

Why did you come to church today? It is another beautiful weekend in Michigan. You could have packed up the car early and gone to Tawas or Traverse City. You could have used the morning to stay in bed and catch up on your sleep. You could have stayed home to wash the car, cut the grass, or clean the garage. Why did you come to church? I know why you came. You have come here to enjoy the beautiful peace and rest that can only be found in Jesus Christ, a peace and a rest this world and all its blessings are not able to give you.

But maybe that wasn't the reason. Maybe you are here today, because you are staying with a friend who is going, so you just are coming along with them. Or maybe you came to church today because you want to earn favor with God. You are doing your thing on Sunday to get a better place in heaven or trying to look good to others or cash in on more blessings in this life. In fact, maybe you are thinking that you're doing God a favor by coming to worship today. The bottom line is that only God and you know for sure why you came to church today. In order that we might all examine our own hearts this morning, Jesus teaches us a very important lesson about going to church. May you be here today to "Enjoy the Favor of God You already have!"

We meet two groups of people in our reading. ***One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. {24} The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"*** One group is the Pharisees. They are very pious in their own kind of way. They view the Bible as a book of rules and laws that must be obeyed to gain God's favor. They view themselves as living by the rules. Not only did they outwardly keep most of the worship laws in the Old Testament, they even added hundreds of laws of their own, which were even more specific and strict than the ones God set down in the Bible.

The other group of people in our reading is Jesus and his disciples. It was a Sabbath Day, and Jesus and his disciples were walking on a path that took them through a farmer's grain field. While they were walking, the disciples were picking the heads off the grain and eating them for lunch, because they were hungry. There was nothing wrong with what they were doing. They were not trespassing, because the path cut right through the grain field. They weren't stealing, because God commanded farmers in the Old Testament to leave some grain in their field after harvest for hungry travelers to eat. And there is no indication from the reading that the farmer had any problem with what the disciples were doing.

But the Pharisees had a problem. They expressed shock that the disciples were "working" on the Sabbath Day by picking heads of grain to eat. In the Old Testament God had commanded that on the Sabbath Day no work was to be done, but it was to be a day for physical rest and for getting together for public worship. The Pharisees interpreted that so strictly that they added their own little laws about how many steps you could take on the Sabbath Day, how much preparation you could put into your meals, and even how much work you could put into getting dressed in the morning. If you violated their rules, you were guilty of sin. It's important to notice how Jesus answers their legalism. He simply brushes aside all their rules and laws and goes back to the Bible. He pointed back to First Samuel 21 where it says that King David, whom they greatly admired as a great king, had done pretty much the same thing, and God did not condemn him. When David and his men were hungry, they went into the house of God and ate some of the special bread that only the priests were to eat. ***In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.*** This example showed that in times of emergency it was okay to eat this bread to feed someone in need. What God commands in his laws is love, not legalistically going through the motions of being a pious person. Jesus' point

was clear: if David wasn't wrong to eat that bread that was set aside for the priests, then neither was he wrong for allowing his disciples to eat grain on the Sabbath Day.

There has to be a reason why the Holy Spirit recorded in the Bible all these encounters that Jesus had with these religious people called the Pharisees. It has to be that God wants each of us to look deep inside our own heart. There's a little Pharisee inside all of us. There's a dangerous tendency deep inside of us to think that we can earn God's favor by outward obedience to his laws – by going through the outward motions of church attendance, by praying, by being a nicer person. Why are you in church today? Do we sometimes think that we're earning God's favor by simply coming to church? Do we view worship attendance as doing our duty to God? Do we skip church sometimes and think: "It's okay, I did my duty to God last week"? Or do we leave worship with a good feeling that we've done something good for God, and now he owes us good things for the rest of the week? Do we ever pick at and condemn the sins of others without serious contemplation and repentance of our own sins? Are we satisfied with a little knowledge of God's book and think we know what God says without really studying what he really wants?

Jesus once had something to say to the Pharisees of his day and the Pharisee deep inside you and me. He tells us that all of our outward obedience to God's laws and all our attempts at self-improvement can't solve the problem that exists in our own heart. *For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from the inside and make a man unclean.* Keeping Sabbath laws or any other laws cannot make us pure and clean before God. I cannot hope to earn favor with God by coming to worship this morning. Being a pious person on the outside can never cover up the sin and dirt on the inside. Then why do we come to worship, if it's not to earn God's favor?

Let's listen to what Jesus says about the really important reason we come to worship.

***Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath***

This day is not a benefit for him. It's not really even a day to praise and honor and glorify God. It's not a day to tell him how good he is, and how much we love him, and adore him, and honor him.... What does Jesus say? "The Sabbath was made for man" It is a day for OUR benefit! What do we get out of coming to church, We get to see our friends? Christian fellowship is all well and good, but no, not the point. We "feel" better? It can be a good feeling to worship, but worship is never based on mere human emotions. Rather, we receive God's gifts! Yes! This is it! This is what the Sabbath is about, why it was created for Man, why it is holy and blessed to be a blessing to us! And the blessings of the Sabbath day lead us to our next question. "Who is the Sabbath all about?" The Sabbath isn't about us. You might think so from Jesus saying, "the Sabbath was made for man" But not so! It is about Jesus Christ. For he is Lord of the Sabbath and he's also the giver of rest for our souls. "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The Sabbath is all about Christ.

Jesus gives rest for the soul – rest from sin. His death on the cross paid the price, did the work to pay off the debt of our sin. And we are free and clear! His resurrection turns death into life, not just for him but also for us, and only in Christ can we truly "rest in peace".

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus is our Sabbath-rest. The Sabbath day has a law shell and a Gospel content. Less a requirement than a blessing, less "you must..." than "we get to...". The Sabbath was made as a day of rest for man to find his rest in Christ, who brings eternal, complete, and final peace... calm... rest. It's interesting to note that on the Sabbath, Jesus' disciples were busy eating. They were hungry, and so they ate. So too, on our Sabbath we

find food for our hungry souls. We find just what we need, in Christ. And so, we Christians, come to gather in Christ's name and presence. We come to hear rest from our sins – confessed and forgiven. We come to hear that rest in His word, read and proclaimed. We come to taste that rest in bread and wine that is true body and blood for our forgiveness. Fed and nourished, well rested, we depart in peace.

We no longer observe our Sabbath Day on the seventh day of the week as the Old Testament people did. That's because the purpose of the Old Testament Sabbath Day has been fulfilled. It pointed to Christ, and Christ has come. Paul tells us in the New Testament that we have the freedom as Christians to choose our own day and forms of worship: *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.* But our New Testament freedom to worship how we want does not mean we have freedom to not worship. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us: *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* Because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, and because the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples on the first day of the week – the early Christians chose Sunday as their day for sacred assembly and public worship.

The best part of coming to public worship is that you receive a peace and rest and security that those who don't come to church can only dream about and wish they had. That rest comes from the completed work of Jesus Christ. Everything that is needed for us to be right with God and get to heaven has been done perfectly. When Jesus died on the cross he said, *"It is finished."* Imagine you are hungry, and you are sitting in a restaurant. The waitress places the food before you and says, "Enjoy!" In public worship the Lord your God places before you the blessings of complete forgiveness in Christ and says enjoy. That is why we worship today and every day. It's not to earn God's favor. It's to bask in and enjoy the favor of God that we already have in his Son Jesus. God grant that that is the reason why you and I come to church. Amen.