

Q & A #4

Question: The phrase “Jesus is my Sabbath” is frequently used as justification to not observe the Sabbath as a day in time, but rather, as a continuous resting in Christ. Would Jesus approve of this when He said that He is “Lord of the Sabbath”?

Answer: Jesus' statement that He is “Lord even of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8) is in the context of answering the Jewish religious leaders who were accusing Him of violating the Sabbath day—the seventh day of the week—Saturday. In doing so, Jesus claimed ownership and authority over the Sabbath since he was the one who made it at Creation as the centerpiece in His relationship with the human family (see Mark 2:27—it was made “for man”). He is the only One with the authority to define what the Sabbath is and how it was meant to benefit humans.

To say that Jesus Himself is the Sabbath, and not a day in time, is to go beyond what Jesus explained about the Sabbath. He described it as “My holy day” (Isaiah 58:12). He also said: “Remember the Sabbath *day* to keep it holy. Six days you shall work, but the seventh *day* is the Sabbath . . .” (Exodus 20:8, emphasis supplied). How can God's explanation be interpreted other than a *day* in time? Certainly, the reason it is holy is because God's presence fills it. If that is what is meant in saying “Jesus is my Sabbath”—that certainly fits. His presence fills the day with blessing.

While “Christ our passover” is found in Scripture (1 Cor. 5:7), the phrase “Jesus is my Sabbath” is not found in the Bible. This makes it an extra-Biblical phrase. It is an invention derived apart from Scripture and it is usually meant as a person's rationalization for not observing the Sabbath as a day in time—the seventh day of the week—but as a continuous experience of “resting” in Christ for salvation. The Sabbath, however, is an excellent time to rejoice in the reality of this experience in a person's walk with Jesus. We must also be aware that the Sabbath came into existence in Creation's perfection before humans needed to be redeemed through the meritorious work of Christ.

If you were a Bible-believing pastor and a church attendee came to you and announced “I am not returning the tithe anymore because Jesus is my tithe”—would you agree? Or what if a new believer preparing for baptism said “Jesus is my baptism” as a reason for not being baptized in water—what would be your response?

These statements are called “spiritualizations.” It appears that Pope Gregory the Great (590—604) may have been the first to use this spiritualization “Christ is my Sabbath” in his attempt to quiet those who were reminding the population that the Bible Sabbath is the seventh day of the week. Pope Gregory called them “prophets of anti-Christ” (James Ringgold, *Sunday: Legal Aspects of the First day of the Week*, Fredrick D. Lynn & Company, Jersey City, 1891, p. 267).

Jesus often used metaphors to describe His role as our Savior. He said “I am the door,” “I am the vine,” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the light of the world.” But He did not say “I am the Sabbath.” On the other hand, He did say: “The Sabbath was made for man [humankind] . . .” (Mark 2:27). And He was referring to a day in time—the seventh day of the weekly cycle which is a divine boundary of time set at Creation.

Did Jesus redefine the Sabbath? His several Sabbath miracles recorded in all the Gospels appear to be performed to restore the meaning of the Sabbath. These reforms stripped away the man-made traditions that had made the Sabbath grotesquely burdensome. Jesus' mission was to recapture what had been lost, not to redefine it. The result was that Jesus renewed the Sabbath's delight and honor.

The first century believers continued to observe the Sabbath as a day in time just as Jesus had practiced Himself (Luke 4:16). Historians record widespread Saturday Sabbath observance for many centuries after the Resurrection of Jesus. Those who had walked with Jesus knew His mind and heart first hand. Jesus and those who walked with Him are the point of reference for the genuine Sabbath experience. Paul tells us that Jesus is the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). That God intends for the Sabbath to remain a day in time is expressed in His description of the Sabbath's future in eternity “from one Sabbath to another” (Isaiah 66:23).

If the phrase “Jesus is my Sabbath” is popular today, it is not because of anything Jesus or the disciples wrote or taught. If the origin of this came from Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century in his attempt to denounce seventh-day Sabbath observance, how willing should you be to adopt it? Of course, Pope Gregory was willing to recognize the first day of the week (Sunday) to memorialize the Resurrection of Christ even though it is not specified in the Bible; yet, he was not willing to recognize the seventh day (Saturday) as the memorial of Creation which is specifically stated in Scripture (Exodus 20:8-11).

So, to whom will I give deference: to Pope Gregory or to Jesus Himself who explained “The Sabbath was made for man [all humanity]. . .”?

Answer prepared by Daniel Knauff, author ***Sacred Time unRemembered—How the Original Sabbath Was Lost and Why It Matters***, published, 2014.