

The Market-Place of the Soul

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[0 : 0 0] shall work be done. But on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places.

Amen. The Sabbath day is God's market day for the week's provision.

Thus wrote the Puritan Lewis Bailey. Today, perhaps we focus too much on the pain of what you cannot do on a Sunday and not enough on the joy of what you can.

The way we observe the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath, needs realignment. We live in different days from those of our fathers. They applied scriptural principles into their own culture.

We must apply the same scriptural principles into ours. When we overlay their interpretations of the Sabbath over ours, they look restrictive.

[1 : 5 1] When we overlay our interpretations of the Sabbath over theirs, they look permissive. I'm not saying somehow that the truth of how we are to observe the Christian Sabbath is somewhere in the middle.

What I am saying is that neither of them embrace in full the totality of what Lewis Bailey offers us. That the Sabbath day is God's market day for the week's provision.

And once again, therefore, I say that our times perhaps we focus too much on the pain of what we cannot do on a Sunday. Not enough on the joy of what we can.

Perhaps it's time that rather than wince at the thought of another Presbyterian Sabbath, we open our hearts and say, Thank God it's Sunday.

I get the chance to have a guilt-free rest. A grace-filled Lord's Day is a gospel privilege. In Leviticus 23, verse 3, we read the words, Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation.

[3 : 0 9] You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places. There's the phrase. A Sabbath of solemn rest.

Rest is not restrictive. It never has been. Rest is permissive. In other words, it's okay to rest on a Sabbath.

It's okay to put down one's tools. It's okay to slow down the gray matter and press pause on your career, recognizing that life is more than eight to six, and realigning yourself rather around the gospel again.

Let me suggest that Leviticus 23, verse 3, with its marvelous phrase, A Sabbath of solemn rest, seen through the lens of that marvelous quote from Lewis Bailey about the Sabbath being God's market day for the soul, helps us to view the Sabbath from three perspectives.

First, a rest from work. Second, a rest with one another. And third, a rest for God.

[4 : 2 5] A rest, first of all, from work. A rest from work. In Leviticus 23, verse 3, we read, Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh you shall do no work.

Now, let me remind you of the context of the book of Leviticus. It was written to a people on a long journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. They weren't static.

They were always moving. They didn't live in established cities. They had nowhere to call home. Rather, they lived in a great camp, which from day to day, week to week, month to month, moved location.

That's why we call them the wandering Israelites, because they were always moving. They were never at rest. For 40 years, they were wandering in the wilderness, and by any stretch, that was a very challenging existence.

The whole community had to work together to ensure its survival. And so in the first instance, in the context of Leviticus, this command here in verse 3 is a word to the lazy.

[5 : 42] It's a word to the lazy among them. Six days shall you work. In other words, to survive, every member of the community has to share the load.

We often suppose that the Old Testament Sabbath laws, they purely concerned what you could and could not do on one day, the Sabbath.

But actually, they were far wider than that. They concerned what you could and could not do on the other six days also. Work for six days.

Rest for one. Work for six days. Rest for one. There's the rhythm. And so to the lazy in the Israelite camp who weren't pulling their own weight, comes the word, work for six days.

Because that's what we were created for. Two weeks ago, I made reference to Matthias' father, Kurt van der Swag, who talks about the pursuit of Christlikeness being the pursuit of what it means to be truly human.

[6 : 48] And the pursuit of being truly human consists in getting up out of bed and going to work for those six days. We're not created to find personal satisfaction or self-worth in lazing about.

And unless we have good medical reasons for not working, we need to make every effort as God's people to be up and about and doing. The lazy should not expect sympathy from the Sabbath laws.

Grace does not produce couch potatoes, but fruit bearers. So for those six days, work at your lawful employment. That's what we're reading here in Leviticus 23.3.

Work hard as a student in school or in university. Work hard at home. Work hard in your office. Work hard on the shop floor. Work in the classroom. Work in the ward.

Spend your week's provision of energy. We talked a few weeks ago about a Protestant work ethic the bedrock of our industry as a nation.

[7 : 57] My brother fills up his car with petrol every Saturday morning. Because of the job he does, he knows that he will use one full tank of petrol in the week.

And then on the next Saturday morning, he is back at the petrol station to fill up again. On Sundays, you are filling your tanks with the rest to be found in God and his gospel.

So make sure you are spending your week's provision of energy so that you are ready for Sunday's rest. But I guess more directly, this command in Leviticus 23.3 is a word to the weary among us.

To the weary. I suspect that as a nation, we're going through an epidemic of weariness. For decades now, people have worked too many long hours and had too much pressure on their shoulders.

And the command says, six days work shall be done. Did you hear that, weedy worker? Six days, not seven.

[9 : 06] You're to work for six days and six days only. The commandment goes on. On the seventh, you are to do no work.

This is Mosaic employment legislation at its finest. On the seventh day, you shall do no work. So for six days, you're going to study for your university courses.

But on the seventh, you're going to put your books away and you're going to rest. As a Christian, you're going to benefit. No one else does. The God who promises to honor us if we honor him tells you, go and put your books away and take a day of rest.

Children, you have six days on which to do your homework. On the seventh day, put your books away and take a rest. The seventh day is set aside for you to do something altogether different from what you do every other day.

God has designed it for our rest to be the day when we fill up for the rest of the week so that we never find ourselves running on empty. So, do you sit at a desk for those six days?

[10 : 27] Don't sit at another desk on the seventh. Get up and take some exercise. You are ultra active for those six days. Don't be active on the seventh.

Take an exercise break. This is a word for the weary, not just of body but also of mind. Get yourself another phone. What you do not use for work, use that phone on Sunday so that your customers and your colleagues can't contact you.

Don't check your email. Word for the weary, rest. This is your market day for replenishing your energy. Make the most of it or you will burn yourself out.

The Israelite camp, as it wandered through the wilderness for those 40 years, always rested on the seventh day. Always. No exceptions. And so this command is both a word to the lazy and a word to the weary.

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh, no work shall be done. When I was a student at Free Church College, my minister at the time was Alastair I. MacLeod, who himself was a former professor at the Free Church College.

[11 : 43] On one occasion, in a sermon, he told us that on a Sunday morning, on our way to church, on our car journey, we should take an intentional diversion past the Free Church College for the sole purpose of wiggling our fingers and sticking out our tongues.

The college had had its pound of flesh for six days, but on the seventh, it had no hold of us at all.

And it's the same for your workplace. For the weak, it has hold of you, rightly so. On the seventh, make sure you shake your hold on it and rest.

Second, from this verse, we want to look at a rest with one another. A rest with one another. I love the way in which this command is framed.

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places.

[13 : 01] So the emphasis here is not just on resting from, but also on resting with. Notice what the command says. It is a holy convocation.

It is a Sabbath in all your dwelling places. Remember, Leviticus, as the rest of Scripture, but especially Leviticus, is written in the context of community.

In other words, the Sabbath is to be observed in relationship. First, resting with the fellowship, and second, resting with the family. First, resting with the fellowship.

You will notice what the command says. It is a holy convocation. According to the dictionary, a convocation is a large, formal meeting.

It's where and when we meet with one another. It is envisaged that believers will meet with one another on the Sabbath for holy purposes.

[14 : 05] And nothing has changed through the dispensations. We know that it was Jesus' practice to attend the synagogue on the Sabbath. We read from Acts that it was the practice of the early church to meet together on the Sabbath.

We read in Hebrews 10, verse 25, do not neglect the meeting of yourselves together. I'd like to think we get the point, right?

The Christian Sabbath is when we meet with other Christians. A day we cease to be consumers and start being companions. That's one reason that we as Glasgow City Free Church opted for Zoom as our internet platform.

We know it's not the slickest or the most refined of the platforms, but we wanted intentional participation. We wanted to see each other's faces and even though we are separated from one another physically, we remain companions.

The other platforms, whatever they are, do not allow us the same privilege and so negate that precious aspect of biblical worship. To be human means to work but to be human also means to be with.

[15 : 25] It involves community and relationship. At the present time, very few are allowed to gather together physically for worship.

But when these restrictions are lifted, six months' time, let's hope, let's pray. Six months' time, everything's back to a new normal. What message will you be sending to us as Glasgow City Free Church if you should absent yourself from worship here on a Lord's Day?

The message will be, we are not important to you. You don't need us. We don't need you. You're the one special Christian in the history of the entire world who can go it alone and doesn't need anybody else.

Don't you know you're depriving us of your gifts and your graces? Come rest with us on the Christian Sabbath. Follow the Creator's design. Don't absent yourself from the fellowship.

Go to market day with others. But you'll notice also from the text, it's not only resting with the fellowship, it's resting with the family.

[16 : 41] Resting with the family. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places. It's a day for fellowship, yes, but it's a day for the family, whatever that family might look like.

It might be a circle of friends. It might be a nuclear family, whatever, but it's a day of resting with the family when relationships can be enjoyed and deepened.

This kind of family is the basic network of a thriving society and the Sabbath is a day for the family. It's designed to build durability and strength into our society.

There are still scattered remnants of this family focus. In British society, for example, we think of Sunday dinner as being the one meal in the week where the whole family eats together.

Sunday must be this, a day of resting with the family, whatever that family looks like, tight circle of friends or a nuclear family.

[17 : 52] we spend six days working on our own and the seventh is the perfect opportunity to remind us what our children look like and how they're getting on in school and what they like and don't like.

And before you ask, I'm not being facetious at all. don't sacrifice that precious family time for anything. Some Christians mistakenly believe the best way to worship the Lord on a Lord's Day is to walk up a mountain and in the rarefied atmosphere at the peak soak up the presence of God.

They say, I don't need to be in church to worship God. I can be worshiping Him here at the top of this mountain. Well, they're right, of course, but they're wrong. They're dead wrong. You need other Christians.

We need you. You need your family. Your family need you. Don't be so selfish. Learn how to rest with others. Standing alone, exhausted, on top of a mountain is not a good way to spend the Sabbath, however fulfilled you may feel afterward.

Having spent your morning worshiping God with the fellowship in the church and then sitting around the dinner table with your family at home, that's a good way to spend the Sabbath.

[19 : 23] Go to market day with your family and enjoy it with the fellowship. Rest with others. And then lastly, a rest for God.

A rest for God. Now, you'll notice this evening that I'm being very prescriptive in my sermon. I often get criticized for my lack of practical application, so I thought I'd remedy that this evening and tell you exactly where I think the text from Leviticus 23 is going.

Notice from this verse that the Sabbath day is described in terms of it being a solemn rest, a holy convocation, that it is a Sabbath unto the Lord.

In other words, the Christian Sabbath is first and foremost the market day of the soul. We all complain of being too busy in today's frenetic society, but at the same time, we ignore God's invitation to press pause on this one day of the week that He has set aside for our spiritual growth in grace.

Now, you will know that I am not the strictest Sabbatarian in terms of feeling guilty about what I do or do not do on a Sunday. I've spent way too much time with overzealous Sabbatharians to see the lines blurred between gracious opportunism and legalistic hypocrisy.

[20 : 57] However, my mind is fixed in this one direction, namely, the most important element of the Lord's Day is the public worship of God.

The most important element of the Lord's Day is the public worship of God. This is the market day of the soul. I remember someone I deeply respect explaining to me the dangers of the world encroaching into the Lord's Day.

It's not what people do on Sunday that makes it wrong. It's what they don't do. Ultimately, it is worship which suffers from all the encroachments into the Lord's Day.

soul. The playing fields at the high school are full on a Sunday morning of kids learning how to play rugby. The queues at the shopping malls are unending.

Amateur football, competitive races, high-profile sporting events, none of them are bad in and of themselves, but they result in church becoming just one more activity in, among many others, rather than the gracious opportunism of the market day of the soul.

[22 : 16] The saddest thing of all is when Christian parents feel that allowing their children to learn how to play rugby on a Sunday morning is more important than them learning how to follow Jesus.

So if church classes with rugby training, competitive running, football tournaments, whatever, there should be no competition in the Christian's mind.

None at all. If it does not, if rugby training is early in the morning or in the afternoon, then that's a different issue. One for your own conscience.

As it is for mine. But if it means absenting yourself and your family from the public worship of God, then that is not a matter of conscience. It is a matter of disobedience and a lack of grace in your heart.

Are we really saying that doing on a Sunday what we could do any other day of the week is more important than learning how to be a disciple of Jesus? Again, you know me, I've been your pastor for 17 years.

[23 : 29] I am not a strict Sabbatarian in the traditional sense, but my mind is fixed in this one direction. Namely, the most important element of the Lord's Day is the public worship of God.

Let nothing, nothing at all, whatever it is, get in the way of your attendance at the public worship of God. It's not for no reason that these are called the means of grace. But then he said to me, but, but, but wait a second, I'm here most Sundays of the year.

I'm only two or three Sundays away at competitive racing or rugby training or football tournaments or whatever. Yes, and I say to you, yeah, but you know what? I manage to tell the truth most of the time.

I manage not to be greedy most of the time. And I manage not to fiddle my tax returns most years. Get the point? The Vedicist 23.3 is not about restriction.

It is about gracious opportunism. The Christian Sabbath is the market day for the week's provision. It's on Sunday we receive the grace we need to meet the challenges of the week ahead.

[24 : 43] The challenges of living in a society hostile to the gospel. The challenges of overcoming the fears and worries in our minds and our hearts. The challenge of living in peaceful relationship with our families and our friends.

It's on Sunday as we come together to feast on the word of God that God fills us with his grace to meet these challenges. The driving force behind Sunday evening worship is also gracious opportunism.

Sunday evening worship is a dying fashion in the free church of Scotland. I don't know why. I suspect why it is. But listen to me. If we believe that hearing the word of God preached is a means of grace that it's a way God uses to build us up in our faith, do you not suppose we shall benefit from hearing it preached 104 times a year rather than just 52?

It's not about legalistic hypocrisy. It's about gracious opportunism. There's no way I'd rather be on a Sunday evening than under the sound of the word of God.

It's a day of solemn rest. It's a holy assembly to the Lord. The needs of our workplaces, the needs of our football pitches are to be ejected, guilt-free, and replaced with coming to the public worship of God, eager to feast upon the word of God, and to be fed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[26 : 21] In our affluent society, every day is market day. And yet, in the world of Lewis Bailey, the Puritan, a market day took place only ever so often. Merchants would travel from hundreds of miles around to sell their wares on market day.

People who lived nearby would flood these market towns on market day to buy things they couldn't normally get. A new plow, a new suit, a new dress, new kinds of food.

There'd be games and competitions, festivities and fun. Young people would meet and get opportunities to let their hair down and find, perhaps, prospective partners.

People who lived nearby would look forward to these market days all year round. But in our affluent society, every day is market day, which means that we have altogether lost the force of Lewis Bailey's argument.

try to get it back. The Christian Sabbath is your market day when you have new opportunities to learn about Jesus and experience the power of the gospel in new ways.

[27 : 36] Perhaps historically we focused way too much on the pain of what we could not do on a Sunday and not enough on the joy of what we could. I like this phrase. I really do. gracious opportunism and especially in using it in connection with how we view the Christian Sabbath.

Meeting together for worship. Spending time with our families, whatever that family looks like. Guilt-free exclusion from the workplace.

No more pressure from kids saying, can I do this? Can I do that? Can I do the next thing? And us having to be a taxi service. Having more time for private devotions.

For dealing with the issues of the week gone by and strengthening ourselves against all the challenges which shall come in the week ahead. What a marvelous opportunity for us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

You know, we're always complaining, every one of us, about being exhausted and burned out. Jesus said to us, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[28 : 50] The very people who complain about being exhausted and burned out, myself included, are the very people who don't take resting on the Sabbath seriously enough.

Think about it. I close by repeating Bailey's quote and asking each of us to rededicate ourselves and to rededicate our Sundays to resting from work, to resting with each other, to resting for God.

The Sabbath is God's market day for the week's provision, wherein he will have us come to him, to buy of him without silver or money the bread of angels and water of life, the wine of the sacraments and milk of the word to feed our souls, tried gold to enrich our faith, precious eye salve to heal our spiritual blindness and the white raiment of Christ's righteousness to cover our filthy nakedness.

Amen.