

# Day 5 Healing Time

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## “Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28).

There is an old rabbinic story, more of a parable really: God had gone from nation to nation, offering His law in an attempt to find those who would be willing to receive it. They asked: “What does the law contain?” When they heard about prohibitions such as not killing, not lying, not stealing, every people group rejected the offer, because they could not imagine life without such practices. Eventually, He found a group of people in the wilderness to whom he proposed the same thing. Their question was: “What is the advantage of keeping Your commandments?” God answered: “I will offer you My eternal kingdom, where there will be no more death, suffering, and pain; you will always be happy.” They smiled saying: “What You are telling us is beautiful, but it’s too far in time; we want something we can see and taste now.” God answered: “Along with the law, I will offer you a sample, a foretaste, so that you can see what the kingdom is like. I will give you the Sabbath.” The parable expresses a great truth: Sabbath is an anticipation, a foretaste, of eternal life.

### Jesus and the Sabbath

Each one of us has a certain image regarding the Sabbath, depending on the life experience and the knowledge we have about it. Most of the time, we associate the word “Sabbath” with rest, peace, blessings, and joy. We do not want the Sabbath to be disturbed by tense relationships, accusations, or physical or emotional suffering. But we live in a world of sin, and we must recognise that sometimes this is the reality. Not all Sabbaths are the same. It was the same with Jesus, which we can read about in Mark 3:1-6.

Perhaps the author, the disciple Mark, was present on that Sabbath. That’s why he could not forget the scene in which Jesus “looked around at them with anger” (Mark 3:5), because the grief was too great and He could not hide it, and because of the hardening of their hearts.

The synagogue event is preceded by another episode (Mark 2:23-28) that also took place on the Sabbath. The disciples with Jesus were crossing wheat fields, and they began to pluck heads of grain and eat them (Mark 2:23). The One who is accused again is, of course, Jesus, because He allows it. Each disciple talks about the miracles Jesus performed on the Sabbath, and if we count them, there are seven altogether. All the Gospels relate the tensions and confrontations between Jesus and the religious leaders on the occasions of these miracles, but the largest amount of space for relating the controversies that followed is provided by the disciple John.

An important thing that every believer should remember is that these discussions are never about how the day should be celebrated, but only about how the Sabbath should be kept. The Pharisees had 39 categories of prohibitions for the Sabbath, and the discussions around these prohibitions were endless and often sterile. Jesus was never drawn into such debates. Even in these two cases, He does nothing except express general principles that can be, of course, applied differently, depending on place and time, such as: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil?” (Mark 3:4). Evil is what they were planning on doing that very Sabbath—they were planning to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6).

The disciple Matthew adds a detail: “If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless” (Matthew 12:7). It is possible that on that Sabbath day no one invited the disciples for lunch. In Old Testament times and in Jesus’ time, the Sabbath was not a day of fasting; it was a day of joy. That is why Jesus tells them, “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The principles Jesus stated are profound and comprehensive! If they

were taken into account even today, many sad experiences would be avoided.

## Sabbath—a day of joy

Jesus is in the synagogue on the Sabbath day and is invited to preach. It's what we want every Sabbath: to see and hear Jesus! Jesus not only sets out the principles of the Sabbath, He also shows how they can be experienced in practice. There was a man with a paralysed hand (Mark 3:1-3), and at one point Jesus notices this man. He stops during the sermon and addresses the one with the withered hand: "Step forward" ("Stand up in front of everyone," NIV).

It is impossible for this incident not to draw everyone's attention, especially those who were following Jesus. There are three actions that Jesus takes on this occasion. First, He touches the sick man. At some point their eyes meet. Jesus sees a need, a suffering, and cannot move on without stopping to help. He sees the helplessness but also the faith of this man, who had come to the synagogue for worship. Second, Jesus gets involved. He doesn't just express compassion, which is important, but it's not enough. He asks the man to become the centre of attention, to stand "in the middle."

Many times, on the Sabbath, we position ourselves as the centre of attention, waiting for others to come to us, waiting for others to observe our presence or our ministry. Often the Sabbath, after an entire week of labour becomes the day when we wait to be served, nourished by God's Word, and blessed, forgetting the true purpose of the Sabbath: to bless others through our ministry. Sabbath can become a day of joy only if we follow Jesus' example. No one had the courage to answer Jesus' question, whether "it is lawful to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath" (Mark 3:4). Third, Jesus protects this man, He doesn't just heal him. The angry Pharisees and the Herodians, the two extremes of Jewish religiosity, came out. This time, they have a common goal: to destroy Jesus. Those who rejoiced remained inside with Jesus and the healed man. For them and for this man's family, the Sabbath becomes the most beautiful Sabbath. We are the ones who can make the

Sabbath a delight and a joy for our families and the church where we worship. But let us not stop here. The commandment spoken at Sinai (Exodus 20:10) requires the joy of the Sabbath to be tasted even by those considered "strangers" to the Sabbath-keeping people. God wants to touch more hearts through us on the Sabbath day; He wants to pour out more blessings, and to heal more sinful souls. Jesus declared in His sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth that this was His mission (Luke 4:16-18).

## The Role and Purpose of the Sabbath

It is important to have a correct understanding of the purpose of the Sabbath; it can help us to have the right attitude and action. The Sabbath is first mentioned in the Bible at the time of Creation (Genesis 2:1-3). It is the day when God finished the work of Creation. It is part of His work. They cannot be separated. If during the six days God offered us created things, on the Sabbath day He offers Himself by entering into the space and time created for humans. The Sabbath is the day when God is present with His rest, as well as blessing and sanctifying this temple created in time, to which all people have access.

Rest is not the opposite of work; God did not need rest, and likely the man and woman didn't need it at Creation either. Rest is the celebration of the harmony between heaven and earth. It is the joy of the whole universe for all that has been created. The first account of Creation (Genesis 1, 2) culminates in the joy of the Sabbath. In other words, everything God created was for this particular day, the Sabbath. Even after the Fall, the Sabbath continues to be a memorial of Creation, pointing back to the One who is the Creator. At the same time, it carries with it a certain nostalgia; it reminds us of what we lost. If you have lost someone dear, the Sabbath awakens memories that might hurt. But at the same time, the Sabbath speaks of an end—not only the end of Creation but also of recreation. That's why it carries hope within it. It's the end of our journey home. Every Sabbath is nothing but a rehearsal for the day

when we will see face-to-face the One who is the Lord of the Sabbath. This way the Sabbath becomes a vault that connects the Creation with the recreation through Jesus Christ, and in the centre of this arch is the cross of Golgotha.

We can also call the Sabbath the meeting day. When my parents were alive and I would tell them that I was coming home for a visit, it was the most beautiful day for them. Every occasion to meet was full of emotion and joy. Nothing is sadder than parents expecting their children to come, and the children not honouring them with their presence. Each Sabbath, God opens the door of blessings and expects His children to come for a new feast.

Every Sabbath, we experience rest by putting into practice the principle of accomplished work. We have many plans, to-do lists, and countless wishes. Life beyond the gates of Eden is marked by many failures. On the other hand, the Sabbath tells us to put our worries aside, to stop, and to learn the most important lesson: what God does for us is far more important than our accomplishments. In the work of Creation and recreation, rest precedes work. The first full day for the first human family was a day of rest.

## Sabbath in the Context of the Great Controversy

God did not want this planet to become a place of pain and suffering, but He foresaw the possibility of humans falling, so He gave us the Sabbath. He wanted to say that the danger of falling into sin is real, so it is not enough to meet just once a year or once a month. He wants to spend a day together with us every week. The need for God's presence is imperative after falling into sin. The miracles performed by Christ on the Sabbath must be seen in the context of the great struggle. "The object of God's work in this world is the redemption of man; therefore that which is necessary to be done on the Sabbath in the accomplishment of this work is in accord with the Sabbath law."<sup>1</sup> Before falling into sin, God rested with the man and woman (Genesis 2: 1-3), but in the conditions of sin and suffering, God works on the Sabbath. In this

way He manifests His presence. The Gospels show how the tension between religious leaders and Jesus is growing, because of His Sabbath ministry. In this way, Jesus revealed His identity and the character of God (John 5:17-47). On the Sabbath, the salvation of humans, which was the work of the Father, was a priority for Jesus.

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, reveals in a broader way the reality of the great controversy. In the centre of this book is the Sabbath message. In this time of the end, the number of those who believe in the report of Creation and who honour the Creator grows smaller and smaller. That's why we must convey the truth: "Worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Revelation 14:7). The Jews had the Sabbath but rejected Jesus, and without the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), the observance of the day is of no value. They enclosed it with all sorts of restrictions, and Jesus wanted to restore its true meaning. Another extreme is when the Sabbath becomes a day of ordinary rest, without the respect and honour we give to the One who created it. The Sabbath is the means and occasion by which we show that God is first in our lives and Christ's mission is our mission.

In 2007, in the Romanian media, an article written by a non-Adventist, with the title "Forgive me, Beatrice!" was printed. The author of the article, Emilian Isailă, describes an incident when he attended secondary school in Bucharest and had a colleague named Beatrice. He says: "She was a small girl, beautiful, and smart. She was a good student and did not speak without being asked. For the whole class, Beatrice was a mystery. I sincerely envied her. At the time, it seemed incredible to me that a student missed a day of classes every week. Besides not coming on Saturday, Beatrice had been leaving from the last classes on Friday. We were studying in the afternoon, and as the evening was approaching, she packed her things and left. Beatrice was the daughter of a doctor's family, and they were members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Every Saturday the teachers noted her unmotivated absences. On a Friday afternoon,

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 285.

by the end of History class, five minutes before the bell rang, our teacher suggested that we not let Beatrice leave. Beatrice, impassive to threats, began to pack her things. The teacher called us to stop her. A few boys, including myself, blocked the door; others surrounded her, trying to make her give up. Beatrice sat back down in her desk. She covered her ears with her hands so she could no longer hear us and began to cry. Tears streamed down her cheeks like two springs that had finally found their way to the light. We got blocked. Suddenly there was silence as if the whole class had a revelation. We were ashamed. From that day on, Beatrice had no problems leaving school. A kind of mysterious solidarity had been created between us and her. We were helping her."

Even today, Jesus addresses the young people, the parents, all of us: "Stand up in front of everyone" (Mark 3:3, NIV). The Sabbath is the means through which we honour God. We show that He deserves to come first in our life. Sabbath is day of healing, a time when our hearts are touched by His love. Sabbath is the day in which God wants to bring healing and blessings through His children for those around us. Sabbath is the sign of belonging and faithfulness to God.

Questions:

1. What place does the Sabbath have in your family's schedule? Is the Sabbath a day of joy?
2. How can the Sabbath become a blessing to those around us?
3. What decisions do you want to make for a reconsideration of how you celebrate the Sabbath?

## I Promise

To **KEEP** the **SABBATH**, preparing for it accordingly on Friday, keeping its limits, right thoughts and activities.

# Children's Story: Present, the Present

**“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8).**

Betty always celebrated her birthday in the same way. She would invite her friends over; they would play games and have fun together for a few hours. Then her mum would bring a special birthday cake, which was different every year, and she would serve various goodies that her mum prepared. After everyone left, she would help her mum clean up the house, open her presents, and spend some time enjoying her new toys.

This year it was different. Her birthday fell on a Saturday, and she knew she had to celebrate it differently. She knew it was not just her birthday, it was also Jesus' celebration. She wanted to put Him first, to make Him happy on His special day. When her friends asked her what she had planned for her birthday, she told them: “I have a special invitation for you this year.” “What is it? What is it?” asked Amy, curious. “Well, I want to invite you all to church in the morning, and then you are all invited over for a special celebration lunch at my house. Afterwards, we will go on a special trip in nature and enjoy some special Sabbath games,” Betty replied. “Church?!?” repeated Amy, not believing her ears. “What does church have to do with your birthday?” “It doesn't,” Betty explained, “but it has to do with my Best Friend's day. You see, Sabbath is Jesus' special day, and I would like to first celebrate it the way He likes, and I'm sure He will turn it into a happy feast for me, too.”

As her birthday approached, nothing seemed to be okay. The whole week before, the weather was cold and rainy and unsuitable for an outdoor walk. Her mum, who had planned to prepare a special berry cake, had to work so much overtime that she did not have time to go to the market and buy the fruit. Even Mark, Betty's little brother, didn't feel very well, and Betty was afraid her birthday plan would fail. But she prayed hard about it and was determined

to make the day “a delight,” as she knew all Sabbaths were supposed to be, in spite of all the challenges.

Surprisingly, Saturday morning the weather turned out to be very nice, and the sun shone warm and bright. At church, the instructor from her Sabbath School group wanted to surprise her and prepared a big strawberry cake for everyone, and they ate it at the end of the class. To her surprise, all her friends attended church and came over afterwards, bringing her presents and making the lunch a real celebration. And most of all, in the afternoon, when they went for a walk in nature about two miles away from their village, they found a tiny, little puppy, probably lost or abandoned by someone far from home. “It's exactly what I've wanted!” Betty exclaimed, excited. I have prayed so much to get a puppy for my birthday, but I knew my mum and dad would not allow me to get one at home, so I didn't tell anyone about my wish.” “Seriously?” her mum asked. “Yes, Mum,” Betty replied. “Please, please, can I take him home? I will call him Present, because he's my birthday present from God.” She jumped happily, holding the little puppy close in her arms.

“You're so lucky!” exclaimed Amy. “You've gotten exactly the birthday you've dreamed of. And I think it was, indeed, one of the best birthdays you've ever had.” “I told you,” replied Betty. “When we take care of God's day, He will make ours a real celebration!”

Questions:

1. Why do you think it is important to keep the Sabbath and celebrate it?
2. What things can you do to make the Sabbath day special and beautiful?
3. Name a friend who does not know about the Sabbath, and share the special news about God's day with that person.