

... That you turn your hymnals to page 321. It is a small catechism. We're talking about the Sabbath day today, so it seems only [inaudible 00:00:09] salutary, that we should study a little bit about what Luther says about the Sabbath day itself. Now while you're looking it up, I want to talk a little bit about the gospel lesson. We have, first off, the Pharisees coming and judging Jesus and his disciples about doing work on the Sabbath day. Now, this work was an offense to the Pharisees because the Pharisees had based their entire existence on how you could define following the law. They had 617 different codes of laws of trying to explain what God's law was actually saying. And so they would wrap themselves around the axle about every little thing that you had to do. And they themselves thought that they were actually following God's law almost perfectly. So much so that many of them could say, "I've follow God's law since my youth." And they actually believed that to be true.

Now, they thought of themselves as true followers of the law. And anything you did that was considered work, they would judge you for. Now, to put this into perspective, by work they defined you could take X number of steps outside of your house and no more on a Sabbath day. And the number of steps was how long it took you to get to the synagogue and back, and that was it. After that, if you had to do something, you had to stop walking, you had to figure something else out. I mean, that's how nit-noid and detailed they got. And so the disciples picking some wheat grains and eating them was considered work to the Pharisees. Now, Jesus turned their whole idea of what was pleasing to God on its head. The law is not pleasing, but loving the Lord, your God with all your heart, that's what is pleasing to God.

And so the Pharisees were offended by Jesus and they were offended that he was not showing them the due respect and honor that they thought they deserved. And you can tell that this has nothing to do with the Word of God, with the gospel, with salvation by their response to Jesus when He healed the guy with the withered hand. He heals the guy on the Sabbath. He says, "Is it right to help or to hurt on the Sabbath day?" And they're just like, "We're not answering that question. We're not having Him twist our words." So they thought. So He heals the man and what do they do? They go running to the Herodians. Really? The Herodians. These were the guys who said, "You know what? The Jewish people lost the war, the Romans seemed to have won, so let's be like them."

So they abandoned all the laws of God, they abandoned the customs of Israel. They abandoned everything, and they just started to look like the Romans and practice their lives like the Romans, eating unclean food, practicing unclean practices and all of that. So they were like the mortal enemies of the Pharisees. And yet when the Pharisees are frustrated, what do they do? They go to the Herodians. The enemy of

my enemy is my friend, or something to that effect. I don't know. But anyway, they were not being honest, they were not being focused upon God's Word. They were simply interested in their own prestige, in their own standing before man. Not before God.

Now even in the United States, the Sabbath day has gotten some confusion as to what we are to do and not to do. In some traditions, the only thing you could do on a Sabbath day was read the Bible and sit still and meditate on God's Word. You couldn't go out and do anything. You had to just sit there. Even if you're like a three-year-old kid, you had to sit on a bench for the entire day. That was the law, and people would judge you if you got outside of it. So the Sabbath day, as Jesus says, "Was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." What does he mean by that? Let's look at Luther's definition of the third commandment and we'll read that together.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. So in other words, the Sabbath day is about giving you God's gifts. The Sabbath day is about you hearing the Word of God and being strengthened for your journey of faith. The Sabbath day is about God promising that in this place as we gather together as a congregation, He promises us to give us His real body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. He promises us to be able to read the Word of God together and He promises us that his called servant is going to share the Word of God and explain the Word of God to you in a way that hopefully makes sense. His promise that this is where we receive the gifts that He has prepared for us in a unique and special way. We get to pass by the baptismal font as we enter the church, And remember that in our baptisms, God adopted us and brought us into this family.

And so we remember God's grace. That is what the Sabbath day is all about, is receiving the Word of God and rejoicing in it. So that doesn't mean you can't go out and mow your yard or whatever, but the idea of the Sabbath day is about hearing God's Word, growing in it, learning it, and appreciating the joy that you receive from it. It's also gift for you and me to remember that we have a chance to rest. Our lives are not a constant 24/7 of fighting and struggling and worrying and fretting and focusing upon getting more and doing more and whatever else the world might say we need. The Sabbath day is an opportunity for us to step back and remember that God has promised to give us all good things and that we, our worry, our fret, our doubt, we can cast upon Him because he cares for us.

You notice Paul describing our lives here in this world as "treasures in jars of clay." Now think about jars of clay or like the terracotta planters that we have everywhere. How strong are they? What happens when pressure gets placed on one

of those terracotta pots or it drops from like three inches or something? They break almost instantly. They're fragile things. And this is what Paul is describing our lives as. We are these jars of clay and think about the pressures of this world that are coming upon us, the struggles and the strains and the trials and tribulations that are in this world in general. And if you look at your own lives are personally happening to you right now. And then you think about your own sin and rebellion and rejection of God, your own disobedience to the 10 Commandments, and how that is also putting pressure on your assurance of salvation. And you can see that fragile pot of clay cracking under the pressure.

And God says, "Here's a Sabbath rest" to relieve the pressure, to help us to understand that God is protecting these fragile jars of clay, that He is with us and no matter what we may face, what does it say? Even though we are pressed on every side, we're not crushed. So when the weight of the world is coming upon us, we don't have to deal with it on our own, but we know that God has promised to take it for us, to guard us and keep us in His loving care. We are perplexed but not in despair. How many things in our life do we look at and say, "I don't know why this is happening?" And we want to say to God, "Why me? I don't get it. It's not fair."

And yet we know from the Word of God that even though we do not understand, even though we can't figure everything out, we know that God is there protecting us. So even when we face our mortal death, when even we face trials and tribulations, disease and sickness and illness and job problems and everything else that comes our way, we may not understand why it's happening, but we don't need to despair because we know that God has promised to give us all good things. He's already given us our eyes, ears, and all of our senses, our food, clothing, household, shoes, cattle and all that I need to support this body and life. We know that that is promised to us. And so we do not despair. Even when we face persecution, we know that we are not abandoned.

Today, I get a magazine called Voice of the Martyrs, and it talks about Christians in nations that are antagonistic to Christianity where they are in fear for their lives. If they ever get caught holding a Bible or praying, they literally are facing the sword and they know that they may be persecuted, but they're not abandoned. Even when they're struck down, they're not destroyed. Even if we die for our faith, even if that persecution leads to martyrdom, we are not destroyed because we know the hope of everlasting life that comes because we have heard the God on that Sabbath day and received His gifts on the Sabbath day and been assured that we are His children. And because we are His children, He will be with us and He will take us to be home.

So the Sabbath day is all about giving you the good gifts that God has promised to you in a very special and unique way so that you might be confident that what you receive is from God. Now, when I have confirmation classes in seventh and eighth grade for the kids, inevitably when we get to this commandment, I always get asked the question, "Do I have to go to church pastor?" And I usually surprise them because I say no. They're like, "What? Hey, pastor says we don't have to go to church. Cool." Yeah.

I say, "No, you don't have to go to church." But God has said, "I'm going to give you my special gifts given to you by my chosen servant who has been called by me to serve you my gifts. I'm going to give you my word of forgiveness and grace. You get the opportunity to confess your sins and you receive the assurance from God himself through my voice, that your sins are forgiven. You're going to gather before the altar and receive the real body and blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of your faith. You're hearing a sermon proclaimed about what God's Word means and helping you to understand the assurance that you have in your salvation.

These are the gifts that God promises. You get to sit together in fellowship with people who are in your same situation, who are praying for you, who love you and care for you, and who are your family in Christ. This is what you get when you come and receive the word on the Sabbath day when you come to church. So no, you don't have to come to church, but why would you not want to?"

So many wonderful things are given such comfort and peace and assurance is given. Why would you not want to come and receive those gifts from the hand of God himself? That is what the Sabbath day is all about so that you might be able to rest. Now, it was interesting enough, we do not actually celebrate the Sabbath day on the "Sabbath day," the seventh day of the week. On the seventh day, God rested, and that is the pattern for us. We rest as well after a week of hard work, but we celebrate and honor the Sabbath day on the first day of the week. Why? Because Christ rose from the dead. It was proof positive that His death on the cross accomplished what He said it would: the forgiveness of sins. It was proof that God accepted that sacrifice as sufficient for our forgiveness.

And again, Paul kind of explains it a little bit more in the beginning. He says, "On that first day God spoke and He said, 'Let light shine out of darkness.'" So on the first day, God spoke and light came into the world. And now we celebrate again the light of God coming to the world on the first day of the week when the salvation of all mankind was accomplished and proven on Easter Sunday. And so the light again has come into the world on the first day of the week: Christ's gift to you. And these jars of clay that we have a great treasure within, what's going to happen when the light comes again on the final day? Those jars of clay will be

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transformed into what we were always meant to be. The glorious creation that God has given to us. We will still be flesh and blood, but we will not be fragile, we will not be broken because the sin will be removed and we will be free. And Christ will wipe every tear away from our eyes.

And that glorious treasure that is within us will shine forth as we live with Christ for all eternity in an eternal Sabbath rest. What a glorious day that will be. And until that time, may His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.