

Goal: That the hearers would observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Question: What's more important than going to church? Answer: Nothing! But wait, isn't that kind of extreme? Is going to church really that important? I mean, we've been told many times that we don't get into heaven by what we do. It's by God's grace alone and what Christ has done for us. *"So, come on, nothing is more important than going to church? But what if you wake up on Sunday morning with severe pains and discover that your appendix is inflamed? What if the baby is hungry and crying, and you're out of formula or baby cereal; wouldn't that be a good enough reason for missing church? What if you work as a policeman or a firefighter? What if you're a doctor or a nurse? What if you work for Hawaiian Tel or at a gas station or at a restaurant? Are you going to tell all those people that going to church is more important, and that they should quit their jobs or not work Sunday mornings? That's not realistic."*

The next thing you're going to tell me pastor, is that it's wrong to go to my kid's baseball game or a BBQ at the beach or out for lunch after church, because I'm making someone else work. That sounds outdated doesn't it? I mean things have changed. Our society is 24/7, and it depends on the many who work on Sundays. I'm glad the hospital is open for emergencies, and if I drive anywhere, it's good to know that there will be gas stations. Yeah, it's convenient, but it's like my dog Lilly who knows that she's supposed to stay in her bed. When people come over or we're eating dinner or there's something interesting, she'll step out one foot, then another, then another, until she's freely roaming around and getting into stuff. Of course, there're exceptions, but because *"going to church"* is the primary way we honor the Sabbath, it remains our highest priority.

Today's lessons focus us on what you and I should or should not do on a Sabbath. ***"Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you."*** (Deuteronomy 5: 12 – 14) People back in Bible times were more concerned about offending God than most moderns are. Even 20 years ago, when I was working as a Biochemist in San Francisco we still had blue laws on Sundays, but Biblical Jews, they took it to a greater degree in how they defined WORK.

For example, they classified 39 different types of work, such as sowing, planting, reaping, baking, and spinning. People weren't permitted to build a fire on the Sabbath, but it was OK to keep a fire going. You couldn't swat a fly on the Sabbath because it was considered hunting. A woman wasn't allowed to comb her hair and a man couldn't push a stick into the ground because it was considered "plowing", but dragging a stick was OK.

A Sabbath day's journey was limited to a 1 and 2/5 miles and children were discouraged from running during play. Then there was the debate as to whether or not a person should eat an egg that was laid on the Sabbath. ([Jewish Virtual Library: What is Shabbat?](#))

So, it's easy to see why Jesus' disciples were criticized for working on the Sabbath as they picked some of the grain, rubbed it between their fingers, and ate it. ***“One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” (Mark 2: 23 – 24)*** Notice, they weren't accused of stealing the grain; because God says that's OK. ***“If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.” (Deuteronomy 23: 25)*** Their criticism was that Jesus' disciples were working on the Sabbath, violating the Law.

Jesus defended them using the example of David ([1 Samuel 21: 1 – 6](#)) who asked Ahimelech the priest for bread for his men to eat. But the only bread was the holy bread of the Presence and he gave it to David. Jesus' point was that there was something more important than picking grain on the Sabbath. ***“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2: 27 – 28)***

Those who were so intent on keeping all of the laws were missing the point, for many today, the Sabbath may have lost much of its intent. Consider this fictitious letter:

Dear Pastor, I'm sorry we weren't home when you stopped by. We had to go to the mall for vitamins for Betty's angelfish. We found your note and want to thank you for inviting us to the special services. Sorry, but we can't make it to either one, because we are having a BBQ the one night and going bowling the next.

Pastor, you wouldn't believe how busy we've been. In July, my cousin was here, and then we spent two weeks on the North Shore. We were all set to come last Sunday when the cat got out, and I had to chase him all over the neighborhood. Then it was too late to come.

It's too bad we missed you. Do stop again. We think the world of our church and of you. If everyone loved their church as much as we do, the world would have fewer problems. Your loyal member, Luke Warm

P.S. We'll be sure to be there this Sunday, unless my brother-in-law comes in from Nebraska.

I'm sure that if it isn't the brother-in-law from Nebraska, it'll be something else. Church attendance has lost its place on our list of priorities.

But it's more than just “going to church.” Martin Luther explains the 3rd Commandment this way, *“We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect His word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy, and gladly hear and learn it.”* So, keeping the Sabbath is centering ourselves on God's Word; listening to it, wrestling with it, repenting and seeing things from God's point of view, until His Word lives in us.

There was someone who introduced each of us to God's Word. Maybe it was a parent or Sunday School teacher, a grandparent or a friend. Have you ever told that person how thankful you are that they took the time and effort to teach you? Paul reminds Timothy, ***"As for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."*** (2 Timothy 3: 14 – 15) And Paul encouraged the Colossians, ***"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."*** (Colossians 3: 16) Jesus encourages us saying, ***"Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it."*** (Luke 11: 28)

Even though there may be some legitimate reasons for not going to church with other believers, it is essential for God's people to worship Him. Worship is the key to keeping the Sabbath holy. *"Jelly Socks"* is the title of an article written by Beverly Schwind, from St. John Lutheran Church in Port Clinton, Ohio. She writes:

We are the family that comes rushing into church services as the choir is assembling and the bells are ringing. Why can't we make it just five minutes earlier, why must it always be a Sunday morning rush from start to finish? What does it entail to get a family of four children ready for Sunday services? It isn't that getting to church is an unplanned, last minute decision. The preparation starts on Saturday with baths. But there are many unpredicted Sunday morning experiences to upset the schedule and rob us vital minutes needed to arrive in church early. It may be an unplanned diaper change, a rush to the bathroom, a misplaced envelope, or a fast change of clothes. The children, having eaten breakfast, are dressed in their Sunday clothes. The boy, having no fancy bows or hair problems, is easily dressed and usually ends up eating the girls' breakfasts while they are getting dressed.

So, it was, not long ago. We were getting into the car minutes ahead of schedule when we noticed our son had jelly all over his socks. Father quickly rushed Jelly Socks into his room and changed him. Placing our son back in the car, he gave the oldest girl orders to tie his shoes. As we ascended the church steps, Jelly Socks walked right out of hastily tied shoes, and as the bell rang, I grabbed one boy and two shoes and entered the church.

After saying my "Good Morning" to the Lord, I glanced down the pew to inspect my family. I notice a sock inside out, a wrinkled collar; my earrings are still at home, but Dad looks fine, except for the while shoe polish baby is getting on him. And Jelly Socks, he looks angelic with His shoes now on and whispers, "When are we going home?"

I relax, and as we stand for the processional, I feel a tinge of pride and thankfulness for the family God has given me. What a thrill it is to have my family beside me on the Lord's Day. The hairdos, the wrinkled collar, the forgotten earrings, even the jelly socks are unimportant when we begin the worship of the Lord and realize that it is His day.

How important is going to church? It's the most important thing we can do, for the time spent in worship fills our souls' deepest needs and plants God's Word in our lives. Jesus said, ***"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*** (Mark 2: 27) Amen.