

Genesis 2:1–3

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Date: 31 January 2021

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[0 : 00] Again, that's Genesis chapter 2, verses 1 through 3. Those who are able, I ask that you please stand for the reading of God's word.

Amen. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the hosts of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it, God rests from the work, from all the work that he had done in creation. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. It's a joy to be with you on this snowy Sunday.

Thank you for those who found their way here early to make sure the service would go on. Thank you for that. Let's just pray before, as we enter.

[1 : 15] Father, your word is living and active. It is sharper than any two-edged sword able to really interpret the intentions of our hearts.

And Father, we come before you, and we pray that we would sense that your word is alive. That we would recognize that your spirit is real. That as we sit among one another, that you would lead your people onward, we pray.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. What do you need rest from this morning? What do you need rest from this morning?

Perhaps, working with university students, it's that onslaught of problem sets that comes week in and week out.

Or the looming paper deadline that stands a few days out. Maybe it's a pile of papers on your virtual desk or the compounding number of unread and unattended emails that you have in your inbox.

[2 : 27] For some of us, it's the day in and day out care of young children. It's exhausting. It may be a teenage child in rebellion. Drains every ounce of patience that you have and results in sleepless nights.

For others, I know it's financial anxiety that weighs heavily. This lingering pandemic leaves you restless. It may be the concern of a loved one's failing health that hammers on your heart repeatedly.

It may be the pain and suffering of past trauma that you experience at the hands of someone you love. You desire relief. You just want it done.

It needs to be finished. See, built into our human condition is this need for rest. Each night, whether early or late, we put our head down on a pillow.

It's indicative of our need of physical rest. And certainly, it reveals that we need emotional and psychological rest as well. We yearn for rest.

[3 : 38] Well, this morning, we will see that the grand promise held out by the Bible is rest. I desire to demonstrate that the goal of all of creation is to settle into the rest of God.

This morning, I want to show you that this seventh day culminates creation in such a way that the goal of all of creation is found in the rest of God.

We will see the rest of God as the goal and glory for all of creation. In other words, you were made to dwell in God's rest.

Well, three signposts I need to hang up this morning to guide our time. I alliterated because I have to, I think.

I almost didn't, but I found a word in the thesaurus this morning. Three words, three signs this morning.

[4 : 51] I want us to see the characteristics of this seventh day, followed by the concern, the particular concern of the seventh day.

And I will conclude with the culmination of this seventh day. The characteristics of the seventh day. After spending time in the creation account, upon initial reflection, one might think that the climax of the creative work was certainly the sixth day.

The Bible spends the most time or the most words on it. It's the establishment of humanity, the pinnacle, the prize of God's created work, so to say.

It's about us, the recipient of the image of God. It's about us, to whom God has spoken. We would like to think we are the most important in the story.

However, this morning we will find that, literarily, the capstone of creation is not the sixth day.

Rather, the culmination of creation falls on the seventh day, the day that God is found resting.

[6 : 03] And the writer does a few things to bring this to the forefront. He calls the seventh day forward, so to say, on stage, and all the six days take a step back.

Moses, presumably the writer, puts a spotlight on the seventh day. And he makes sure you don't miss it. Because in two verses, he tells you it is the seventh day.

You need to know it's the seventh day. It's not day one, or day two, or day three, four, five, or six. All the other days get one verse that says, and it was the sixth day, and there was evening and morning.

But in these two verses, particularly verses two and three, the writer needs you to know that it's the seventh day. It is the seventh day.

And there are a few things that we want to note about the seventh day. First of all, what's not here? God doesn't talk on the seventh day.

[7 : 02] There's no phrase, and God said. There's no phrase, and let there be, and it was so.

Those are all absent. It's as if, while the first six days were marked by God's creative action and activity, the seventh day is set apart seemingly by his inaction, by his lack of creative activity.

There's the absence of the repeated refrain, and there was evening and morning the first day.

There was evening and morning the second day. But on the seventh day, there's no refrain.

Seemingly, it never ends. What's noteworthy is there's no temporal dimension to this day. It is the never-ending day.

It is as the exhausted parent or the overworked employee or the drained student would blur out. It is the longest day ever, literally. There's also the absence of any spatial reference.

All the other days are highlighted by heaven and earth. The lights were flung into the heavens. The waters were filled with teeming fish upon the earth.

[8 : 16] There's no need to chase them all down, but you can see them in the first six days. Each day of creation is set in reference to heaven and earth, but not the seventh day.

It's as if to say, we're not exactly sure where this happens. There's no spatial indicator that tells us. And you have unfolding on this seventh day, a day that never ends, a day that takes place in a mysterious location.

It's positioned in such a way that the reader, you and I, are extracted out of time and space. It's the time and space of days one and six and set in this place that is unconstrained by natural law.

The day is further set apart because we're given this picture of God at rest. Our English translation suggests that God is resting or at ease.

And in case you get the idea that God is somehow exhausted from his act of creating and in need of rejuvenation or refreshment, it would actually be more helpful to think of God resting as God completing or stopping his creative work.

[9 : 35] It is the describing of the cessation of his creating. God was not fatigued. He was simply finished. God had completed what he intended and purposed.

We know very well that the Bible tells us elsewhere that the Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow weary or faint.

The psalmist celebrates the fact that the one who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. God is not tired.

In contrast to, in radical contrast to the other ancient Near Eastern gods of the day, those gods actually documents that men and women were to alleviate the work the gods had to do.

As the gods were trying to sort out the natural order and there was rebellion going on, these gods created men and women in order to alleviate their load.

[10 : 41] The gods were constantly facing opposition and needed rest from working. But for Israel, the people of God, their God would not be one who longed for rest but chose to rest.

We are not to picture an exhausted farmer at the end of the day crawling into bed in desperate need of restorative sleep.

No, rather it is better to picture an artisan holding out his completed project masterpiece, admiring his work and ready to set it on display.

It is. God's rest is his punctuation on his creative achievement. It is. I don't mean to put it irreverently, but it is in some way God patting his own back and saying, well done.

It is good, even very good. I don't get that taste often, but maybe you, as you attempt a project or accomplish a feat, you admire it.

[11 : 48] And in your heart, you are pleased. Well, we know God never stops working. The universe is held together by his power.

Theologically, we assert that God has created. And beginning in chapter 2, God will sustain all that he creates. He's involved in all the affairs of the world.

He is always working. And so when Jesus comes on the scene, you might remember the story that he heals an invalid. Forty years, this man could not walk.

And as the discussion unfolds and as the religious leaders start persecuting him and antagonizing him, and they're saying, why? How could you do such a thing on a day of rest?

And Jesus says, actually, as a matter of fact, God has always been working. To imply that from the seventh day onward, God continues his work in upholding all things.

[12 : 47] The final characteristic of this day is this. It is a day that is declared to be holy.

This day is heightened in the fact that it is the first pronouncement in the Bible of something or someone being holy.

Granted, it seems like implicitly it might be holy because God is there. But what the text tells us, that this day would be set apart, reserved for God.

It would be this day, this realm, this domain, this day would be holy. The heavens would not be holy. The earth would not be holy. The animal kingdom would not be holy. And lo and behold, even humanity with the image of God was not declared holy.

[13 : 50] So we, the readers, find ourselves on a day in the rest of God, in a domain, in a sphere where time has no constraints, where there is no morning and evening, when sun and stars do not rule.

So we find ourselves in a domain where the blessing and the favor of God is manifest, and the rest of God is exemplified, and the holiness of God is pervasive.

It's a day set for himself, unmatched in all its characteristics. We see in days one to six, God speaking creation into existence. In day seven, God sanctifies a space unto himself.

And we're left to mysteriously wonder, what else does God set aside for himself? And that's how the Bible opens.

That's how the Bible opens. Well, the characteristics of the day, and now I want to talk about the concerns of the day. The qualities and the characteristics of the seventh day are extraordinary.

[15 : 03] And I've simply made observations up to this point. But what are the applications of these characteristics? In other words, why does the seventh day matter?

Well, we know humanity had beautiful origins. Made in the divine image. Handed this manual, this threefold manual. You're to do three things. Exercise dominion over the rest of creation.

Work in a way to tend and care for it. Multiply and fill and populate and reproduce and fill the earth so others could enjoy God's creation and eat and consume and be satisfied.

And it's upon the heels of that manual, that instruction book, that the seventh day is recorded. Work, procreate, and eat.

Eat, and then we go into the seventh day. And lest you and I come to the conclusion that men and women were simply created to exercise dominion, multiply, and eat, we're given the seventh day.

[16 : 10] Lest you believe that life is merely about the power of dominion, the pleasure of multiplication or sexual activity, or the consumption of food and goods.

This scripture confronts you and I with this seventh day. We are not determined by function, by relationship, by eating or drinking.

And some of us need to hear this today. Because the presence of the seventh day, what it reminds us and shouts at us is this. You are more than what you do.

You are more than what you do. Our purpose goes beyond our function. Student, mother, businessman, teacher, physician.

These are all valuable facets of our social fabric. But the presence of the seventh day makes this argument. Your value will not be determined by what you do.

[17 : 14] Rather, let me put it this way. It will be determined by where you are. Namely, the seventh day. It's not where you work that matters.

It's where you rest that matters. Unless humanity come to believe that life is merely about reproduction, relationships, and marriage, the seventh day comes upon the barren, the unmarried, the unfruitful, the childless, whispering, that though the creation mandate is not fulfilled in your physical life, there is a domain where you can find rest, alleviate your shame, and your shortcomings.

And lest you come to believe that life is about consumption, eating, and drinking, and being merry, and all that life entails, the presence of the seventh day comes and confronts you and tells your conscience there is something more to be had.

The seventh day is the billboard that tells you there is more to life than this natural world offers.

Creation is good. It is very good.

But don't be deceived. It is not God. It is not God. Creation's goal is to find herself in the rest of God. And as the Bible unfolds, you see this play out.

[18 : 42] The Sabbath principle becomes the prescription of the nation of Israel. It is to be for the nation a giant stop sign. Stop! Halt! Pause! Refrain!

Why? Because my people are more than what they do. My people are more to me than their reproductive functionality. My people are more to me than their worldly success or pursuits. It would be the constant refrain, the rhythm of the rest of life in the Bible, that there is rest, meaning, and vitality found outside the created order.

It would be found in the seventh day. It is clear from these verses that God stands apart from days one through six.

He is distinguishable from his created work. He would tend to his creation, but he is not to be equated with his creation. Certainly God is everywhere, but we are never to be mistaken that God is everything.

[19 : 44] As pagan nations worship sun, moon, and stars, Israel knew clearly that God was none of them. As pagan nations crafted idols out of wood, gold, silver, Israel knew very well that God was none of them.

As our contemporary culture makes money, status, power, intellect, accomplishment, God, surely Christ's church, the people of Christ's church, should know that God is none of them.

The concern in these verses is a warning for humanity. We are not to think that life is all we see. It is a strong temptation, a great pull, a deceptive force. One writer, Paul David Tripp, puts it this way. This side of eternity, we have this temptation to ask physical creation to do what only the creator God can do.

The seventh day, its concern is to establish from the outset of the Bible that creation has, God has an intention to move all of creation forward to a destination, namely, the rest of God.

[21 : 01] It is in this domain that God's, of God's rest, that you and I will ultimately be fulfilled. God's rest, that you and I will always are always clamoring at substantive things.

They're good, but they are not God. You see, it's interesting. In North America, it's almost culturally embedded in our culture.

We vacation and retirement. And if you're like me in any way, the moment I put a vacation in my calendar, whether that means going somewhere or doing something or just pausing from regular life, my heart is fixated on that day.

Because on that day, that vacation holds this promise. Man, maybe I could stop. I think they're watching. Stop caring about my kids. just for three days.

Or maybe I could put down that writing project for just those three days. And maybe I could escape this frozen tundra and walk along that white sand beach for just three days.

[22 : 16] Because when that happens, everything will be blissful, finished, fulfilled. But you know how it ends.

For three days, it's okay. But you're left wondering, is that it? When's my next vacation?

And as North Americans, we say, well, this is the day. When I retire, it will be a lifelong vacation.

And so, I save up all my eggs.

I work myself to death. I sacrifice relationships and time in order to go into retirement. And what I've discovered, I'm not even close to retiring.

But still, you can't sleep at night. Still, you're concerned about loved ones. The pandemic hits you whether you're a multi-billionaire or a normal person.

[23 : 25] The retirement is indicative of humanity's longing for permanent, fixed rest. Well, the seventh day tells us this.

And I just want to close with this last point. How does the seventh day culminate? Certainly, Genesis chapter 2, verse 1 is the culmination of the creation account.

The repetition makes it clear that creation is complete, finished. Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them. And the seventh day, God finished his work.

The translation attempts to cast the redundancy of it all. He's done with all the work that he had done. John Calvin has a wonderful word picture upon the seventh day.

The world was now fully furnished. The earth that began as formless and void and empty was now formed, filled, and illuminated. That which was hollow was now inhabited.

[24 : 37] That which was once empty was now infused with energy. God had completed what he had begun. God had finished what he had intended. God completes what he begins.

God will finish what he intends. He will complete. He is certain that he who begins a good work will be faithful to complete it.

And this morning, we need to be reminded that the God of the Bible is a persistent God. He is a persevering God.

He doesn't leave impartial projects or incomplete projects or partial work. And to bring his people into his rest would be the remainder of the biblical endeavor.

It becomes one of the largest unifying themes of your Bible. You can think of it if you have a paper Bible. It's one of these fibers that connect back cover to front cover.

[25 : 42] If you use a digital phone as your Bible, you could think of it as a circuitry that connects, I don't know, the screen to the battery. Front to the back.

The rest will be lost in the ensuing chapter. But it will not thwart the persistent plan of God to bring his people into his rest.

the Bible tells us that he would take an enslaved people with a mighty and outstretched arm and bring them into a promised land, abundant and secured, prosperous and peaceful.

He would give them a law prescribed Sabbath rest upon their hearts. As the Ten Commandments told God's people how they were to relate to God and relate to one another, there's this one command that tells them how they were to relate to time.

Eternity, so to say, would be set upon their hearts and carve a residence there. Six days they would work, but on the seventh they would cease to work. Why? Because the image bearers of God were to be imitators of God in the world.

[26 : 51] The keeping of the Sabbath was a commemorative act and it would remind them that God delivered them from abusive tyranny, but also oppressive work and brought them into undeserved rest.

God would bless them, prosper them to such a degree that they would fashion a house for God, a temple so magnificent, so splendid, and so glorious. And as the king, King Solomon would dedicate this temple, he would stand there and offer up this prayer prayer.

And he would say from 2nd Chronicles chapter 6, and now arise, O Lord, and go to your resting place.

The people of God tried to construct a furnishing for God or house for God. And what's staggering about this temple, I'll leave it to you, 2nd Chronicles chapter 6, go read it.

This temple would be God's resting place. And this resting place was so astounding that it reverses every deficiency of the world.

[28 : 07] The writer of 2nd Chronicles tells us that hey, if there's ever any injustice and these two parties were to go to God's resting place and righteousness would be unupheld and justice would reign.

And if enemies were surrounding your nation and they were coming up against you and you would certainly be confounded and defeated, go to God's resting place and ask for peace.

And when the sky stopped raining and the land stopped yielding, go to God's resting place and ask for fruitfulness.

When the foreigner comes, who's outcasted, rejected, neglected, and they encountered God's resting place, they would be cared for.

And though sin would abound, there in the resting place, forgiveness would be found. You see, the theme carries forward and sadly, Israel would lose this resting place.

[29 : 17] God's people sought to reinstate it, but their feeble and faithless attempts fell short. So God sent a new temple, a new resting place, a new temple to be within his people.

It was the Lord Jesus Christ. And he comes, ironically, on the Sabbath day when the religious elite, he came doing work on the Sabbath day when the religious elite prohibited it.

He was performing the miraculous when it was restricted and people were asking him, why, why, how could he do such a thing? And the answer is clear that on the Sabbath day, God demonstrates in Jesus his persistent plan to restore humanity that they may enter into his rest.

rest. The invalid danced and leapt. The blind was able to see. The weary, the heavy laden, the crushed and the oppressed were invited to exchange their burden for rest.

So, in Jesus, you and I find God speaks again. God spoke in days one to six, and in Jesus, he comes again and speaks, come to me, all who labor and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[30 : 38] take my yoke upon me and learn from me. I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. The God who declared creation finished then goes to the cross and secures your eternal rest.

It's no coincidence that that line resounds again. That as Genesis 2 tells us the creative work is done, it is finished. Jesus suspended from a cross, looks at his redemptive work into bringing you and I into his rest and utters the same thing.

It's finished. It's complete. It's done. That Jesus recovers what was lost through redeeming us and offers us rest.

And I have much more and I don't want to trace it all out but I'll conclude with this that as your Bible ends, as it wraps up, there are a lot of images there but there is one image that is appropriate.

There's a procession of sorts, a throng of people walking along a street and they're entering into a city with great jubilation. Ironically, there's no more sun, moon, and stars as if the created order had faded, as if time was no more.

[32 : 07] Incidentally, the declaration from the outset is it is done. It is done. It is finished again.

And there a throng of people walk into a place with great glory and jubilation and song.

In the meantime, we've only sampled the serenity. It's a peace we've only previewed. It's a joy we've just seen in passing, this rest from our labors.

But one day, victory from this three-headed monster of sin, death, and the devil. Every longing will be met, every hollowness filled, every injustice judged.

It is the eternal blessed bliss. It is the rest of God. And so, Genesis chapter 2, verses 1 to 3, launches for you and I, the purposes and the goal of creation, to rest with God.

Father, we thank you for this time together. And we thank you that you are a persistent and persevering God. That even in our disobedience, we are not so wayward or rebellious that we would, that this rest would be inaccessible to us.

[33 : 41] And yet you come to us in the Lord Jesus and offer us this continual persistent rest. And so, Father, I pray for our hearts, I pray for our labors, I pray for our condition that we would look to Jesus, look to Jesus, the grand invitation into the rest of God.

God, go with us, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.