

# OCCASIONAL NOTES

Strangers Rest Evangelical Church

Autumn 2020

[www.strangersrest.org](http://www.strangersrest.org)

“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: 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*.”

**(Isaiah 58:13-14)**

By Mark Mullins

In the last edition of Occasional Notes, we considered the biblical grounds for holding that the Sabbath remains a day that should be observed by believers and the reasons why it was changed from the seventh day to the first day of the week, the latter being the day that Christ rose from the dead. In this edition, I would like us to consider how we are to observe the Sabbath.

## The Lord's Resurrection

It is said by many that the Sabbath is a day for us to relax and not to do any activity. So many of us will treat Sunday as a day for a lie-in. We will get up as late as we can to recover from the previous week.

Rather than seeing the Lord's Day as the first day of a new week, we see it as the end of the previous week: a day in which to recover from the week that is past. Yet we have our Lord's own example of what he did on the first day of the week: he rose from the dead!

His work of redemption is finished, but he has not ceased to work – for we read that “he ever liveth to make intercession for us” (Hebrews 7:25). We also read in John 5:17 that the Lord

Jesus said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work”.

## The Lord on the Sabbath

Let us consider the Lord Jesus on the Sabbath day during his ministry:

1. The Lord began his ministry on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) – “And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 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, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes

of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bear him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, is not this Joseph's son?"

2. The Lord Jesus went to the synagogue and taught (Mark 1:21);
3. He healed on the Sabbath day – the man with the withered hand in Matthew 12/Mark 3; the woman bound by Satan for eighteen years in Luke 13:14; the crippled man who picked up his bed and walked in John 5; and the blind man in John 9:16;
4. He did good on the Sabbath day (Mark 3:4).

In addition to this, we read that on the first day of the week, the disciples came together to break bread and preach the word (Acts 20:7). Believers gave their tithes on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2).

### Not a Time for Idleness

We must therefore conclude that the Lord's Day is not a day for idleness, yet so many believers are idle on the Lord's Day. We have only to turn to Matthew 20 to see that idleness has no place for the believer: in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a man hiring labourers. The Lord turned idle men into useful workers in the kingdom: in verse 3 we read:- "And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way."

In 1 Timothy 5:13, Paul warns against widows learning to be idle and wandering about from house to house.

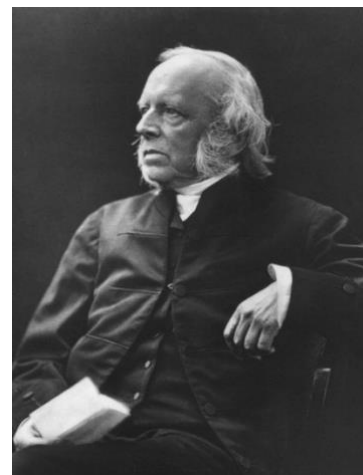
I suggest to you that far from seeing the Sabbath day as a day to be idle, the believer finds much to do as he glean food for his soul. Indeed, the great testimony that distinguishes the believer from the unbeliever is that without

Christ there is nothing to do on the Lord's Day except stay in bed until late in the day and idle away the rest of the day spending it on one's own lusts.

Pastor John Thackway (Holywell Evangelical Church), in an address he gave at the Salisbury Conference in 2005 on this subject, referred to Josef Pieper who made an interesting point about sleeping in on Sunday mornings. If we make the Sabbath the day to lie in, we will suffer an adrenaline switch and the body will have wound down too much by the time we arrive for morning worship. It is similar to starting a holiday when you find that the first half of the holiday you cannot get enough sleep. One possibility is to use Saturday for your lie-in. Otherwise, and I think this may be more practical, make sure you get to bed in good time on Saturday night. Then you will be fresh on the Lord's Day and won't need a lie-in.

### A Time to Prepare

This brings me onto another point. We should be using Saturday evenings to prepare ourselves for the Lord's Day. I wonder how many of us do? Obviously there will be times when this is not possible. We might have unavoidable duties on a Saturday evening arising from our work commitments or a social commitment that we feel bound to accept.



However, they should be the exception. Andrew Bonar once wrote to his brother: "At other times, especially on Sabbath days in the midst of prayer in the congregation, the temptation of wandering worldly thoughts,

completely overpowers and distracts me, and so also I often come away unprofited by the preaching of the Word." Andrew Bonar was a godly man. If he had such experiences, how much more we? One way of addressing such problems is in our preparation for the Sabbath – by setting aside time to pray and get right with God before we begin the Lord's day.

There is a scriptural precedent for this. You will remember from Exodus 16 that the people gathered the manna on the sixth day and not on the seventh. So we need to do everything we can the day before to prepare for the Lord's Day.

There is a saying: "healthy body, healthy mind" – but for the believer I suggest there is something different. Healthy soul, healthy mind and body. If the soul prospers, the whole person prospers, and so John wrote in his third letter:- "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth."

### **The Marketplace of the Soul**

The Lord's Day has been called the marketplace of the soul. We spend the whole week working for our bodies; the Lord's Day is when we work for our soul. It is quite striking. I would like to suggest to you that a Sabbath well spent in the labours of the Lord will leave your body feeling refreshed when it was previously tired.

I have heard it said that the Sabbath is a day of holy rest that it may be a day of holy work. It is a day when we rest from the labours of the world that we might give ourselves to the work of the Lord. I rather wonder whether we have misunderstood our duties on the Lord's Day when we see the minister as an exception to the rest of the congregation. If he labours in the Word, why not us? If he labours in prayer, why not us?

### **A Sabbath at Home**

Let us consider Leviticus 23:3:- "Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings." We note that we are to have a Sabbath at home as well as in church. How sad it is that many entirely ignore this aspect of the Sabbath. They will attend church but on returning home it is back to the chores, which even extends to stopping at the supermarket on the way home. Friends, this should not be. The Sabbath is one opportunity in the week for us to put aside all duties of the week, from mowing the lawn, to paying our bills, to washing the car, to hoovering the sitting room. I suggest also

that we should prepare meals as far as possible the day before to minimise the time spent cooking. We must help the cook have his or her Sabbath rest as well.

### **The Sunday Evening Service**

Another aspect of the Sabbath that has rather slipped into disuse in a number of churches is the evening service. For many people, the morning service is the only one they will attend, so churches are increasingly only offering one service a day. I heard one well-known retired minister say that he used to hold an evening service at 8pm because that was when people got back from their weekends in the country. I have asked myself whether that can really be the optimal use of the Lord's Day? Obviously we need to avoid making stereotypes and being legalistic but ideally we should try to be in one place on the Lord's day, not always travelling back and forth. Obviously there are exceptions, but we are looking to have a settled course for our observance of this most important day of the week.

### **Travelling on the Lord's Day**

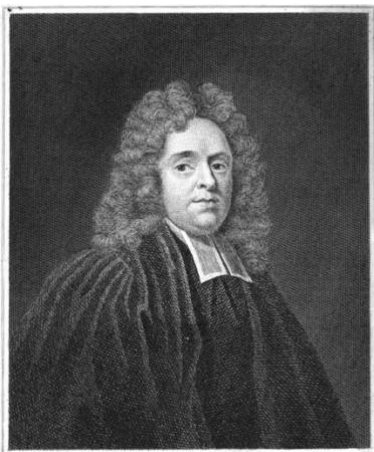
Should we then travel at all on the Lord's Day? This will particularly be a question that will be asked by those who live a distance from church. 2 Kings 4:23 is instructive. The Shunammite's son had died and the Shunammite was preparing to visit Elisha. However, before she left, she told her husband who said to her: "Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? It is neither new moon, nor sabbath." This suggests that it was the custom of the people to travel to the man of God on the Sabbath day. We should therefore be willing to travel to get to church. I remember reading once that during the Welsh revival, people used to walk seven miles to get to church over the Welsh hills. One can only imagine what that must have been like in the middle of winter, yet the people were pleased to do it. Sadly, in our day things are very different. People are unwilling even to get in their cars and drive for as much as forty minutes to hear a faithful minister. Friends, this is the other side of the coin. We must be willing to travel to where our souls will be refreshed. It may not be ideal, but Scripture does include the principle of necessity as being a reason to

deviate from the requirement not to work on the Sabbath.

## Matthew 12

In this regard, there are some valuable lessons that we can learn from Matthew 12. Interestingly, the Lord and his disciples were walking on the Sabbath day through some corn. It would appear that they were on the way to the synagogue because that is where we find the Lord from verse 9 when he healed the man with a withered hand.

First, the Pharisees accused the Lord of allowing his disciples to pluck ears of corn on the Sabbath. The Lord's answer demonstrates the principle of necessity. Matthew Henry's



Engraved by J. Smith from an original picture.

exposition of this passage is instructive. He begins by reminding us all of the ongoing requirement for us to keep the Lord's Day. We covered this in the last edition of the Occasional Notes,

but let me repeat it for our edification: "Christ's industrious explanation of the fourth commandment intimates its perpetual obligation to the religious observation of one day in seven as a holy Sabbath. He would not expound a law that was immediately to expire, but doubtless intended hereby to settle a point which would be of use to his church in all ages; and so it is to teach us that our Christian Sabbath, though under the direction of the fourth commandment, is not under the injunctions of the Jewish elders".

Second, of course, we see that the disciples were on their way to the synagogue, again confirming that travelling to our place of worship is needful and excusable on the Lord's Day. It was not an idle walk. Walking to converse on the things of the Lord and to meditate on His Word is certainly to be encouraged, but what about recreational

walking that we might do on another day? I will leave the question hanging for the reader.

It would appear that the disciples had forgotten to eat, perhaps being so fixed on their Sabbath duties or perhaps having been fasting in preparation for the Sabbath. Whatever the reason for their hunger, as Matthew Henry observed, providence so ordered their steps that they found themselves in a cornfield where it was lawful for them to eat from the ears of corn (Deuteronomy 23:25). This plainly wasn't much for the disciples, but they were content with what the Lord had provided. Matthew Henry cited one Mr Ball of Whitmore who used to say that he had two dishes of meat to his Sabbath dinner, a dish of hot milk, and a dish of cold, and he had enough and enough. That is a solemn thought for us all as we tuck into our rather more sumptuous fare...

The Lord Jesus justified what the disciples did from an Old Testament precedent. The show-bread was for the priests (Leviticus 24:5-9), being most holy to them, and Exodus 29:33 stated that a stranger could not eat of it. So here there was a need. As Matthew Henry pointed out, a thief that steals to satisfy his soul when he is hungry is pitied rather than despised (Proverbs 6:30).

The Lord Jesus also referred to the priests doing a lot of manual labour – killing and preparing animals for sacrifice on the Sabbath. This suggests that anything that promotes and doesn't hinder the worship of God on the Sabbath is lawful, including such activities as ringing the church bell which we did in our local parish where my parents lived.

The Lord Jesus justified these exceptions by three arguments:

1. In this place is one greater than the temple (Matthew 12:5). If the temple service justified the priests' work, how much more the service of the Lord Jesus Christ? As Matthew Henry noted, in Christ dwelt not the presence of God symbolically, but all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily (Colossians 2:9).

2. God would have mercy and not sacrifice (Matthew 12:7). Ceremonial duties always give way to moral duties. Deuteronomy 5:14 tells us that the purpose of the Sabbath is to rest the body so that no law should be construed to contradict the intended end. It would have been no rest to the bodies of the disciples to have starved them on the way to the synagogue. Instead, it would have made the Sabbath an unnecessary trial for them.
3. The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day (Matthew 12:8). The Lord Jesus alone is able to change the law – or rather, correctly interpret it. It is, of course, another reason why it has not been abolished. Why would the Lord abolish the day of which he has just said he was Lord?

### Healing on the Sabbath

From there the Lord and his disciples went into the synagogue where the Lord healed the man with the withered hand, which brought more criticism from the Pharisees. Matthew Henry expressed it rather well when he said that the work of necessity was done by his disciples when they ate the corn and the work of mercy was done by the Lord Jesus. He went on to observe that “the works of mercy were his works of necessity”, because it was, to quote Matthew Henry, “his meat and drink to do good”. The Lord answered the accusation of the Pharisees by asking whether they would save a sheep that had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day. He went on to observe that a man is of much greater value than a sheep; then in verse 12, that it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath. To quote Matthew Henry: “There are more ways of doing well upon Sabbath days, than by the duties of God’s immediate worship; attending the sick, relieving the poor, helping those who are fallen into sudden distress, and call for

speedy relief; this is doing good: and this must be done from a principle of love and charity, with humility and self-denial, and a heavenly frame of spirit, and this is doing well, and it shall be accepted (Genesis 4:7)”.

### Anecdotes from the Past



Let me finish with a couple of quotes from *Gleanings of Highland Harvest* by Murdoch Campbell. This is an anecdote concerning one James Matheson. I quote from page 113:- “There was another young man who sneered at his remonstrance

against his desecration of the Lord’s Day. ‘Beware,’ said James, ‘lest the Sabbath should break you.’ The young man concerned perished in tragic circumstances on a Sabbath morning.”

Finally, page 97: “Donald Duff had his Bethel seasons, and one of these was at the Creich communion in the summer of 1872. On that occasion the Lord’s people present were so sensible of the gracious Spirit of God in the ordinance, that one old man from the parish of Reay prayed publicly on the Monday morning for grace to endure the pain of separation. ‘The Lord was there.’ The services on that Sabbath began at eleven in the morning and with an interval of one hour, continued till half past nine at night. After the services the people refused to disperse, and continued to praise and prayer till midnight. The following day they gathered again at seven in the morning. The Highlands has had but few days like these since, when the Lord shined gloriously out of Zion.”

May each one of us so apply ourselves to seeking the Lord both before and on the Lord’s Day that it would indeed be a delight to us.

## Testimony: Hannah Munday

I don't remember a time when I didn't believe in the existence of God. Neither do I remember ever disbelieving that He had created me, that He cared for me, or that the Bible was His Word. Having started life in a Christian home, my eyes and ears were filled with biblical knowledge and practice from the outset: I was sung prayers by my mother before I could speak, taught from the Bible before I could read and taken to the church pastored by my father before I could walk there myself. From the age of five, I attended a Christian school in Wiltshire where I was taught about the world from a biblical perspective by teachers whose mission was to lead children to Christ. No one forced me into any of it, and they didn't have to; I was led gently by example, and I was more than content to follow. It was the only way of life that I knew.

Belief in the existence of God does not necessarily demonstrate belief in God Himself – although the two are commonly, mistakenly and dangerously conflated. I was warned of this repeatedly by parents and teachers alike, and at the age of six, I could tell anyone that there was a crucial difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge of God and His Word. Ironically, I understood this itself in my head but not my heart. In similar paradox, despite knowing in my head that I couldn't be a Christian simply because my parents were, I nonetheless rested on their faith for my own. I knew intellectually that I couldn't get to heaven just because I went to church and attended a Christian school, but still thought in my heart that I would be accepted at the celestial gates on that very basis. My "faith" was nothing but assumption: belief in who God was based on belief in who my family was.

Around the time that I turned seven years old, my conceptions of who both I and my family were began to be changed. I started to appreciate more deeply that my parents were mortal – something that my young mind had never truly considered despite never doubting that my parents would one day go to Heaven. My initial fear of their death was soon redirected on realising that if my parents were mortal, I was too. Concern for what would happen to me

if my parents passed away turned to concern for what would happen to me if I died myself. Would I go to Heaven? I had no certainty in saying that I would. I sought to push the anxiety to the bottom of my mind, often successfully, but where I failed to block my fears was night-time when they surfaced in my subconsciousness as a nightmare that recurred time and time again. In my sleep, I would fall into a black hole from which my parents tried to rescue me but never could, leaving me to spiral further and further into a chasm that never ended until I awoke still terrified by the experience. To my infant mind, the bottomless pit stood as a graphic representation of death and of descent to Hell – a place from which I couldn't even rely on my parents to rescue me. Little by little, God was awakening my soul to the reality of my spiritual condition in a way understandable to even a child. Deep down, I grew increasingly aware that I was a sinner and that death and Hell were nothing but what I deserved.



Fears and nightmares persisted for several months until a Sunday early in 2005. As usual, I attended the evening service at Maryport Street Baptist Chapel, Devizes, with my family. The meeting began similarly to any other, with hymns, Scripture readings and prayers that seemed no different to those of previous occasions. Neither did the sermon – at least to begin with. My father was preaching on Song of Solomon 5 v 6: "I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." I don't remember all of the message, but its ending stands out in my memory unlike any other of my life. Making a

final application of the text, my father addressed unbelievers by reminding them that if they remained in their sin, it would one day be too late for them to seek Jesus Christ. They would instead face judgement and an eternity in Hell. My father urged anyone in such peril to “seek ... the Lord while he may be found” and “call upon him while he is near” (Isaiah 55:6). The words that I heard seemed to be directed straight at me, and I was gripped by a sense of my own sin and unworthiness heavier than any I had known before. I knew that if I were to die that night, I would be condemned to that eternity in Hell – to that smoking, bottomless pit described in the Book of Revelation. I knew that I couldn’t remain as I was one hour longer. So, as directed, I sought the Lord and called on Him for mercy and forgiveness. As I prayed, I felt a sense both within and without of a burden lifted from my shoulders, replaced by an overwhelming flood of peace that was the very opposite of the spiritual anguish I had felt just minutes before. I knew in that instant that God had pardoned my sin and brought me into a

personal relationship with Him. It would be impossible to describe the joy that I felt in that moment.

Reflecting on those months of my life from a distance of fifteen years, I am increasingly amazed at the way in which God chose to work in my heart. Having been saved so young, it is only in retrospect that I understand more about the process of regeneration and conversion that the Holy Spirit effected so clearly in my soul. The fact that I had no intellectual-theological grasp of those workings at the time only emphasises that what took place was wholly spiritual, the agency being the Lord’s. God called me by name before I ever called on Him. I am and forever will be catching up with what He has done, for “He is before all things” – and I only love Him because He first loved me.

*Hannah joined her brother, Joel, at Strangers Rest in September 2019. She has since worked part-time in the church youth ministry.*

## **Praise and Prayer Requests**

For Praise:

- Please give thanks for the unity we are enjoying as a fellowship;
- Please give thanks for the spiritual growth of one of our eldest boys (soon to be 18);
- Please give thanks that the other 17 year old has resumed coming to some Sunday evening meetings recently;
- Please give thanks for the Lord’s blessing on the online Friday kids’ club activities;
- Please give thanks for the continued involvement and support of some families who attend Sundays elsewhere at the children’s Friday Bible Club.

For Prayer:

- Please pray for the fellowship as we continue the second lockdown until early December 2020 – that we would continue to be built up in love, serving the Lord and others;
- Please pray that one of the 17 year olds will continue to join us on Sunday evenings now we have moved online with the lockdown;
- Please pray that the Lord would be pleased to add a family to our number with a burden to reach Muslims;
- Please pray for our Gospel outreach in the community and beyond – that each of us would be given opportunities to make our Lord’s name known;
- Please pray for continued spiritual growth and that the Lord would save souls here at Strangers Rest.



You are warmly invited to our  
**Christmas Carol Service**  
On 6<sup>th</sup> December 2020 at 11:00am

**Details are:**

**Zoom** Meeting ID: 910-993-1031; Password: 667012

Or call 0131 460 1196 using the above details.

**YouTube** <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUV3ZmDVydcAftZ6TCLGiiA>

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**Services:** Sunday Service 11:00am and 6:30pm; Wednesday Bible Study 7:00pm;

Friday Children's Bible Club 6:30pm

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