

Choosing The Field Of Battle

Revisiting the Timing of the Resurrection

David C. Grabbe

Given 14-Feb-04; Sermon #651s

The battle over whether to worship God on the first day of the week or on the seventh has raged for well over 1,000 years. And there is not any indication that either side will be capitulating any time soon.

In the Christian era, the Sabbath has been a divisive doctrine since the 4th century AD when the Roman Catholic Church took it upon itself to assume the authority to change the day of worship. In the years that followed, thousands of Sabbath keepers were imprisoned or killed for dutifully obeying the fourth commandment.

When the Protestant Reformation took place in the early 16th century, those opposed to the abuses and corruption of the Catholic Church broke away in an attempt to set things straight. However, they took with them many of the same false doctrines that had infected the mother church. Among them were Sunday worship, the pagan trinity god, and various other pagan holidays and practices. So today, the vast majority of professing Christians attempt to worship God on the first day of the week, even though the Bible was very clear that it is the seventh day that was made holy.

The Catholics will readily admit that they changed it, and they also admit that if you go by the Bible alone, the correct day of worship is the seventh day, but they justify their dogma and their doctrine by saying the Pope has absolute authority to change such things. Protestants, on the other hand, are unwilling to concede papal authority, and so they justify Sunday worship by saying they are honoring the day on which Christ rose from the dead.

The war over the day of worship rages on largely because human nature believes what it wants to believe, even in the face of overwhelming evidence. People want to worship on their own terms (as we heard from Clyde last week), and very often they willingly choose to remain ignorant of the truth. Christ told the Pharisees, "All too well you reject the

commandment of God that you may keep your tradition.” But He may as well have been speaking to the Protestants and Catholics alike.

I do not have any illusions that what I will be speaking about today will put an end to this war. Rather, we are going to be examining one of the tactics that Satan uses within this conflict. The strategy that Satan uses is to determine and to manipulate the field of battle. He gets people to argue over the wrong things, and the way he operates is to see a certain detail blown out of proportion, or facts taken out of context, and thus a battleground of the enemy's choosing is set before us.

This is what we will be looking at: How Satan has chosen the battleground for the Sabbath and Sunday debate and uses this theater of war of his own definition to keep the unsuspecting masses confused.

In terms of military strategy, the field of battle is frequently a determining factor in the outcome. Even in the current War on Terror, we see the fields of battle being chosen with great forethought. The U.S. would much rather fight terror on foreign soil than on our own land. Rather than deploying our army within the civilian population, and just waiting for the next attack, we have taken the fight to the enemy. As the saying goes, we would rather fight our enemies in Afghanistan and Iraq, than in New York or Los Angeles.

Saddam Hussein has used a similar strategy, but with the opposite goal in mind. He realized ahead of time that his army was absolutely no match for the U.S. He knew that a fight in the open would leave his army crushed in short order. And so he had his troops put up a token resistance and then fade back into the civilian population of Baghdad. He knew the U.S. was reluctant to incur civilian casualties and used this to his advantage by forcing the U.S. to wage urban warfare, knowing that the international media would be recording every stray bullet and bomb.

By choosing to wage guerrilla warfare in an urban setting, he was able to keep the U.S. from bringing its full power to bear, because of the risk to civilians. He knew he could not defeat the U.S. militarily and so instead he leveraged the media and the international opinion which are entities that the Bush administration fears at least a little more than Iraq's army.

Satan likewise is a very shrewd commander, and he will gladly choose the field of battle for us if we allow him to. And if Satan has chosen a certain field, we can be certain that he has some sort of advantage there. We will take a look at this in Matthew 4 with the temptation of Christ.

Matthew 4:1-10 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

From this example, we can see Satan attempts to choose the field of battle for his own advantage. He tried to get Christ to focus on who He was and what He deserved.

In the first two temptations, Satan tried to cast doubt on God, either on His ability to provide or to protect. He implied that God is not trustworthy. He did the same thing with Adam and Eve, and as we will see, he does the same thing with the Sabbath.

In the third temptation, Satan abandoned all subtlety and pretense of piety and boldly threw everything onto the table. In this strategy, Satan's position on the battlefield was much more straightforward. There was no misapplication of Scripture as before; not even a mention of Scripture. There was not any clouding of the issue or blowing something out of proportion.

Satan tried two sneak attacks, and when they did not work, he decided to use a full-frontal assault in his temptation of Jesus Christ. He brazenly offered glory and authority in exchange for subservience.

We see that Satan will quote Scripture when it suits his purpose. He will grossly emphasize some elements and greatly diminish others. He will couch things in certain terms that deflect us away from the core issue. He will make mountains out of molehills, and molehills out of mountains. The perception with which he presents us almost always has a shade of truth, but it is in the wrong context, or with the wrong application. And as this example shows, the right application of a simple biblical principle is the best defense against Satan and his twisted landscape of reality.

One of the places where Satan has used this strategy very effectively is in the debate of which day of the week is to be kept holy. Please turn with me to Mark 16, verse 9. This verse often serves as Satan's high ground in the war.

Mark 16:9 Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.

If you have been in the church for any length of time, you are probably very familiar with the emphasis that Protestants place on this verse as their proof of a Sunday resurrection. You are also probably aware that the Greek does not have punctuation, and that the King James translators put the comma after the word "week," rather it should have been placed after the word "rose." "Now when He rose, early on the first day of the week, . . ."

You are also most likely familiar with the sequence of three days and three nights that can only be fulfilled through a crucifixion that took place late in the afternoon on Passover, which was Wednesday that year, and a resurrection 72 hours later on Sabbath afternoon. These facts and sequences are well established, and there is not a need to re-prove them at this time.

This battle over the timing of the resurrection has been fought over and over again, and undoubtedly this pleases Satan greatly because it gives him an advantage in clouding men's minds.

You see, in making the timing of the resurrection the focal point, Satan has been able to establish this field of battle. He has set the terms for the discussion, even though he will not be able to dissuade anyone who truly understands. By keeping the battle at this point, he is able to distort several issues at once and keep mankind under his sway.

So before even examining the timing of Christ's resurrection, the question should be asked, "What importance does the day of Jesus Christ's resurrection hold? Did the day of His resurrection cause a change in the day of worship?"

The Saturday or Sunday resurrection issue has been a focal point of debate, because of the impacts that it could have on the correct day of worship, but to begin here is to begin with an assumption at best and a conclusion at worst.

Where in the Bible is there any indication given that Jesus Christ's death or resurrection would change the day of worship? Does our Savior ever say, "The seventh day Sabbath is fine for now, but the day I really want you to commemorate is the day of the week on which I am resurrected." Is there a verse that says, "Remember the day of resurrection to keep it holy"? Does God ever proclaim the day of resurrection was to be sanctified for all time?

Is there any indication given in the Bible that the Lord of the Sabbath has somehow removed the sanctification and blessing that He originally placed on the seventh day? And does God change things on a whim, especially something as foundational as the day on which He meets with His people?

Satan would have us believe so. But there is no variation, no shadow of turning with God. God does not change. His fundamental character and approach to things remain constant.

Hebrews 13:8-9 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.

From this we can see that God's changelessness is a major defense we have against false doctrine. Once He establishes something, is He going to change it out of hand? Could we trust a God that would be so undependable and unpredictable? The answer to all of this is there is no prophecy given about a

change, no statement by Jesus Christ or the apostles, and no example given of the blessing and sanctification being transferred after Christ's death and resurrection.

Even if Christ had been resurrected on the first day of the week, and we know He most certainly was not, but if He had been, there is still not a single verse which says that the day of His resurrection was intended to be some kind of new day of worship. That is clearly a tradition of men. In fact, the Bible says that the timing of His resurrection demonstrates something entirely different. Please turn with me to Matthew 12.

Matthew 12:38-40 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Take careful note of this. The singular purpose of Christ's foretelling how long He would be in the grave is to prove that He was the Messiah. Jesus gave only one sign that He was who He says He was. He would be in the grave three days and three nights, that is, 72 hours, and then God would resurrect Him.

For the question of whether or not He was in the grave three days and three nights has absolutely nothing to do with which day God set apart and made holy, and everything to do with whether Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

As you are probably aware, there is also a great deal of controversy surrounding the meaning of three days and three nights. This is another battlefield that Satan has chosen because he knows he has a certain advantage in getting people to argue over word usage and idioms and the meaning of the original Greek.

But this controversy is irrelevant as far as the day of worship is concerned. On the other hand, it is a vitally important with regard to whether or not Jesus Christ was the Messiah, and any professing Christian should tremble at

the thought of Christ being disqualified by not being in the grave the precise length of time He prophesied. But it should be evident that Satan has engineered this field of battle by unnaturally mixing two completely different subjects.

So we can see that Satan has been very successful in obscuring the truth about the Sabbath by getting people to focus on the wrong thing. Even though he knows the truth about the timing of the resurrection, he also knows he has a better chance of drawing people away from the Sabbath day by making the timing of the resurrection the point of contention.

But it is apparent that even though Jesus Christ did in fact rise from the dead on Sabbath afternoon, the Bible nowhere states that a certain day of the week should be venerated on the basis of the timing of the resurrection. Rather, the Sabbath is to be kept holy because God made it holy at the beginning of the of the creation, and 4,000 years later it was also the day on which He resurrected His Son.

Remember the strategy that Satan uses, and the next time you are presented with a spiritual question, consider whether the issue being discussed is the real issue at hand. Because if Satan is behind it, there is a good chance he has chosen a battlefield that gives him an advantage.