the people then how would they have understood what the Lord meant?



This is how Joseph Benson, an early Methodist (1749-1821) put it in his Commentary on the Old and New Testaments:

This is that which the Lord hath spoken — Either to Moses, by inspiration, or to the former patriarchs, on a like occasion. It is agreeable to the former word and the law of God concerning the sabbath. To-morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath — Here is a plain intimation of the observing a seventh-day sabbath, not only before the giving of the law upon mount Sinai, but before the bringing of Israel out of Egypt, and therefore from the beginning. If the sabbath had now been first instituted, how could Moses have understood what God said to him (Exodus 16:5) concerning a double portion to be gathered on the sixth day, without making any express mention of the sabbath? And how could the people have so readily taken the hint, (Exodus 16:22,) even to the surprise of the rulers, before Moses had

declared that it was done with regard to the sabbath, if they had not had some knowledge of the sabbath before? The setting apart of one day in seven for holy work, and in order to that for holy rest, was a divine appointment ever since God created man upon the earth.

The second point to be made is that in Exodus 20:8 the Lord told Moses to "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy". It would be a strange thing to say if this was the first time the people of Israel had heard of the sabbath. It plainly was not the first time. John Elias made the point that the word 'remember' signifies (among other things): "the antiquity of the command, 'as if he has said, "Remember how God sanctified it.'"⁵

William Perkins made the point that this clause indicated that the Sabbath had been greatly neglected and so men and women must prepare themselves for it.

The moral component of the Sabbath commandment

The keeping of the Sabbath is part of the moral law. The Sabbath was appointed by the Lord to Adam and Eve before the fall of man and therefore before any ceremonial observations had been introduced. I have always considered that the first animal sacrifice occurred when the

Lord gave Adam and Eve animal skins to wear (Genesis 3:21) just before they were expelled from the Garden of Eden after the Fall.

John Owen had this to say in *Exercitations Concerning the Name, Original Nature, Use and Continuance of a Day of Sacred Rest* published in 1671.⁶:-

'None will deny, but that it is required of us in and by the Law of Nature, that some time be set apart and dedicated unto God, for the observation of his solemn worship in the world. And it is plain to every one, that this natural dictate is inseparably included in the Law of the Sabbath. It will therefore surely be difficult to make it absolutely and universally positive [i.e. ceremonial].'



There are indeed ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath Day. William Perkins, in *The Golden Chain*,⁷ distinguished between the ceremonial and

moral aspects of the Lord's Day. He made the point that it is ceremonial in respect of its strict observation reflecting the internal sanctification of the People of God. This comes from Exodus 31:13: "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep:

⁵ John Elias (ibid) at p232-3

⁶<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A53694.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=toc>

⁷ *A Golden Chain, or The Description of Theology* (Cambridge: John Legate, 1600)

for it *is* a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that *ye* may know that I *am* the LORD that doth sanctify you." So the strict observance of the Sabbath is a sign of the sanctification within the believer. Plainly that is no longer a reason to observe the Sabbath since this is the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer.

It also signified the blessed rest of the faithful in the Kingdom of Heaven. Isaiah 66:23 says: "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord." Also Hebrews 4:8-10:- "if Jesus (Joshua) had given them rest" etc.

It is also ceremonial in that it was observed the seventh day after the creation of the world and sacrifices were subsequently introduced in Numbers 28:9:- "And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot, and two tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, and the drink offering thereof: this is the burnt offering of every sabbath, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering."

William Perkins adds two reasons why the Sabbath is also moral. He made the point that the sabbath preserves and conserves the ministry of the word and the solemn worship of God, especially in the assemblies of the church. In this respect we are as much required to rest from our vocations on this day as the Jews were. We read in Isaiah 58:13:- "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, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words."

It is also moral because it allows servants and cattle to rest from their labour which on other days is their duty to their owners.

The continuing obligation of the Sabbath commandment

Having established that there is a moral component to the Sabbath it makes it more difficult to argue that it is no longer binding on Christians. Indeed in Mark 2:28 the Lord Jesus pronounced that the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath. It would, you might think, seem rather surprising if the Lord Jesus, having declared himself Lord of the Sabbath was about to abolish it. Rather, having declared his ownership of this day the Lord Jesus is once again proclaiming his Divinity. As we have seen in Genesis 2, it was God who instituted the Sabbath. Having taken ownership of the Sabbath it is therefore a proper name to call it the Lord's Day as John does in Revelation 1:10 when he said: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day".

The word for "Lord's" is *kuriakos* and appears in only one other place in scripture: in 1 Corinthians 11:20 in which it refers to the Lord's supper. This is significant for two reasons.

Firstly, we know that the Lord's supper is so called because the Lord instituted it in the first place; we see this in Matthew 26:26-29. We should also notice that the Lord did not introduce the Lord's supper in a vacuum but as a substitute for the Passover. As we are told in 1 Corinthians 5:7, Christ is our passover. So we see an Old Testament ceremony replaced by a New Testament practice. This is what James Durham (1622-1658) said that no day has been honoured with so many gospel privileges more than the first: Christ's resurrection, at least two appearances after it, and the coming of Pentecost. He added, "[i]t is most suitable that the old world should end in a Sabbath, and the new begin in a Sabbath, that so the worship of the new ...might the more immediately and convincingly preach the change"⁸. It is interesting to note that on that day the disciples were all gathered together as you would expect for the new Sabbath.

We see that the disciples also met for worship on the first day of the week:

- Acts 20:7 – 'And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.'

- Paul had waited in Troas seven days (v.6) – because the disciples met on the first day of the week. This meeting can't have been a special meeting for Paul because he had waited seven days for the meeting.
- Preaching and breaking of bread – i.e. public worship⁹
- 1 Corinthians 16:2 – 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.'
- V.1 ('As I have given order to the churches in Galatia, even so do ye') shows that this command was given to many churches, not just a particular one¹⁰. Obviously, Paul would have chosen the most convenient day for the collection which is when they all met together on the first day of the week.

Returning to Revelation 1:10, we may positively assume that the Lord's Day is so named because the Lord instituted it by changing the day from the seventh day to the first day of the week. We know that the Lord Jesus rose on the first day of the week. We also know that the Lord appeared to his disciples on the first day of the week in John 20:19 following his resurrection:- "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled

⁸ Durham, James, *Law Unsealed, or a Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments: With a Resolution of Several Momentous Questions and Cases of Conscience* at p59 (Glasgow: Robert Sanders, 1676), [Early English Books Text Creation Partnership], <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A37046.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=toc>, accessed 13 November 2019.

⁹ Durham, James, *Law Unsealed, or a Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments: With a Resolution of Several Momentous Questions and Cases of Conscience* (Glasgow: Robert Sanders, 1676), [Early English Books Text Creation Partnership], <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A37046.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=toc> at p159.

¹⁰ Iain Murray

for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you." It is significant that the Day of Pentecost is also on the first day of the week. In Leviticus 23:16 we read that the feast of weeks was fifty days after the seventh sabbath which is the first day of the week.

What about the change of day from the seventh day to the first? We have already made the point that the Lord Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and therefore that he has the authority to change the day from the seventh to the first day. After all the Lord's resurrection, being his entrance into rest from his finished work of redemption, is more worthy of being remembered than the Lord Jesus's work of creation (As Nicholas Bownd wrote at page 123 of the Doctrine of the Sabbath: "we keep this day, because on it Christ rising from death rested from the work of our redemption; which work of redemption being a greater work than that of creation...") (Ephesians 1:19-21; Romans 1:3-4; 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:20; Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5).

It is also worth noting that the purpose of remembering the Sabbath in Deuteronomy 5:15 is that the Lord brought His People out of the land of Egypt where they were servants. As we know, this signifies the deliverance of God's people from the bondage of sin. How much more appropriate is it that we should change the day of the week to coincide with the resurrection?

It is also worth noting that the change of the day from the last to the first day of the week does not represent any change in the moral nature of the command. We are not told to remember the seventh day but to remember the Sabbath *to keep it holy*. That is not to say that we are free to change the day to suit ourselves. For the reasons already mentioned, the Lord has changed the day as the Lord of the Sabbath.

In Matthew 24:20, the Lord Jesus warns his disciples to pray that their flight be not in winter, neither on the sabbath day. He is speaking of the coming destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. If the law of the Sabbath was to be abrogated then it seems strange that the Lord Jesus would speak of it as continuing into the Gospel Age. John Owen said in his *Exercitations on the Sabbath* at page 193-4:

Through this caution, Christ `doth declare the continued obligation of the Law of the Sabbath, as a moral precept upon all. It is answered by some, that it is the Judaical Sabbath alone that is intended... But many things ... render this conjecture altogether improbable.'

'All real obligation unto Judaical institutions was then absolutely taken away; and it is not to be supposed that our Lord Jesus Christ would before hand lay in provision for the edification of his disciples in error.'

'Before that time came, they were sufficiently instructed doctrinally in the dissolution of all obligation in ceremonial

institutions' (done principally by Paul, especially in Hebrews).

Those who disagree that Sabbath observance is still binding on the believer justify their position by reference to Hebrews 3 and 4. Their argument is that when we become Christians we enter into the Sabbath rest of Christ and, therefore, there is no longer a day to remember because Christ is our Sabbath rest. I have found John Owen's treatment of this subject very helpful in his *Exercitations Concerning the Name, Original Nature, Use and Continuance of a Day of Sacred Rest* published in 1671.¹¹

In Hebrews 4, the Apostle (who I believe is Paul) speaks about two sabbaths. In verse 4 he speaks about the first Sabbath on the seventh day of creation: "For God did rest the seventh day from all his works". In Exodus 31:17, God said to Moses: "for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed."

We see that God is the foundation and principal cause of our rest. In verse 3 it is called "my rest", that is God's Rest. Therefore, the Sabbath is God's rest before it becomes our rest. After the Sabbath was established as God's rest it then became an appointed rest for mankind. As we have seen God blessed that day as a Rest for man and a pledge of our future entering into the Rest of God.¹²

Next the Apostle considered the Rest of the Land of Canaan where we see three rests mentioned again:

1. There was the Rest of God which is described as His rest (if they shall enter into my rest, verse 3). This rest we see in verse 6 is the rest of Canaan in which some did not enter through unbelief and perished in the wilderness. The prayer of the people was "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength" (Psalm 132:8).

The work of God is comparable to the work of Creation. The Lord Himself made this comparison in Isaiah 51:15-16:- "I am the Lord thy God that divided the Sea, whose waves roared, the Lord of Hosts is His Name, and have put my words in thy mouth and have covered thee in the shadow of my hand, that I may plant the Heavens and lay the foundation of the Earth, and say unto Zion thou art my people." He compares the establishing of the church-state of Israel to the original creation of all things. This was the work of God and upon its completion God entered into His Rest being satisfied and happy with what he had made. Returning to Psalm 132, once God had established His Zion for the temple and for the place of His worship (see John Gill on Psalm 132:13), the Lord goes on to say, "This is my Rest, and here will I dwell".

¹¹<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A53694.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=toc>

¹² *Exercitation of the Sabbath* at page 371.

2. Once this rest was established by God, the people were invited and encouraged to enter into the Rest themselves. Their entrance, to quote John Owen, "was their coming by Faith and Obedience into a participation of the Worship of God wherein he rested, as a means and pledge of their everlasting Rest in Him. Although some of them came short hereof, by reason of their unbelief, yet others entered into it under the conduct of Joshua. God expressed both His Rest and the Rest of the people by appointing a Day of Rest."

3. This Day of Rest was a "token, sign and pledge"¹³. This was not the same as the Day of Rest given at Creation but of God's present Rest in His instituted worship and was an aid to their entrance into their eternal Rest. Therefore, the Seventh day had a particular importance to the People of Israel that God was their God and they were God's people. This Day of Rest was merely a preparation for the great day of Rest that was to come after the Resurrection.

So both these states of the Church had these three distinct aspects: (1) a Rest of God on his Works for their foundation; (2) a Rest in Obedience and Worship for man to enter into; and (3) a *Day* of Rest as a pledge and token of both the other.

John Owen goes on to show that there was to be a third Rest of the Church in the New Testament into which people were encouraged to enter. The state of Rest was different from the preceding two:

1. There was a work, unique to God, to be completed and finished which was the foundation of the new Testament Church;
2. A spiritual rest followed the Rest of God for those who believed;
3. There was a renewed Day of Rest to express that Rest of God and to be our pledge of our entering into Heaven itself.

Just as God did everything in the creation of the world, so Christ who is God, did everything in setting up, what John Owen described as, the new Church-state. Upon finishing this work (at the resurrection), he (that is Christ) entered into His Rest. Therefore, the Apostle writes in Hebrews 4:9:- "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God". This was the rest of salvation in Christ. In verse 10 the Apostle writes, "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his."

Many expositors speak of this entering in to rest as if it applied to the Christian. Admittedly, I used to think that this was the case. However, for the reasons that John Gill succinctly states, it must refer to the Lord Jesus and not the believer:

¹³ *Exercitation of the Sabbath* by John Owen at page 375.

This is to be understood not of believers, nor of their entrance into the Gospel rest, or into eternal rest, but of the Lord Jesus Christ; for a single person is only spoken of, and not many, as in Hebrews 4:3 and the rest entered into is his own, which cannot be said of any other; and besides, a comparison is run between his entrance into rest, and ceasing from his works, and God's resting the seventh day, and ceasing from his, which can only agree with him; and besides, Christ is immediately spoken of, and at large described in Hebrews 4:12. Now he entered into his rest, not when he was laid in the grave, but when he rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God, as having done his work; and this is the ground and foundation of the saints' rest under the Gospel dispensation;

The Lord Jesus had works to do on earth, such as, preaching the Gospel, performing miracles and obtaining the redemption and salvation of his people. Upon his resurrection he was able to rest from his labours and to look upon them with satisfaction just as God rested from his labours on the Seventh day of creation.

As John Owen observed (page 377) when he questioned what works the believers should be said to rest from, there is a sense that the believer rests from his sins, labours, sorrows and sufferings, yet this has nothing in common with the Rest of God who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil and canst not look on iniquity", let alone commit sin (Habbakuk 1:13).

And so a new day of Rest arises from the Rest that Christ entered into when he ceased from His labours at the resurrection. John Owen makes three observations about this day:

1. It is a Sabbatism, or one day in seven which is to be dedicated to sacred rest, having its foundation in the Light and Law of Nature and was to be observed in each of the three states of the Church;
2. For this third state of the Church, as we have already seen, there is a change of day as it belongs to another Covenant, having its foundation in a work of another kind;
3. The observation of this new day is suited to the spiritual state of the Church under the Gospel which has been delivered from the bondage of the Law.

I would like to look next at the objection raised from Colossians 2:16-17 where Paul wrote: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days."

Romans 14:5-6 is in a similar vein: "(5) One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. (6) He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doeth not regard it..."

Galatians 4:10 is again making the same point – "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years." These and other verses show that the

Sabbath day was a Jewish ceremonial observance which has passed away with all others.

Those who do not accept that the Sabbath observance is for all time cite these verse to demonstrate that a day of rest is no longer required to be observed by Christians. However, as we have seen already, the weekly sabbath has both a ceremonial and a moral content. Plainly, it is no longer required to sacrifice on the Sabbath as Abel may have done in Genesis 4 and Jews were required to do by their burnt offerings in Numbers 28:9. However, we must remember that the Sabbath was first introduced before the Fall and, therefore, before the ceremonial law when only the moral law was in force.

John Owen pointed out that it cannot be shown that the weekly Sabbath was intended here as opposed to the observance of Sabbatical Years.¹⁴ Leviticus 23 contains two references to Sabbaths that were not the weekly Sabbath: first, verse 24:- "Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation." And second, verse 32:- "It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath."

Nicholas Bownds in *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath* made these helpful comments about Colossians 2:16 at page 147: "Paul speaks 'of so many in the plural number, where he proves that Christ has set us free from the ceremonies of the Jews, and that they are in no wise to be adjoined unto the gospel, in so much that we are not bound to that distinction of meats and days, that they were – no not of the *Sabbath days*, neither to keep that one which we do, in that manner, and to that end, which they did in every point, neither to keep the other *Sabbath days* at all which they had.'"

Our spiritual condition measured by our Sabbath observance

Let us consider next some observations from men of God about the relationship between the Sabbath and our personal holiness:

- John Elias (in *Life, Letters and Essays* by Edward Morgan, p.267 – 'Letter to American Christians', 1827): "We believe that the religious state of persons or churches is very perceptible in the manner they keep the Sabbath. It is very painful to think that the manner of many observing the Sabbath shews that they have but little delight in Christ, and slender hope of heaven."
- John Elias (Morgan, p.384 – letter, 1834) 'The observance or profanation of this holy day is like a weather-glass, shewing signs of

¹⁴ *Exercitations on the Sabbath* by John Owen at page 219.

the rise or fall of a nation. This is also applicable to particular persons.'

- Robert Murray McCheyne: 'Did you ever meet with a lively believer in any country under heaven, one who loved Christ and lived a holy life, who did not delight in keeping holy to God the entire Lord's Day?'
- John Wells in "The Practical Sabbatarian, or Sabbath-Holiness Crowned with Superlative Happiness" (London: 1668): 'We may see here how much infidelity influences the hearts of most; for surely, did we not look upon [the] rare promises [of the Sabbath] as bonds without a seal, the revenue of them would bribe us to the most accurate and spiritual observations of God's holy day... But the world is fallen under the same rebukes as once the disciples did, "O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves?"'
- "A Sabbath well spent, brings a week of content And strength for the toils of the morrow; But a Sabbath profaned, whate'er may be gained Is a certain forerunner of sorrow." Quoted in A.W. Pink, *The Ten Commandments*.

Testimonies of Past Believers and the Sabbath

The following testimonies demonstrate the continued validity of the promise made in Isaiah 58:13-14: "(13) 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, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: (14) 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."

John Elias and Rhuddlan



John Elias was a nineteenth century preacher who was greatly burdened for the keeping of the Sabbath in England. He sent petitions to

Parliament, seeking to show the duty and privilege of earthly rulers to encourage and protect the observance of the Lord's Day.

At the turn of the 19th century, some Welsh towns devoted the Sabbath not to worship, but to sin and ungodliness. Among them was Rhuddlan, Flintshire, where a noisy, riotous market was held on Sundays. In 1802, Elias was moved to preach there in the open air, despite warnings of danger from his friends. Standing on the steps of the New Inn, he prayed fervently for the people with streaming tears, thanking God that they were not yet destroyed, and

beseeking Him that they would regard the Sabbath. He then preached with great boldness, gravity and compassion on Exodus 24:32 – ‘Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest time thou shalt rest.’ John Elias asked whether the Sabbath day should still be kept ‘if it were a fine day, the harvest being very wet and bad, and the corn much injured.’ ‘Yes,’ was his answer in powerful tone of voice; ‘yes, you should obey the word of God at *all* times’ (Morgan, p.88). He then exclaimed repeatedly the following words: ‘Oh robbers! Oh robbers! Oh thieves! Alas! stealing the day of the Lord! What! robbing my Lord of his day! Oh robbers! The most vile and abominable! (Morgan, p.88)’ Elias referenced both the scriptural threats for abusing the Sabbath, and the promises made to those that keep the day holy, emphasising that those who observe it ‘live far better’ and ‘certainly die infinitely better’ than those who abandon it for work and wages (Morgan, p.88). Elias’ sermon filled its audience with such alarm, guilt and misery, that not only were some truly converted, but also the Rhuddland market was never held again on the Sabbath. This change was effected solely and entirely by the simple preaching of the gospel. Elias later noted in his autobiography, ‘The Lord strengthened me... He gave me the victory.’¹⁵

King George III



Following the death of King George III in January, 1820, John Elias observed in a sermon that there had never been a king like him in Britain, noting his experience of salvation and his dependence on, and devotion towards, God. Among other anecdotes, Elias told the following:

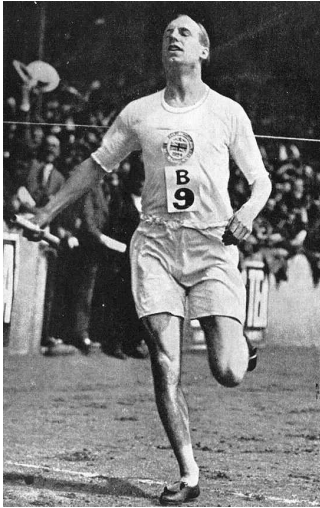
‘It seems that there was a good man employed on his Majesty’s premises, of whom he took notice. As he went about one Monday morning, he missed this person; he found out upon inquiry that he had been dismissed because he refused to do some work on the Sunday, which, as was stated by the master, was a matter of necessity. “Send for him back immediately,” said the king, “the man that refuses to work on the Lord’s day, is the man for *me*, send for him.’ (Morgan, 409)

John Elias wrote later that under George’s reign, through which he firmly upheld the Sabbath day, ‘The cause of the Lord prospered, and his Gospel had wonderful success ... not only in England, but also in foreign parts. The slave trade was abolished: the Sunday School Society was established then: also, those noble institutions, the Missionary and Bible Societies.’

¹⁵This summary, written by Hannah Munday, is taken from Edward Morgan, *John Elias, His Life, Letters and Essays*

'It may, in some degree, be said of him as of Solomon, that all "that came into his heart to make in the house of the Lord, and in his own house, he prosperously effected." 2 Chronicles 7:11.'¹⁶

Eric Liddell



The Scottish sportsman Eric Liddell (1902-1945) showed great athletic potential from a young age, breaking records in track running while studying at Edinburgh University¹⁷.

Great success in his 1923 season established him as a world-class sprinter, and led to an invitation to prepare for the Olympic Games in Paris the following year. However, when the Olympic programme was publicised with the 100m among events scheduled for a Sunday, Liddell made it clear that he, as a Christian, would not participate in any race on the Lord's day. Attempts made by the British Olympic Council to persuade the Olympic Committee to reschedule races were to no avail, and when it was suggested to Liddell that the continental Sunday lasted until only midday, he replied that 'His Sunday lasted all day' (page 104). Nevertheless, Liddell began quietly to prepare for the 400m – a distance

which he would never have dreamed of attempting otherwise. The Olympics came, and Liddell began by taking bronze in the 200m. Two days later, the starter's pistol cracked for the 400m final. In the following 47.6 seconds, Liddell not only took gold, finishing four metres clear of the American champion Horatio Fitch, but also beat both world and Olympic records. The extent of his victory over Fitch was one of the widest recorded in the history of the event. The *BBC Scotland* website states that 'Without doubt one of Scotland's sporting heroes, Eric Liddell, owes much of his fame more to a race he didn't run, than any he did.'¹⁸ 'Them that honour me I will honour...' (I Samuel 2:30).

Extract from *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* by John Bunyan



"All this time, I was not aware of the danger and evil of sin. I never considered that sin would damn me to eternal hell, no matter what religion I followed, unless I was found in Christ. No, I never

thought of Him, nor whether He even existed. Thus man wanders around while spiritually blind, but tires himself out seeking the empty

¹⁶ibid.

¹⁷John W. Keddie, *Running the Race: Eric Liddell, Olympic Champion and Missionary*, Darlington: EP Books, 2012. Summarised by Hannah Munday.

¹⁸www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/sportscotland/asportingnation/article/019.shtml, quoted in Keddie, 2007, 22).

things of this world, for he does not know the way to the city of God (Ecclesiastes 10:15). But one day, among all the sermons our preacher made, his subject pertained to the Sabbath day and the evil of not keeping that day holy, whether by work, sports, or anything else. Despite my religion, I was one who took much delight in all manner of sin, especially on the Lord's Day. I was convicted of my sin under his sermon, thinking and believing that he made that sermon on purpose to show me my evil ways. I then felt what guilt was, though I never did before that I can remember; but after that sermon, I felt guilty and so went home with a great burden upon my spirit.

For an instant, this caused me to lose the desire for sin and caused my former pleasures to seem bitter to me, but behold, it did not last long. Before I had finished eating, the burden began to leave me and my heart returned to its old

ways. How glad I was that this grief was gone from me and that the fire was put out, that I might sin again without guilt. So, after I had finished eating, I shook the sermon out of my mind and returned with great delight to my old custom of sports and games on the Lord's Day. The same day, as I was in the middle of a game of cat,¹⁹ just as I was about to strike the cat the second time, I suddenly heard a voice from heaven in my soul that said, "Will you leave your sins and go to heaven or keep your sins and go to hell?" At this I was as if in a daze; I left my cat upon the ground, looked up to heaven, and with the eyes of my understanding, I seemed to see the Lord Jesus looking down upon me. He was fiercely displeased with me and seemed to threaten me with some grievous punishment for these and my other ungodly practices."²⁰

(This article includes research carried out by Hannah Munday.)

¹⁹ [1] Tip cat, or cat, is an ancient English game, thus described in Strutt's Sports and Pastimes: The game of cat was played with a short, heavy club about three feet long, and a "cat," a piece of wood about six inches long and two inches thick, tapered at the ends to form a double cone. With the cat placed on the ground, the player strikes it on one end, causing the other end of the cat to rise up high enough for him to strike it. Variations of the game included guessing the distance that the cat flew, scoring points depending upon which number was up on a four-sided cat, and running around bases as the cat was being retrieved.

²⁰ Bunyan, John. Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (Updated, Illustrated): A Brief Account of God's Exceeding Mercy through Christ to His Poor Servant, John Bunyan . Aneko Press. Kindle Edition.

Should we put redemption for prisoners before retribution?

By Faith Amurao



On the morning of Sunday 8 March 2020, Mark Mullins had the opportunity to speak about the Gospel at the BBC's Big Questions. Hosted by Nicky Campbell, who includes most perspectives on questions of moral importance for each Sunday morning, the one before them that day was 'Should we put redemption for prisoners before retribution?'

Steve Chalke was one of the guests. He once held orthodox evangelical views but has in recent years, denied Christ's death in the place of sinners to atone for sin and supports same sex marriage. He was the first of the front row guests to be asked his view and, said that "Punishment does not work". This could be seen, in his view, from the rate of reoffending which is 70%. He added, "We take those who are most vulnerable... We lock them up, because society thinks that's a good idea, then we finally release them when they're institutionalised, and we wonder why they reoffend – we wonder why they aren't healed by being locked up".

A couple, Gary and Lesly Hoolickin, whose son was murdered in 2016 by a boy who was arrested fifty five times and put in prison twenty seven times was asked by Nicky what kind of places they would like prisons to be. Mrs Lesley believes that "They're too soft in the prisons." When asked what would have been the right solution, her husband answered, "I think you've got to lock these people away and forget about them – that's my opinion. You're not gonna make this lad right – you're not gonna turn him."

Steve Chalke was insisting that an alternative to the current system of state punishment is needed. In his view, a type of redemption for criminals is required which is new, holistic and therapeutic.

Mark Mullins responded, "There is more to Christ's message than compassion and forgiveness. We need to forgive those who are sorry." He emphasised the hardness of the human heart which causes a man who is not truly sorry for his past to be hardened in his crime. He pointed out that "Capital punishment is biblical". Showing the Christian's responsibility to minister to those being punished for their crimes, he used the example of John Wesley who visited prisoners as they were being taken to the gallows and who shared

with them that peace with God is available through the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Mark Mullins quoted the words of the penitent thief who was crucified next to the Lord Jesus and who rebuked the other unbelieving thief by saying, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss." That thief because of his faith in Christ's sacrifice for him, received more than the just punishment of his crimes on earth: he received a heavenly reward. Jesus said to him, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The believing thief submitted not only to the justice of the day but also understood that there was more to such justice – it should cause us to fear God. It reminds us of the Lord Jesus' warning when he said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Steve was quick to caricature Mark's perspective that of a "stereotypical Christian".

Mark Mullins urged everyone to "Read the Bible for what it says: all of us have sinned. We all need redemption but Jesus Christ paid the price of our redemption". Mark was speaking of general sinfulness that has corrupted all of us since the first man and woman's disobedience which resulted in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the passing of sin to their descendants. It is this sinfulness that results in

our need for redemption. Redemption is not merely a response to relieve criminals of their just punishment (and those who argue such an alternative have hijacked the term and squeezed out of it all biblical and truthful significance) but it is God's solution to our problem of sin. After all redemption in the Hebrew connotes the deliverance through substitution for the person or animal being delivered. It also means to cover sin, to atone, or make expiation as the price paid for a life that has become a forfeit.

Mark Mullins added that since there are different levels of corruption and depravation, we must deal with each person where they are. This is surely how the Lord deals with each of us. He comes to us individually in whatever state we are in and like the good Samaritan sees and finds us in our broken, sinful state, bears us and binds up our wounds, paying the price of our restoration.

Nicky gave the last word to Nasser Kurdy an imam and a surgeon who was attacked but was able to forgive his attacker. Nasser said he "could not hate or [harbour] anger in my heart." He said that out of forgiveness his humanity was restored and enabled him to look at his attacker as a human being. He added, "I could not deny his humanity, I have to be compassionate." It is all well and good to speak of forgiveness and to look at our humanity as encapsulated in our brokenness and vulnerability. But such an outlook does not encompass the whole truth

which includes our sinfulness. Sin has to be atoned for. We have to be redeemed from its just penalty which is death and an eternal punishment in hell. The only one who has the power to forgive truly is the Lord who offered himself as a lamb to the slaughter – see Isaiah 53. The imam’s perspective is like Steve Chalke’s approach to the problem of crime; he would like to analyse the heart of the criminal with questions like “what’s happened to you, what’s broken in your life, how were you abused?” These are necessary questions to understand the whole picture and context of the

history of the wrongdoer but it obscures and sets aside the deeper issue of man’s responsibility for his sin which only the Bible can answer. ”

Mark Mullins’s final words on the show, which was sadly not the last word, were, “What would our world be without retribution? People must be prepared to see the seriousness of crime and sin, the opportunity to face up to them and make peace before God who is our peacemaker.”

Church Update

By Faith Amurao

Hudson Taylor in *Days of Blessing* (p.9), an account of meetings held in China at the commencement of the China Inland Mission, said:

[L]et us wait on God, remembering who it is that is at the helm, and that ‘all things are working together for good to them that love God.’ (Romans 8:28) If we are right, nothing and no one can harm us. (1 Peter 3:13) It was all *wrong* as regards Judas betraying his MASTER. It was all *right* as regards JESUS being betrayed. “The cup (*not* which Judas has given me, or the Priests, *but*) which the FATHER hath given me, shall I not drink it?” Only upon GOD must we wait...‘GOD is refuge for us.’...let Him do what He chooses: whatever *He* chooses will be well chosen; whatever *He* decides will be well decided. Let

us do away with *our* plans...‘Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our GOD be upon us: And establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; Yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it.’ (Psalm 90:16-17)

Children & Christmas

The children (between the ages of 11 and 16) are continuing to enjoy the Sunday afternoon sessions of question time with the Minister after the service and their study of *Pilgrim’s Progress* with Hannah Munday. This extra session has been greatly appreciated by the keener children and some of the adults have enjoyed being

reminded of this Christian Classic. Please pray for better attendance at the Sunday morning service by some of the children and give thanks for the enthusiasm of others. .

The Children's Christmas Gathering on Friday 13 December 2019 was a joy for all, especially for those of the children's family members who could attend. One or two of them invited friends from school. We had a Christmas meal prepared by Faye Amurao and some of the church members. Mark Mullins also gave a Christmas message. There were also games for the children.

The following day the adults and children sang carols at the local market as a witness to the neighbourhood and to invite others to the Carol Service. Afterwards, we visited a local elderly care home, Starkey House, to do more singing. Mark gave a Gospel message to the elderly folk, some of whom were accompanied by their carers.

New Trustees

On behalf of Mark Mullins, I would like to inform you that on 14 February 2020, five new trustees were appointed – Jonathan Arnold (Pastor of Westminster Baptist Church and editorial director at the Trinitarian Bible Society), Roland Brown (Pastor of Forest Hall Church, Loughton with responsibility for the English Speaking Services at Funchal Baptist Church, Madeira),

Rupert Hollins, (Secretary and founding member of Grace Baptist Church, Portsmouth) Mark Mullins, and John Thackway (Pastor of Holywell Evangelical Church, Vice-Chairman of the Trinitarian Bible Society and Editor of The Bible League Quarterly). We are grateful for all the support that our previous trustees (The Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches – EFCC_ provided the church especially through its chairman, Pastor Gwynn Evans who has been a long standing friend and support of the church. Please pray for our new trustees, that the Lord would fill them with the fulness of His Spirit and grant them wisdom from above as they make important decisions concerning the church, its life and future.

Covid-19

Following the Government guidance on this world pandemic we had our last services at the church premises on Sunday 22 March 2020. We include a tract that we have published.

On behalf of my family, I would like to give a testimony that we have a God who answers prayer.

On 9th April 2020 we joined with Forest Hall Church for a Day of Prayer for the nation. My father shared a devotion on the parable of the importunate widow (Luke 18:1-8) and 2 Chronicles 7:14 which (from the previous verse) says, "If I shut up heaven that there be no rain,

or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

My mother, Faye Amurao, has been a kidney transplant patient for 4 years and is on regular medications to suppress her immune system which makes her particularly vulnerable to Coronavirus.

We noted my mother was unwell after she complained of dizziness related to a low heart rate and low blood pressure on Thursday 2nd April although it normalised that evening. Two days later, she developed an irregular heart-beat. My sister, who is a doctor, was concerned that she could have developed a stroke so we asked for prayer and took her to our local A&E. After about 3 hours, her heart rhythm returned to normal.

By Monday 6th April, my mother had developed flu-like symptoms including chills, high fevers, aches and weakness throughout her body, a reduced appetite, and a cough. My sister arranged an urgent review with her kidney doctors for that morning. They took blood tests, started her on antibiotics (the change in approach to hospital care was striking when these were handed over without a prescription like a box of chocolates) and sent her home.

The following day, 7th April, we were told that my mother had tested positive to COVID-19. Over the next few days, despite our mother's weakness from the virus, she r continued to join the extra online prayer meetings that our Minister called as well as the regular Bible study and prayer meetings on the Monday and Thursday morning.

Hands were lifted up in prayer for our mother to the God of all grace, by family and friends across the UK, and relatives in the US and Philippines. However, her sickness continued. By Thursday evening around 6:30pm, her heart rate and blood pressure were low. These were a cause of concern because one of her tablets to reduce her naturally high blood pressure had already been temporarily stopped which should have caused her blood pressure to rise but due to the virus it had gone down. We continued to pray.

By 9pm that same night, our mother's heart rate and blood pressure had normalised. After we finished the checks, our mother said she had something unusual to tell us. She said, "Just before you checked me, and after I was reading my Bible, in the middle of my prayer, I felt something rising from my chest, and grating against my throat as if it was coming out through my mouth. I opened my eyes and saw a sizeable, blue, grey and white cloud outside my mouth." She added that, "I immediately prayed to say, 'Thank you Lord for taking this

virus out of me!" Ever since that remarkable incident, she has been well. This surely is "the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:23).

We cannot explain why some brothers and sisters have died and gone to glory due to this viral infection while our mother has been spared by our good and merciful God. However we

trust in the providence of God. Only He knows all things. We praise and thank our God that when "we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:9-10).



**143rd Anniversary Service of
The Strangers' Rest
Evangelical Church
Saturday 27th June 2020 at 14:30**

Speaker: Rev. Richard Mayhew
At 131 The Highway, London E1W 2BP

You are invited to join us via **Zoom** -

Meeting ID: 910-993-1031

Password: 667012

Or phone 0131 460 1196.

Or via our **YouTube** channel -

Strangers Rest Church London:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUV3ZmDVydcAFtZ6TCLGIa>

Editor – Mark Mullins (mlrmullins@gmail.com)

Editorial Assistant – Faith Amurao (faith.amurao@strangersrest.org).

Strangers' Rest Evangelical Church, 131 The Highway, London E1W 2BP; 07784531776.

Sunday Services: 11:00am & 6:30pm; Wednesday Bible Study & Prayer Meetings: 7:00pm;

Friday Children's Bible Club (Term time): 6:30pm.