

A GIFT WITH

P U R P O S E

by

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This Booklet is the substance of a sermon preached in St. Mary's Church, Islington, by the Reverend Derek J. Prime, M.A., S.Th., Minister of Lansdowne Evangelical Free Church, West Norwood, S.E.27, in connection with the Annual Thanksgiving Service to mark the Founding in 1831 of the Lord's Day Observance Society by Bishop Daniel Wilson, one-time Vicar of Islington.

A GIFT WITH PURPOSE

It is fitting that we should turn in the Scripture to that part of God's Word which lays down a principle which governs our thoughts of the Lord's Day. Our particular reference is to Genesis 2:3. "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God had created and made."

We are taken back in these words to the very beginning of God's creation of all things. We read: "The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done". Then the narrative goes on to say: "And God blessed the seventh day". Familiarity with the words and expressions of the Scriptures tends to mar the impact they should make upon us: and here we have a case in point. "God blessed the seventh day". Can you think in Scripture of any occasion where it is recorded that God is said to have blessed a thing, or a day? The Scriptures are full of occasions when God is said to have blessed *people*—men and women of all sorts, and in many varying circumstances. But it is unusual, if

not unique, for God to bless a *thing*, or a *day*. And the Scriptures themselves do not fail to notice this, for in the Ten Commandments we are told: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord *blessed* the sabbath day, and hallowed it".

"*God blessed the seventh day*". And, notice, He blessed it at the Creation. The principle of one day in seven is a Creation ordinance. We may enquire whether one in ten, or, for that matter, one in eight, or nine—would have done. But no purpose is served in asking such a question: for God determined that it should be one in seven, according to the pattern of His creation. The fact that it is a Creation ordinance, i.e., something which God laid down at the time of the Creation, reminds us that it is something for the whole of mankind to observe, and was not intended merely for the Jews, or for the Christian Church, but something which He ordained for all His creatures.

We should observe, therefore, that the blessing comes before the commandment. The whole purpose of the one day in seven was for blessing. "*God blessed the seventh day*". It was only after the Fall that the

blessing had to be couched in a commandment. And God's purpose in the commandment was that man might know the blessing. God's purpose, which is unchanging, was for blessing.

Let us examine this word "bless", in order to ensure that we understand what God did when He *blessed* the seventh day. The word "bless" is used in many ways in the Scripture, and principally in the sense of "salute", or "mark out", or "cause to benefit". The word is used in three ways.

SALUTED

1. *God blessed the seventh day in that He saluted it.* "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made: and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day . . . because that in it he had rested from all his work". God blessed it in the sense that He *praised* it: He was glad that it had come. He rested from His creative activity. We may ask the question: "Did He have to rest? Was it a necessity?" The answer is clearly "No". No such necessity can be placed upon the Almighty God. His purpose, therefore, must have been the instruction of His

creatures by way of example. For God the seventh day was one of satisfaction and delight. He had seen all that he had made, and it was good. "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). His work of creation was complete, and so He saluted it as a day of rest and refreshment. For, as Exodus 31:17 declares: "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed". The Almighty God rejoiced in rest and refreshment through the seventh day. When the sixth day ended, and the seventh day began, He was glad: He praised that day: He saluted it and blessed it, and declared it to be good.

MARKED OUT

2. *God blessed the seventh day in that He marked it out as a special day.* "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it". He set it apart: He marked it out. He blessed it because of its significance. It is a perpetual reminder of His sovereign creation of all things. God's creation was from nothing by the power of His Word (Gen. 1:1; Psalm 33:6, 9; Heb. 11:3). He performed His work of creation independ-

ently of any creature (Is. 44:24). And God remains independent of His creatures (Romans 9:5). God did not need to create the world, or man: it was an act of His free and sovereign will (Prov. 16:4; Acts 17:25; Rev. 4:11). As a reminder of this fact, He calls upon His creatures to keep one day in seven different. He would have His creatures set it apart as a day, *as a mark and token of His goodness*, when His goodness should be recalled, and His creation acknowledged. The significance of this marking out of the seventh day as a special day should not be overlooked; and it needs to be emphasised in this our day. Man all too easily forgets his creatureliness, and when he does, he over-reaches himself, and brings himself into problems and difficulties which he cannot deal with, and which it was not God's purpose that he should have to deal with. When God's creatures mark out the seventh day as a special day they recall their own creatureliness, and their dependence upon God, and this is man's highest wisdom. But remember that he is the creature, and God is the Creator. Later on God was going to use the keeping of the seventh day as the marking out of His people as His very own. In

Exodus 31:13, 14, Moses is told by the Lord: "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily, my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a *sign* between me and you throughout your generations: that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore: for it is holy unto you." The keeping of the seventh day was a sign of Israel's special relationship to God. The keeping of one day in seven for God *remains an outward sign* of those who acknowledge Him: it is one of the ways in which His people are to be distinctive in the world. That on this one day they deliberately recall that God made them: that they are His creatures, and are dependent upon Him. Still later, the seventh day was to be the first day of the week rather than the last, and to witness not only to God's creation, but to redemption, and to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. We should notice that God blessed the seventh day in the beginning to mark it out as a day — *the day* — of special significance, that men might not forget the fact that it symbolised God the Creator, and man the creature.

MADE BENEFICIAL

3. *God blessed the seventh day in that He*

made it a day of benefit for His creatures. To bless is to make a thing beneficial, in the same way that for God to bless a person is to enrich that person with certain benefits. God not only blessed the seventh day, and marked it out as a day of significance, but also because He intended it to be a day of benefit: the whole purpose of the day is for man's good. God ordained our physiology: He declares that our physical being alone needs one day in seven for rest. We and all men acknowledge that we need daily rest. We would rise up in protest if a man had to work day and night. And we acknowledge that we need an annual rest too. But God declares that man needs, not only a daily rest, but a *weekly* rest, rest both of body and mind. Man needs refreshment and renewal of his bodily and mental powers and these benefits come only from rest. If men and women ignore this principle, if they ignore the principle of their creation, they bring problems to their physical make-up, their mental well-being, and the welfare of their souls. Man's spiritual life needs renewal even as his physical, and the one day in seven has its vital place here too. God instituted the Sabbath that His creatures, and in particular

His redeemed creatures, might have regular and stated opportunities of worshipping Him. By means of the one day in seven free from work, time is provided for worship, quietness before God, and the hearing of His Word. By these means, God's truth is preserved, men and women are built up in their faith, and others converted to Christ. Just think what the progress of the Gospel might have been if God had not ordained one day in seven. Our Lord Jesus Christ set us a pattern here, as everywhere else: He was always found in the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. God blessed the seventh day, and His purpose is that men and women should know its blessing. We know that blessing as we adopt the principles that arise from God's purpose in blessing it.

RIGHT USE

Think of the principles that are to govern the right use of the day. We are not to observe the one day in seven — the Lord's Day — in a mere legalistic manner: on the other hand, we are not to be indifferent as to how we observe it. The rule for the observance of the Christian sabbath is not the *Jewish* law: rather the design or purpose of its institution is to furnish the rule. There

were many occasions when there was conflict over the sabbath in the ministry of Jesus, but He placed the emphasis upon the fact that *principles* must be wrestled with and established, rather than detailed rules laid down. His own words express this fact so well: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath". The blessing of God on the Lord's Day comes to those who adhere to the principles, and apply them carefully and obediently to all the issues which continually arise. The Word of God reveals those principles, as, for example, the following:

1. We should not work on the Lord's Day. "In it thou shalt not do any work . . ."

2. We should not make others work on the Lord's Day. "In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant" . . .

These two principles, however, do not rule out works of necessity, or of mercy: indeed, it is God's will that we should be careful to perform these in a way consistent with what we know His will to be in showing mercy and kindness.

3. We should not use it selfishly, seeking our own pleasure.

4. We should not use it carelessly — for example, as in talking idly.

5. We should think of it as the holy day of the Lord. And we should encourage our young people to do the same.

6. We should account the Lord's Day as a delight. It should be a day amongst the people of God in which the family rejoices. Ask any child living in a Christian home what is his, or her, favourite day. We should expect the answer to be "Sunday".

7. We should think of the seventh day as honourable, and thus to be honoured. God blessed the day that men might be blessed. That which God has blessed men should praise and honour.

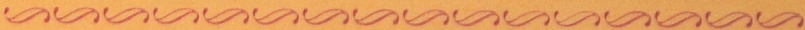
8. We should use the Lord's Day to take delight in the Lord.

9. We should seek to choose the things that please the Lord.

(See Exodus 20:8-11; Isaiah 58:13-14.)

These principles all lead us into blessing that God purposes for His people. As we follow these principles, all the purposes of God for His Day in our lives shall be ful-

filled. We shall remember Him as our Creator and Redeemer, obtaining that due sense of our creatureliness and dependence upon Him. Our bodies and minds shall be refreshed; our souls shall be fed. We shall be *prepared in body* for the six days ahead; we shall be *prepared in spirit* for that 'rest of God' which is yet to be revealed to the people of God; that rest in heaven which awaits God's people as their glorious inheritance in Christ. 'God blessed the seventh day', and He blesses it still to those who fulfil the principles. God has marked it out as a day of significance, a special day. God blesses those who keep His day, and keep it holy for Him.



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