

Series: Isaiah

Title: The Sabbath God Has Chosen

Text: Isaiah 58: 1-14

Date: March 22, 2015

Place: SGBC, New Jersey

The worldly man wants to know how little religion he can have and still be saved. Here, God declares how much religion a man can have and yet be lost, simply by missing the one ordinance wherein God and his people rest.

True worship is to obey God's ordinance from a new heart—the ordinance is to rest in Christ our Sabbath. Then everything we do in our lives will be done to the honor and glory of our Redeemer, from a heart constrained by his love and grace.

**Isaiah 58: 1: Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.**

This is God's charge to his preacher. "Cry aloud"—do not mutter and peep. "Spare not"—do not hide back the truth; do not say this is of some and not of others. "Lift up thy voice like a trumpet"—make sure everyone hears this word loud and clear. "Shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins"—God charges his preacher to show God's people that they are transgressors and sinners before God. Show them what their transgression and sins are particularly.

Surely, the people were harlots and publicans and drunks and vagabonds. Not hardly.

**Isaiah 58: 2: Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.**

They sought God daily; delighted to hear of God's ways. They appeared to be a people that did righteousness. But they had forsaken the ordinance of God.

Notice the word ordinance is singular. All God's judgments were shown to be settled in this one ordinance which they forsook. They asked God to teach them the ordinances of justice—they forsook the one ordinance in which God's justice is settled. But they asked God to teach them his many ordinances that they might work justice and righteousness. They only appeared to do righteousness. Truth was, they had forsaken that one ordinance of God which declared his righteousness. By forsaking that one ordinance, everything else they did was unjust before God.

## **THE ONE ORDINANCE**

First, this one ordinance was the Sabbath day which typifies the believer's rest in the Lord Jesus Christ through faith. Down in verse 13, God says, "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath,..." Notice, God told them to turn away their foot from the Sabbath—cease trampling this holy ordinance underfoot.

Remember when Moses drew near to Christ in the burning bush, Christ told him to take his shoes off his feet for this is "holy ground." It was holy ground because Christ speaking from a burning bush foreshadowed Christ speaking from the cross in the midst of God's fiery justice.

Likewise, God's ordinance of the seventh day sabbath was regarded by God as a holy ordinance because it greatly foreshadowed Christ and the rest which his people have in him through faith. All God's ordinances

of justice were settled in Christ on the cross. Therefore this one ordinance showed how the believer rests from all our works, in Christ, our Sabbath Rest.

## **CHRIST OUR SABBATH REST**

The law of the Sabbath Day was only a shadow; Christ is the Substance of what it typified. Believers today are not obligated to keep a day. Christ is the fulfillment of what those ordinances shadowed. By Christ's death we are free from those rudimentary customs of the world. Those who insist on keeping them put on a show in will-works religion, in false humility, in neglecting and afflicting the body but they never mortify the deeds of the flesh by their vain show. In fact, as we will see in our text, those actions really feed the flesh.

Colossians 2: 16: 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: 17: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ...20: Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21: (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22: Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? 23: Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Consider how much better Christ our Rest is than the day under the old covenant law. The law of the Sabbath Day only gave physical rest for the body, from physical works; Christ gives spiritual rest for the soul in him.

Matthew 11: 28: Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29: Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

The Sabbath Day gave rest on one day; Christ gives rest every day for all eternity.

Hebrews 4: 9: There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10: For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

Under the law, rebels in Israel did not consider it a delight to observe the Sabbath Day. Under grace, by the Spirit of God working in our hearts, believers delight to rest from our vain works in Christ our Sabbath.

These are reasons why, God condemned them for forsaking the one ordinance which foreshadowed Christ our Rest. Instead, they made the Sabbath day into a work of righteousness whereby they sought acceptance with God. So God said to them, "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*." (Isa 58:13-14)

## **THE OFFENSE**

Secondly, let's see their offense. God calls it "doing thine own ways, finding thine own pleasure and speaking *thine own* words." Oh, so they must not have any observed the day at all! No, the offense was they were observing the day but their hearts were far from God.

God gives us the words of the hearts of the children of Israel as they observed the Sabbath Day, "Wherefore have we fasted, *say they*, and thou seest not? *wherefore* have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no

knowledge?” (Is 58: 3) God refers to their observance of the Sabbath Day as a “fast” and as “afflicting their soul.” Perhaps they did “fast” and “afflict” themselves. God did not require they do either. But God is revealing their true hearts by this description. In their hearts, looking at their obedience to God’s requirement on the Sabbath Day, they considered themselves to be doing a great sacrificial and afflicting work for God. Also, remember they said, “There is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.” (Nu 21: 5) In their hearts, they thought that if all they could eat was manna then they might as well be fasting. But the manna from heaven pictured Christ. (Jn 6: 47-50) This was their heart toward Christ. They called resting in Christ a fast and an affliction because to do so meant doing without the works and the bread for which they truly had an appetite and lusted after in their very hearts. It is an example of a sinner who pretends to rest in Christ while his true confidence is in the works of his flesh outwardly.

So they complained when God did not take notice of them and their works, “Wherefore have we fasted, *say they*, and thou seest not? *wherefore* have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?” (Is 58: 3) The man who works for God’s acceptance is not even noticed by God.

## **GOD’S DESCRIPTION**

Listen to God’s description of their Sabbath observance, “Behold, in the day of your fast [in the day of your Sabbath observance] ye find pleasure,…” (Is 58: 3) This is what God charged them to repent from in verse 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.” See how God uses the word “fast” sarcastically. They considered their works a great fast and sacrifice but in reality they were eating it up; it was great pleasure to them!

Brethren, have you ever come across folks like this in our day? They observe Saturday or Sunday—act sad and sorrowful, act as if it is a great sacrifice to do without on a day—but they are so proud of it, they delight in it.

God says of them, “and [you] exact all your labours.” (Is 58: 3) It is amazing! As they rested outwardly from all their works, they tallied up all their works. They took their tally sheet and said, “God says, ‘Cease from your work.’ Check, we did that!” But they missed the spiritual meaning that believing on Christ, we cease from our religious works for righteousness and sanctification.

They said, “God says, ‘Gather no food or sticks or kindle a fire for food.’ Check, we did that!” But they missed the meaning that God’s child rests in Christ our Bread, our Righteousness our Eternal Life.

They said, “God says, ‘Set all your servants free so they can rest.’ Check, we did that! And if we saw someone not resting, we smote them and made them obey!” But they missed the meaning that Christ set his people free from that very vanity, from the whole law, so that believers no longer smite each other with the fist of wickedness or exalt ourselves over each other, requiring such things as observance of a certain day of the week. We trust Christ to discipline his people in our hearts through the gospel.

Be sure to get this. This is the heart of the will-worker who observes a Sabbath Day because he thinks he is required to under the law, because he thinks it will get him favor with God. He has missed the picture and meaning of the Old Testament Sabbath. He has missed the true Sabbath, the true Rest altogether. Our Sabbath Rest is Christ the Lord. Their ceasing from their daily work was their religious work whereby they expected to gain God’s acceptance. They look at everything they are doing for God and think “this makes God owe me.”

## **THE HEART’S MOTIVE**

Next, God declares the three-fold motive of their hearts for observing the Sabbath Day, “Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as *ye do this* day, to make your voice to be heard on high.” (Isa 58:3-4)

One, God said, “Ye fast for strife and debate.” The motive of their heart for keeping a literal Sabbath Day was to strive against and debate against other men, using their works on the Sabbath as their righteousness.

Two, God said, “To smite with the fist of wickedness.” The motive of their heart for keeping a literal Sabbath Day was to have a reason to smite any man who they caught not resting on the Sabbath Day. If he went out to gather food rather than trusting God to provide, if he did not let his servants rest, if he did not provide for the poor, they would smite that man and discipline him for his disobedience to God. Yet, God calls this their disobedience to HIM!

Three, God said they did it all “to make your voice to be heard on high.” Their motive for keeping a literal Sabbath Day was to use their so-called obedience to God to exalt themselves over others and to make God hear them.

Brethren, religion and religious works apart from God creating a new heart is deadly. We are constrained by the love and grace of Christ for us to rest from all our vain works in Christ and to love one another. The law has nothing to do with true God-created obedience. It is by the grace and constraining love of Christ our Master.

### **MAN’S CHOSEN SABBATH**

God asks a question, “Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?” (Is 58: 5)

No, that is man’s Sabbath day. How backwards in sin man is! Man calls it rest to fast and afflict and oppress his soul and others because he lusts after his own religious works and hates to confess he must rest all in Christ. There is no delight in man’s literal Sabbath keeping. There is no rejoicing and no true rest in it. God says that, not man. God accuses all who keep a literal Sabbath from a motive of self-righteousness, self-sanctification, and reward-mongering as taking no delight in Christ our Rest! If God give us ears to hear, that is God’s word in verse 5.

God was not in their hearts. They were not constrained by the love of Christ. Christ had nothing to do with it. It was all for themselves; it was all a vain work of self-righteousness and self-sanctification. They were not resting in Christ at all! Neither are those in our day who do the same!

### **GOD’S CHOSEN SABBATH**

Now, behold Christ, God’s chosen Sabbath-rest for his people, “Is not this the fast that I have chosen?” (Is 58: 6) Remember, “fast” is the word God is using for the Sabbath. Christ is the Sabbath God has chosen.

God chose Christ to set his people free from the slavery of legal bondage. God says the Sabbath I have chosen came “to loose the bands of wickedness and to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?” (Is 58: 6)

The legalist makes chains of slavery by making men obey days and the laws of Moses. They lay heavy burdens, heavy works on men, requiring them to keep the law. But that day typified, Christ setting his elect

free from that very bondage—Christ came and “loosed the bands of wickedness.” He “undid the heavy burdens.” Christ “let the oppressed go free and he breaks every yoke.” Christ did it all by fulfilling the law for us and by creating us anew in righteousness and true holiness.

God chose Christ to be our Life, our Bread from heaven, by giving himself for us, “Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry.” (Is 58: 7) We were starved of all life. Christ is the Bread from heaven who gave us life.

God chose Christ our Sabbath to bring all God’s poor elect into God’s house, “And that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?” (Is 58: 7) We were poor bankrupt sinners. Christ became poor that he might make us rich.

God chose Christ to be our Sabbath to clothe his elect in Christ’s righteousness, “When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him.” (Is 58: 7) Christ stripped us of our fig leaves till we were naked in sin showing us what we were. Then he covered us in his own righteousness after giving us faith to rest in him.

God chose Christ, “that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?” (Is 58: 7) Remember the parable of the good Samaritan. We were the man in the ditch left for dead. The Levite and the priest passed by on the other side. They hide themselves. Law and vain religion could not help us. But Christ, the despised Samaritan, came to where we were and did not hide himself from his own flesh but revealed himself and makes all his people whole in him.

God chose Christ our Sabbath to make us repent from our legal vain self-righteousness by giving us light, health, righteousness, protection and communion with him. He commands us in effectual power to do these things and brings us to do it by his grace, “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity.” (Is 58: 8-9)

Oh, that Christ might speak today and make someone here take away the yoke of the law, the condemning of others and the speaking vainly of their own obedience. If he does then you will have all these great blessings of rest in him!

When he gives a sinner this rest in him and turns us from our self-righteousness, then we truly begin loving needy sinners, not only by doing these things physically, but mainly by this very gospel you hear now. Here is what Christ is doing through his church as we preach the gospel of Christ crucified, “And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.” (Is 58: 10-12)

God says cease trying to coming to God by your obedience in keeping the Sabbath and all the law. That is nothing but your pleasure. Instead, delight in the Lord Jesus and rest in him. Bear witness of him. Then we will be true light when we point needy sinners to Christ the Light. Then we will feed sinners when we preach Christ the Bread. Then we will clothe the naked when we preach Christ our Righteousness.

**Amen!**