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FAILING TO NOTICE THAT IT'S A RABBIT Matthew 12

In the old Jimmy Stewart movie, *Harvey*, the main character, Elwood P. Dowd, played by Stewart, certainly seems to have a grip on reality that is loose, at best. At one point he tells a couple of people of a unique experience he had one night while he was walking along Fairfax Avenue in town. He said, "I started walking down the street when I heard a voice saying, 'Good evening, Mr. Dowd.' I turned and there was this big 6 foot rabbit leaning against a lamppost. Well, I thought nothing of that because when you've lived in a town as long as I've lived in this one you get used to the fact that everyone knows your name."

Everyone knows your name? That's not exactly the unusual part of that story. The humor in that statement comes from how Elwood badly misses the point. Commenting on the fact that everyone knows his name is rather trivial compared to the fact that he claimed a 6 foot tall white rabbit was leaning against a lamp post and talking to him. That would seem to be the part of his little tale that was most worthy of note, don't you think?

When it comes to some aspects of the Bible and our faith there are some things that frequently get missed, kind of like how Mr. Dowd missed the obvious point. To this day I encounter people exhorting others to keep the Sabbath, meaning they need to not do anything on Sunday, except go to church. Certainly they must not work on the Sabbath. Sometimes they make a huge deal about this. They apparently don't realize that they are missing the point as badly as Elwood Dowd did in that story. Today we are going to encounter some controversies about the Sabbath as we continue studying Jesus' life in Matthew 12. We will discover that while it is often misunderstood, in fact the Sabbath represents the most vital truth we can ever live by.

JESUS DEMONSTRATED HIS OPPONENTS' MISTAKEN:

THEOLOGICAL SYSTEM

The Sabbath played a big role in the Jewish religion. For some it still is today. In 2001 the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, passed a law requiring buildings to have what are known as Shabbat, or Sabbath, elevators. The rabbis have ruled that pushing an elevator button qualifies as work, thus doing it on Saturday violates the Sabbath. So Sabbath elevators have an automatic mode. On Saturday they go up

and down the building automatically stopping at every floor, so no button pushing is required. There is some controversy about this, as some rabbis maintain that riding an elevator up is not work, but riding one down is. It's a long story.

It can be a bit startling to read the Ten Commandments, which are so foundational for civilization because in the middle of crucial moral commands like do not murder, do not steal, do not commit adultery, we find Exodus 20:8. It says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." Wait, not working on Saturday ranks in there with not murdering or stealing?

At first glance that's something of a head-scratcher. We know the ancient Jews saw the Sabbath as a big deal. In Jesus' day keeping the Sabbath was so important that the religious leaders created detailed rules to clarify what is work, thus to be avoided on the Sabbath, and what is not. For instance, one could spit on a hard surface like a rock on the Sabbath, but one could not spit on dirt. That's because the spit would make the dirt wet, turning it into mud, and making mud is work. As you can see, you had to work really hard to make sure you were not working on the Sabbath.

In the opening of the chapter as they are walking by a field, some of Jesus' guys pick some grain and eat it, which was accepted practice back then. However, this happened on the Sabbath. The Pharisees immediately seize on the actions of Jesus' disciples. In verse 2 they said, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." They were harvesting grain, and that's work! This incident illustrates why the common folk had no hope of keeping all the laws. Jesus' guys were mostly blue collar men who worked hard all week. It never occurred to them that picking a little grain and eating it could be considered work. They knew what work was, and that wasn't it. That's why they didn't think twice about doing that on the Sabbath. If you happened to be walking by some grapevines and you picked a couple of grapes and ate them would you consider that to be a hard day's work? No way. Neither would anyone in that day other than the elite religious leaders.

Jesus was brilliant. He met these guys' accusations on their own turf. He answered from the Scriptures. He used an incident from the life of David. In 1 Samuel 21 David was on the run from Saul when he went to a town called Nob, seeking help from the priest there named Ahimelek. Ahimelek gave David and his men consecrated bread to eat. This was bread that was only to be kept before the Lord, then when removed eaten only by priests. So by eating that bread David and his men technically broke the Law of Moses. But the priest didn't make an issue of it,

and David is never criticized by the Lord for it. Jesus asks the religious leaders, “Why was that okay?” It was okay because giving starving men something to eat was more important than keeping a ceremonial law about the bread.

Jesus points to Hosea 6:6 where through the prophet the Lord said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” God is not interested in the performance of ritual religious duties as much as mercy. To keep the true intent of the Law one must always view it and its observance through the lens of what is merciful. In the case of David and his men it was permissible to set aside the usual regulation and feed those hungry men. Jesus skewers the religious leaders because they may have been obsessively meticulous about details of the law, but they were showing Jesus’ men and pretty much all the common folk zero mercy. Jesus was making a profound statement about what God really cares about and the nature of his Laws. He also asks, “Why is it okay for the priests to work in the temple on the Sabbath?” Obviously laws can be bent or broken if there is good reason.

What happened next put the icing on the cake. On the Sabbath Jesus encounters a man with a crippled hand at the synagogue. The religious leaders ask Jesus, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” That is a remarkable question. It means that Jesus’ opponents knew he had the power to heal the man! They could not deny that. The only question was, would he heal the man on the Sabbath? In their theological framework, physicians work to heal people, so healing is work. Therefore to heal on the Sabbath is a violation. Obviously they were seriously missing the point about mercy.

Jesus pointed out that if they owned an animal that somehow fell into a pit on a Sabbath, they would work to get it out. They would work. On a Sabbath. That’s because they knew God was more concerned about the plight of the animal than he was about them following Sabbath rules. So clearly it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, because God desires mercy, not sacrifice. In Mark’s account of the incident with the grain in Mark 2:27 Jesus concludes, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” In other words, the point of the Sabbath Law was to help people, not make life more difficult for them. That is a profound truth about God’s Law that the Pharisees failed to understand.

In our passage in verse 8 Jesus makes a huge statement. “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” He is claiming to be the Lord God of Israel, for only he is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus’ opponents began plotting to kill him. In their minds he was blaspheming and breaking the Sabbath, and inciting others to do so as well. This had to be stopped.

THINKING ABOUT SPIRITUAL POWER

In the next incident people bring a man who had all kinds of problems to Jesus in hopes that the young rabbi could help him. He was demon possessed, blind and mute. Jesus took care of all of it. When he was done, bam, the man could see, speak and was in his right mind. People were blown away. They said, "Could this be the Son of David?" In other words, is this the Messiah?

Jesus' opponents couldn't let people start thinking that. They were dead set against Jesus. They absolutely could not allow people to think he was Messiah. But they could not deny what he had just done in the presence of a crowd of people. He obviously had miraculous power. So their solution was, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." In other words, "Okay, we can't deny that he drives out demons and he heals people, but he does it by the power of Satan." They didn't deny that the power was there, they just lied about where it came from. So Jesus wasn't just a quack or a heretic. Quacks and heretics don't have that kind of power. He had to be Satanic.

This was outright dishonesty. Their own doctrine was that a person who could cast demons out of people had power from God. Now they faced an inconvenient truth. Jesus had that power. To be true to their own teaching they had to endorse Jesus. But they could not allow that. Therefore they had to come up with a new doctrine. Suddenly it was possible to cast out demons by the power of Satan. That had never been true before, but now it was.

Jesus dispatches this attempt at theological deceit with some logic. A kingdom divided against itself can't stand. Let's imagine that when the US went to war against Iraq the Air Force had such bitter rivalry with the Army that they chose to attack them. How is that campaign against Iraq going to go? It's going to fail. If Jesus is throwing out demons by Satan's power you have demon against demon. Satan's kingdom is divided and can't survive. Or another way to look at it, he says in verse 29, if you want to go into a powerful man's house to rob him, the first thing you have to do is tie up the strong man. Jesus is robbing Satan's house, so doesn't that mean he has defeated Satan?

This leads to a verse that upsets some people. In verse 31 Jesus says, "Every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." Uh oh, it's the unforgiveable sin! I've known people who worried that they might commit it and thus be beyond hope. Fret not.

By the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus had just healed and freed a person from demon possession. Remember that by the established beliefs of the Pharisees that was evidence that he must be from God and be wielding divine power.

Instead of acknowledging what they knew and taught to be true, the Pharisees instead claimed it was Satan at work. They did so for one reason and one reason alone. They did not want to admit that Jesus was wielding power from God. So they called satanic what was by their own beliefs the work of the Holy Spirit. That was blaspheming the Holy Spirit. It was calling what they knew to be the Spirit's work the work of Satan.

In the classic movie from the *Star Wars* canon, *The Empire Strikes Back*, there is a scene in which Yoda, the Jedi master, tells Luke to lift his X-wing fighter out of the swamp it is mired in. Luke says, "You ask the impossible!" Then Yoda proceeds to focus, concentrate, and use the power of the Force to lift the ship out of the water and deposit it on dry land. Luke, standing in amazement, says, "I don't believe it." Yoda says, "That is why you fail." What if Luke had seen that and then said, "Well, I think you have some electromagnets hidden up there in the trees, and you turned them on, and you used their power to raise my ship from the swamp. This is nothing but a trick." There would be no hope for convincing Luke of the real power of the Force in that case. He would have just seen unassailable evidence with his own eyes and refused to accept it. He would be deliberately choosing to deny what he could see was true. That's a little along the lines of the situation Jesus describes, except Luke would have to call Yoda Satanic for it to be more parallel. I can hear Yoda now, "Satanic I am not. The Force I am using."

Jesus' point is there is no hope for someone who does that. They can't be forgiven because God had given them evidence before their own eyes that demanded they believe in Jesus. Their hearts were so closed and hardened that they not only refused, they called it demonic, against their own doctrine.

To commit this sin you would have to see the Holy Spirit do something that by your own beliefs would irrefutably be a divine miracle, but instead of acknowledging God's work you would have to claim it was worked by Satan. You would label demonic that which was obviously the work of the Spirit of God. At that point there would be nothing left that could ever convince you to believe, so there would be no hope for you to find forgiveness in Christ.

DEMAND FOR SIGNS

Verse 38 is astounding to me. Some of the Pharisees and religious experts come to Jesus and say, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” Excuse me? Jesus had healed a man’s crippled hand then made another guy who was blind and mute able to see and speak. And now you want a sign from him? That’s like you’re driving to LA coming to the split of the 5 and 405. You need to take the 405 to LAX. As you near that point your GPS says to you, “In one mile take the exit on the right to the 405.” Half a minute later, “In a half mile, take the exit on the right to the 405.” Soon it says, “Take the exit on the right to the 405 now.” But you blow right by the exit. You realize you missed it and angrily yell at your GPS, “Why didn’t you tell me to take the 405 exit?” You’d been given all the warning you needed, but you ignored it. That’s like the Pharisees.

Jesus had given them all the evidence they needed already. Their opposition to him wasn’t because he hadn’t given them enough reason to believe in him, it was because they refused to believe in him no matter what he did, and he knew it. So Jesus says they are a wicked bunch, and he’s only going to give them one sign, the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was in the whale for 3 days and came back, so Jesus would be buried 3 days and come back. In other words, the sign he would give them was his resurrection from the dead.

But then comes that weird saying in verses 43-45. “When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.” Well what in the world is that supposed to mean?

Jesus was not giving instruction about how demons typically operate. He was giving an illustration, in essence a parable. You could paraphrase his story this way, “Imagine that a demon comes out of a person, wanders around looking for a new home, but then comes back to the first person with his demon gang and takes over again.” And he tells us the moral of the story. It is “If something like that should happen the final condition of that person is worse than the first.” He’s talking about his opponents.

He’s not making point about demon possession. He’s going to give them a sign that he is who he claimed to be. It’s a sign that should solve their problem of inability to believe in him. It is so dramatic, so powerful they should believe in

Jesus. The resurrection should settle the matter once for all. But instead they're going to reject it, and now their situation will be worse than ever. The one thing God could do that should convince them to believe they refuse to accept, so now their situation is even worse, for there is nothing left for God to do to help them.

APPLICATION

UNDERSTAND WHY GOD GIVES LAWS

Often religion seems to be about rules. Some of the fundamentals of our faith are the Ten Commandments. It starts with 10 rules. But that's only the beginning. There are a lot more. Consider some of the commandments, some rules, that you'll find in the New Testament. Love God with all your heart. Love one another as Jesus loves you. Pray without ceasing. Rejoice always. Give thanks to God in everything. Do not lust. Do not commit adultery. Don't lie, but tell the truth. Don't gossip. Keep your sexuality in marriage. Don't worry. Seek first God's kingdom. Forgive one another. Be humble. Don't be conformed to the world. Lots of rules. And every other religion may have different lists, but they have lists of rules.

Unfortunately human nature tends to chafe at rules. We want autonomy. We don't want anyone telling us what we can and can't do. We submit to rules when someone makes us, but we don't like it. Our culture particularly is big on individual freedom. We want to be the captains of our own ships, so we don't like rules. Thus today it is common to hear people say things like, "I'm spiritual, but I don't like organized religion." That's a way of saying, "I want to be spiritual, but I don't like your rules." Sometimes I wonder what's so appealing about disorganized religion. But then, I think I already know.

The appeal is that people want the ability to create their own religion, a "spirituality" that enables them to scratch the itch of that nagging sense that the spiritual is foundational to life, but that won't confront them about the dissonance in their own lives. In other words, they want a spirituality that will allow them to live in any fashion they choose and not burden them with guilt. Let's get rid of all those rules so we can have a guilt free spirituality. With no rules, there's no guilt about breaking them. But there are some problems with this boutique approach to spirituality.

Consider 2 problems. That approach doesn't deal with truth. Something can be true even if I don't like it. Second it doesn't solve our problem with guilt. Oddly, we can remove the rules, and still end up feeling guilty. That's because all of us, without exception, fall short of being what's we know we ought to be.

The Bible claims that God has revealed what right and wrong is. He has given us his rules. We may or may not like them, but that doesn't change the fact that they are true. But why has God given us rules? Jesus' opponents believed the rules were intended to be a measuring stick. The rules served the function of determining how holy a person was and thus how deserving of God's acceptance and reward. God said in the Old Testament that if they kept his laws he would reward his people.

It's a little bit like grades in school. The teacher makes the rules in the classroom. The rules pertain both to behavior and academic performance. You get graded on how well you play by the rules. If you follow the behavior rules and you do all the teacher assigns, learn what the rules require you to learn then you get a good grade. You will be academically holy, with a good GPA. So Jesus' opponents, along with the overwhelming majority of the human race, think God's rules exist to determine your spiritual GPA. And of course we all know that those who get the top GPA's get rewarded. They go to the best colleges and grad schools, into the best careers, make the most money and have the most prestige.

Everywhere in this world that is what people think God's laws, or whatever rules their religion, even their own personal boutique religion, are about. Whatever religion people have, even if they think it is no religion, they have some rules that measure their spiritual GPA.

This leads to a number of problems with God's rules. One of them in Jesus' day was you must keep the Sabbath day holy, thus you must not work on that day. If you are going to measure your GPA then you have to have some way of knowing how well you are keeping the Sabbath holy. So the religious people worked hard to decide what is work and what isn't. Walking is work, right? You have to exert effort to walk, and that's what work means, exerting effort. But we all know you have to walk some just to live. If nothing else you have to get out of bed to walk to the restroom a few times a day. So clearly all walking can't be work. So how much walking can you do before you are working and thus violating the Sabbath?

This, then, became a huge focus for religious people. So we get the kinds of conflicts we see in this chapter. Is picking a few heads of grain work? Is healing a man with just a word work? Don't you get the uneasy sense when you are so narrowly defining down to minute, trivial matters, what is and what is not keeping the rule that maybe you're missing the point? It reminds me of the NFL trying to decide what a catch is. "Oh, wait, that ball moved a little right there. It's not a catch!" Uh, maybe something is wrong with that approach.

So we wonder if that really is the point of God's rules. Why does God give us Laws? There are two main purposes. One of them we can see from these incidents, and the other is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. We are tipped off to one main reason God gives his Laws by the statement that the Sabbath is made for the man, not the other way around. The Sabbath was made for people, to **help** them. God gives us his rules not to see if we measure up and thus will be rewarded, but to help us to live more fully!

Consider Psalm 1:1-3. "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the Law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers." What is the effect of God's rules? Does David say if we do them we deserve something from God? Does he say that person measures up and will be accepted by God? No, obeying the rules brings blessing, fruitfulness, fullness and perseverance. It results in a full life.

Psalm 119:1 says, "Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord." What does heeding God's Law do? It brings blessing! In that Psalm verse 45 says, "I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts." Verse 165 says, "Great peace have those who love your law." God gives us his rules so we can have peace and freedom and blessing!

Think of the dictates of professional nutritionists. I am nutritional, but I don't like organized nutrition. I find their dictates to be burdensome rules that stifle me. I am tired of the guilt they lay on me when I feel like having a bag of Fritos with lunch, or have a delicious messy cinnamon roll with breakfast. I want to be free to go have a pepperoni pizza piled high with cheese. But the nutritionist doesn't set out a bunch of rules by which they might judge people and their nutritional practices. They do not seek to grade them and either reward or punish them based on those grades. They seek to help them understand how to live better, healthier lives. And that's what God's laws are intended to do for us. That's what Jesus means when he says the Sabbath is made for the man. All his laws are made for us, to help us experience life to the fullest.

There is a second aspect to God's rules that is important for us to know. They are used to measure our spirituality and holiness. But when used that way we discover that we have a spiritual GPA of right around 0.00. In other words, we get a big fat

F. Isaiah 64:6 says, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”

That’s more than a little disheartening. It addresses the good things we do, not the bad ones or even the neutral ones, if there is such a thing. It says our best actions are like grimy, filthy rags. All of them. This is because in every single one of us there is something twisted down deep inside, and it taints everything we do, even the good things. In other words, in the school illustration, there is something wrong with every single answer we give on every test. We end up with a big red zero as our score for every test.

Have you heard of Legionnaire’s Disease? It is a form of pneumonia caused by a bacterium. It is called that because it was first identified after an outbreak at an American Legion convention in Philadelphia in 1976 at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel. It was discovered that the bacteria was living and breeding in the cooling tower of the hotel’s AC system. Through that system it was spread throughout the hotel. Because that germ lived in the HVAC system it tainted all the air in the entire hotel. That’s kind of like what happens to us. We have the sin bacterium in our soul, and it taints everything that comes out of us. Even the good things we do are tainted, thus get an F.

So yes, you can use God’s law to measure how well you are doing and how spiritual you are. But you’re going to hate the result, because it says you have flunked. And it’s not just by a little. It’s an epic fail. Romans 3:20 says, “No one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” What the law as a measure of our ability to deserve something from God does is merely show us we deserve only judgment. The purpose of God’s rules as a standard is to vividly impress upon us that we need help. We need grace. It is to show us that if we rely on our own merit we have no hope of acceptance by God.

All over the world there are people trying hard to live by the rules of their various religions. Many are believers in Jesus who are trying hard to somehow measure up to what God commands, trying to be worthy and acceptable because they follow the rules. It will never work. All they will find is they fail and are in huge need of assistance. In fact, when viewed as a set of rules to measure our progress, that is the point. We fall infinitely short and we need help. We need God’s grace. We need Jesus Christ to save us.

Should we seek to live by God's rules? Should we try to obey him? Yes, absolutely yes. But not to gain or maintain some standing with him. We do it because he's given those rules to us so that we might live, so that we might have blessed lives. We obey them so that our souls and lives might be healthier, more peaceful and more free. Let's look at one Law and see how God's Law helps us.

LIVE A SABBATH LIFE

Let's think about keeping the Sabbath holy. That is unique among the Ten Commandments. Colossians 2:16-17 says, "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. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." So do not let anyone judge you about keeping the Sabbath. About which of the other of the Ten Commandments was anything like that said in the New Testament? Do you see anywhere that says don't let anyone judge you in regard to murder, adultery, theft or coveting? No. That should tell you that there is something different about the Sabbath Day.

Paul says it is only a shadow of something, and the reality is Christ. Do not murder is not the shadow of anything. It's the real deal. What does that tell us? We need to go back to the original significance of the Sabbath to understand this.

It is very common to hear preachers expound on the Sabbath Day and talk about how it is intended to enable us to have a full and healthy life. They talk about how we need time off. It is crucial for us psychologically, emotionally, spiritually and even physically to have time to rest. Without that rest we damage ourselves in a variety of ways. That is all true. But does that seem so crucially important that it should be included in a list of moral imperatives like don't murder and don't commit adultery? Yes, it is important for our health, but it is not a moral issue at all. Why does it matter so much?

Envision an ancient Israeli who lived in an agrarian society. Especially when his crops were ripe and it was the harvest season, his wealth and his ability to feed his family was dependent on him putting in the hard work of harvesting his crops. He needed to get as much done during the harvest as he could. So in that season he would work from sun up to sun down to pick those crops and store them. For 6 days he would put his nose to the grindstone and work as hard as he possibly could. Then along would come the Sabbath. He was supposed to do nothing. Religious people have twisted Sabbath all out of true by trying to say you can't do anything but religious things on the Sabbath. Not the point. The point was, **don't go to work**. Beyond that, do anything you want. Play baseball, go swimming, bake

a pie, read a good book, tell jokes with your family, just don't go out in the field and harvest the crops. The average Joseph in Israel might look and see his Gentile neighbor out there busting his rear end to gather his harvest that day. He might think, "Here I am, goofing off, doing exactly zero productive work. He's going to have a much better harvest than I am because he's working while I'm sitting here playing checkers."

Why did God command them to do that? Because he wanted them to know, to be reminded every single week, that God would provide them what they needed. The principle was that what that average Joseph needed to do was trust God and be faithful to follow his commands, and God would make his harvest be all that Joseph needed for fullness of life. The Gentile out there laboring on Saturday would experience no more real life than faithful Joseph. The message was that meeting our needs is ultimately not about how much better we are than someone else or how much harder we work, but about the fact that God will supply what we need as we trust him.

You can see that the Pharisees totally missed the boat on the Sabbath. God was never concerned with how far someone walked that day, or with whether they picked up too much weight. He said, "Shoot, for all I care you can get in a good weight lifting workout. Just don't go out in the field and think your ability to have what you really need for life depends on you working practically 24/7, including on Saturday."

This is why Paul said the Sabbath is merely a shadow of Christ. The Sabbath is about the ultimate question of life. How do I gain acceptance by God? How do I get his approval and the reward that comes with it, which is life that is full and eternal? The default answer is I have to earn it. I have to make myself good enough to deserve it. The Sabbath says that is wrong. The Sabbath says I need to trust what God gives in Jesus Christ. In Christ God provides everything what I need for the fullest possible life, for eternal life, so I rest in him.

The meaning of the Sabbath, from the book of Genesis until today, is God provides what we need. Ultimately it means God provides what we need in Jesus Christ. For us to keep the Sabbath means to trust solely in Jesus Christ, then to rest and relax in him. When I trust in what God provides in Christ, when I keep the Sabbath, what I get is life. It is life with God, life with peace, joy, meaning, hope and love, it is life that never ends.

You've heard it from me so often I sound like a broken record. Hmm, that's an expression that doesn't work anymore since hardly anybody listens to record. Okay, I sound like the recording at the airport that says, "The white zone is for loading and unloading of passengers only." In other words, I'm repeating myself. What God supplies is enough.

This is the core of the gospel message. There's so much controversy about origins of life as described in Genesis 1-2. A lot of that happens because people fail to perceive the message of that passage. It is about the Sabbath, about what God supplies is enough. That message finds its ultimate meaning in Christ, but it applies everywhere. And whenever we live by it we find life. When we fail to live by it we get the opposite. We get spiritual, emotional and psychological death.

Do you ever find yourself thinking God must be disgusted with you? Do you fear he couldn't possibly love you because you are just so fickle? Do you ever get down on yourself and think you need to do a lot better so that God can love you? When you do those things you are not living by the Sabbath. The Sabbath, which is about Christ, says what makes you acceptable and loved in God's eyes is what Jesus has done for you, and nothing else. Your flaws and inadequacies are irrelevant.

We recently had a Sunday morning where it seemed like most of the people in our church had something to do besides coming to worship together. We're a small church, and when a sizeable percent of us don't come, let's just say the resulting crowd on Sunday morning is less than impressive. I've never been one to measure success in ministry by numbers, but that particular day honestly it was a bit discouraging. Mondays are always a bit of a grind for me, but that Monday after that day I found my mood sort of circling the drain. "What good do you think you're doing here, Myatt? Does this look to you like the Holy Spirit is working a mighty thing? Just about anybody could get more going than this. It shouldn't be too long before you show up on Sunday and have nothing but empty chairs to preach to." Do you know what I was doing? I was violating the Sabbath. I wasn't trusting that what God supplies is enough. I wasn't believing that what I need to do is be faithful and trust that what God does is sufficient.

When I violated the Sabbath like that the result was not life. It was discouragement, frustration, defeat and hopelessness. It was pathetic self-pity. It was decidedly lacking in joy and peace, and I wasn't really loving anybody. After stewing in that ugly mess for a bit I decided to live by the Sabbath. I chose to believe that what God supplies is enough. I remembered that God is the one who causes any kind of spiritual growth, and that my job is to be as faithful as I can be

while trusting what he decides to do with me. Quickly I began to find peace. I quit feeling sorry for myself. Instead of thinking, “Great I need to work this week to prepare a sermon for all those empty chairs,” I was able to rejoice in knowing that God would bring to our church whoever he felt needed to be there. I rejoiced in the love we experience from our brothers and sisters at this church. I began to experience life.

There is a nearly infinite number of ways the Sabbath applies to us every single day of our lives. Let’s not get tangled up in figuring out what is and isn’t a catch, wrangling about the rules of God to see how we measure up. Let’s live by the principle that in Christ what God gives is all we need. The result will be real life.