

A man was visiting a church, I think for the funeral of a friend. Following the service, they all went downstairs for the luncheon. The man observed that at a certain place, everyone paused to bow before continuing down the steps to the basement. Curious, the man asked some of the church members why everyone bowed at the same spot, but no one knew why this was. One of the older members was asked, and he replied that he did not know either. But he did say this: “Many years ago there was a wooden beam that went across the steps at that spot, and everyone had to duck to avoid hitting it with their head.”

Now I don't know, but I wonder if it would have been seen as disrespectful had someone not bowed their head at that place on the steps?

What Jesus' disciples are doing in our text, in plucking heads of grain, is not simply disrespectful in the eyes of the Pharisees; it is unlawful. And since they are disciples of Jesus, He is acting in an unlawful manner by permitting them to do it.

Now permit me to draw this comparison. The Pharisees are stationing themselves at that one place on the steps for the purpose of making certain that everyone bows at that spot even though the wooden beam is no longer there.

The wooden beam is the Sabbath law. It was put into place so that every Israelite learned to bow to God's command and observe the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.

But the Pharisees kept lowering the beam. In the decades before Jesus arrived on the scene, they added more laws to God's Sabbath law. For example, you could not walk more than one thousand cubits on the Sabbath Day (about five hundred yards). You could not draw water. You could not make plans for the future. You could not be intimate with your wife. You could not say words that were stupid or useless. And they said that plucking heads of grain to eat them was the same as harvesting the grain. So, what Jesus' disciples were doing, because it was on the Sabbath Day, was unlawful.

Do you get the sense that the Jewish leaders were moving away from why one should observe the Sabbath Day to how one should observe it? In other words, never mind why we must bow our heads at that spot on the steps. Forget the why, but here is how you do it.

The Pharisees, and other leaders of the Jews, were changing God's Sabbath law from a blessing into a heavy burden.

But that heavy burden, that wooden beam was removed. Jesus removed it. Sabbath means *rest*. And when Jesus arrived, He became rest for God's people. Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath law because that law was pointing to Him. He Himself carried that heavy burden of the Sabbath law, and every other law of God. He kept them. He fulfilled them. And Jesus carried the burden of sin. Everyone's sin, yours too. The sin which God's Law condemns.

And Jesus took that heavy wooden beam – they stretched Him out on it and nailed Him to it. And that’s why that beam is no longer there. Jesus took it away. He took your sin away, and He kept the law for you. And so, that wooden beam upon which He suffered and died is not in its place over the steps anymore.

This means that the Sabbath law is no longer a burden for you. Jesus turned it back into a blessing. The Third Commandment – observing the Sabbath Day to keep it holy – for you means that you are able to come here on the holy day, Sunday, no matter how many steps you have to take to get here, and find rest in Jesus.

He is, as He says in our text, *Lord of the Sabbath*. Jesus is why David could enter the house of God and eat the bread that was only for the priests to eat. David believed God’s promise that the Lord of the Sabbath would come from his line and be his descendant. He was hungry, he and his men. And they found rest from their hunger and weariness in the holy bread in God’s house.

That rest is also for you. Six days a week you’re out there struggling with every aspect of life. You are engaged in battle against the many faces of evil. You battle even with yourself. Your sinful flesh never quits. It lures you and pulls you. And it’s tiring. What you and I need on the holy day is rest. We need Jesus. We need the holy bread that He is for us. We need His holy words that strengthen us. We need the mercy that His holy wounds grant to us. Because we don’t battle so well! We give in too easily to our flesh.

Do you see why Jesus brings you here on the holy day? Because He is here for you. He is the rest that your body and soul needs. You will not get this rest on your bed and your pillow. You won’t find rest in any other activity, no matter how relaxing it may be. Jesus alone gives you rest, because He alone is Lord of the Sabbath – the Lord of those who seek rest.

If you seek mercy; if you hunger for the forgiveness of your sins, then what you need is here, and it is for you. There is no wooden beam preventing you. There is only the cross of Jesus and the gifts He purchased there for you.

Are you struggling in your battle against sin? On this day of rest, in this holy house, lay down your weary body and soul upon Jesus. He was battle tested on the cross. He was victorious for you. And He knows the battles that are testing you. He stands by you to strengthen you. But today, His word to you is: “Come to Me and rest.”

And friend, Jesus knows full well that you fail each day with your sinful flesh. But He is your place of rest, and He is forgiveness for you. All your sins are forgiven. All those times you failed, giving in to temptation, He fully pardons you.

And on this altar, He is for you the Holy Bread on this holy day. The bread of the Presence, which David ate – it is here for you who hunger for it. And it is a sign, seal, and testament that the Lord of the Sabbath is your Lord who gives you rest by giving Himself to you for the forgiveness of your sins.

You have six long days ahead of you. You have battles to fight. But here and now you rest. You rest yourself in Jesus. Amen.