

Sabbath Rest

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0:00] Anyway, we are resuming our series today in Exodus, and so there were two weeks of interruptions, but I wanted to start off with a quiz question, and that is, who knows how many sermons in Exodus we've had this year, that is, in this current series before today, not counting the interruptions, how many have there been?

Give you a minute to think about it, maybe confer. The answer is in my hands. Okay, how many of you had six?

Those at home as well, you can see this, six? Is it six? Yeah, six, not nine, yep, six. Okay, and next question then, what is the main topic of today's passage?

It's on the Sabbath, right? So rest on the seventh day of our series, get it? Now, is this mere coincidence?

Brilliant sermon series planning, were it not for lockdown? Divinely ordained, maybe even? And just while we're at it, do you know how many Old Testament verses we had in our reading today from Exodus?

[1:13] Seven. Seven. Ooh, spooky, right? Well, in keeping with the theme of rest, we've only got seven verses, and we've only got two verses in the New Testament, so hopefully we'll have a restful sermon today in both form and substance.

But actually, more importantly, God willing, we'll have a rich one as well. So the first thing I want to note is that this is the section that is at the end of God's speech to Moses, which we began in chapter 25.

It's not the end of our series, but it's the end of the speech that God began in chapter 25. And it's a fitting way to end because the culmination of the building of the tabernacle, which we've been looking at, is rest and relationship with God.

All this work God is commanding of them is not an end in itself, but rather it enables the gift and blessing of dwelling with God as his people.

Now, this idea of the Sabbath is new to Moses. God had mentioned it in the Ten Commandments earlier. So on your slide, Exodus chapter 20, in verse 8, he says, Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

[2:26] Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall do no work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your family, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

Now, so important is this idea that God takes the opportunity to repeat it again, to emphasize in detail its requirements in this passage.

And so if you look at your outline, there are three main points I want to make of the passage. First, in verses 12 and 13, we find that the Sabbath is a sign that God is the one who makes Israel holy. So this is what God says, Say to the Israelites, you must observe my Sabbath. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord who makes you holy.

[3:38] Now, you remember, don't you, what I've been saying over the last few weeks about how God makes Israel holy. So going back to Exodus chapter 19, earlier, God had rescued them out of Egypt, carried them on eagles' wings and brought them to himself.

Then, he says, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

The tabernacle they are about to build is to enable them to be this holy nation through the atonement of the sin offerings and then the consecration of the burnt offerings.

So observing the Sabbath then is about remembering this blessing that they have, a weekly reminder of what God has done for them. It's something they all do together as they gather to declare God's praise.

Next, in verse 14, we find God's command to keep the Sabbath. But what's surprising here are the dire consequences if they don't. For the Lord says, observe the Sabbath because it is holy to you.

[4 : 52] Anyone who desecrates it is to be put to death. Those who do any work on that day must be cut off from their people. For six days, work is to be done. But the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest holy to the Lord.

Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day is to be put to death. Now you may think at first that this seems a bit over the top, don't you think? Just for doing a little work on the Sabbath.

But Moses, you might hear someone saying, I was only trying to finish up my work from last night. Do I really deserve the death sentence? And yet, it shows, doesn't it, just how seriously God treats holiness.

When something or someone is set apart by God as holy, then it takes on his character, his attributes. So to desecrate it, which is what working does to the Sabbath, is tantamount to trying to desecrate God himself, to sully what he's made pure.

And when that happens, God has to act. He has no choice because if he doesn't, it shows that he doesn't care for his holiness or his character. And if holiness isn't important to him, then why go to all that trouble with the tabernacle?

[6 : 14] And why bother with the sacrifices and the blood and the offerings that are offered in that place? So God's punishment of work on the Sabbath gives us firstly an indication of what God's holiness entails and how jealously he guards it.

But secondly, the person who breaks the Sabbath says something about his own belief about God. It shows a lack of faith in him.

Now if you recall last year or the year before, it's like the commands for the gathering of the manna in the desert in Exodus 16. If you recall there, they were to collect the manna only for six days.

And on the sixth, they were to collect double so that they could rest on the seventh. Now what did the rest on the Sabbath, on the seventh, teach them?

It taught them that God was their true source of provision. So that even when they rested, God provided for them on the seventh day. The manna they collected on the sixth day didn't spoil.

[7 : 23] Even though for days one to days five, if they collected more than they ate, the manna actually spoiled the next day. So by resting on the Sabbath, they trusted God to provide for them.

And not just physically, now as they head into the promised land, which they had a hand in their physical provision, as it were, but also for their spiritual provision.

That is, for their own atonement and holiness, which they couldn't work for. So on the Sabbath, they stopped working to celebrate God's work in their lives as a holy nation.

And working on the Sabbath shows that they don't trust God. That they don't recognize what He's done for them, rescued them, brought them to the promised land, and provided forgiveness of their sins.

And then finally, we have in the passage, in verse 16, the Sabbath as a celebration of God's pattern for creation. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, God says, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.

[8 : 32] It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day, He rested and was refreshed. I wonder whether you find it interesting to see that God rested and was refreshed.

Now, does God really need rest? I doubt it. Not in the sense that He gets tired and needs to go and sleep. For God neither sleeps nor slumbers, we are told.

And yet, God has hardwired into creation itself this pattern of work and rest. Now, I don't think it's necessarily the ratio that's important, one day of rest for every six days of work, perhaps.

There's some reason to that. But I think what's more important is the principle that the goal of work, the end goal of work, is rest. That rest is the end to which God works, and so should we.

And I think it's just been described in such a beautiful way that God worked, and then He rested and was refreshed by that rest. Now, if you read the original account in Genesis, it's written that God

saw what He had made and that it was good.

[9 : 50] And then on the sixth day, at the very end of His work, He looked on all creation, including of humankind, and He saw that it was very good. And then He rested from that work on the seventh day.

He rested to rejoice in His creation and to enjoy the fruit of His labor. And so likewise, Israel is to rest from their work to enjoy the fruit of their labor.

They're given work after which they have an opportunity to rest and to enjoy what they've achieved. And more than that, as God's people, they enjoy this rest in God's presence.

And as they do, they appreciate how their work mimics God's work and how it mirrors God's creation. So just think for a moment, our motivation for work is to enable us and others to enjoy the fruit of our labor.

So just take cooking, for example. Some of us labor to prepare a good meal. Why? So that it can be enjoyed by others. I think it explains why all these MasterChef contestants get so emotional, don't they, when they talk about cooking for their family.

[11 : 10] You know, it really comes from the heart. That's how they talk about it. And likewise, when we build houses or make things like furniture, it's so that they can be used and enjoyed. I noticed that Katie and her band were practicing hard.

Why? So that we then can enjoy the fruit of their labor as we sing together in praise of God, isn't it? When Twiggie bakes her yummy cakes, it's so that we can enjoy the fruit of her labor.

And in fact, when she sees that we enjoy the fruit of her labor, she takes joy out of that as well, doesn't she? Don't you, Twiggie? Where are you, Twiggie? Yes. I hope you do.

Now imagine a world without rest. In fact, that was Israel's existence in Egypt, wasn't it? Grinding, unrelenting slavery. It drains, does it not, the motivation and joy out of work.

But think, too, of a world without work the other way around. Now we may think it's wonderful, particularly after we've had a really torturous day of work and go, I don't want to work anymore.

[12 : 20] But really, if you think about it, in a world without work, it's not really rest, is it? It's idleness. And so work and rest actually go together, don't they?

They complement each other as God's good pattern for creation. And God Himself worked and then rested and was refreshed. And that's how we're created as well, to work and rest.

And for us who are Christians, this pattern of work and rest actually takes on much deeper significance. We're not merely about working and enjoying the physical world, are we?

Rather, for us, work and rest have spiritual dimensions. And again, we find this is fulfilled in Christ as we've seen throughout the whole series.

That's why we had our reading in Matthew chapter 11 where Jesus said, Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Again and again during this series, we've seen how Jesus is our means to the fulfillment of all that's in the Old Testament, in the Exodus as well, in the series.

[13 : 33] And so here, Jesus is our means to finding rest in God's presence. We've learned that He's our atoning sacrifice, He's our high priest, He's our tabernacle, and now we find that He's our rest as well.

And rest, of course, is synonymous with dwelling with God. And here, Jesus Himself is able to offer this rest because He is God Himself.

As the Son of God, He's able to rightly offer rest in Himself so that when we enter into a relationship with Him, we find Sabbath rest in Him.

And that's why throughout the New Testament, when we become Christians, we're united with Him. We're members of His body, and we are said to be in Christ, resting in Christ.

God's goal when He created us was to find rest in Him. And we are weary and burdened when we don't, as Jesus says, weighed down by the cares of this world and weighed down by our sins.

[14 : 39] And so this rest that Jesus is offering in Matthew chapter 11 is more than just physical rest. Just as we've seen in the Sabbath rest in our passage, it's more than just about stopping work one day a week.

Rather, this rest is about finding peace with God, having our sins forgiven, finding our identity anchored in Christ. There is no more restlessness, if that makes sense, because we've found our identity in Christ.

We no longer need to search for ultimate meaning in life because we've found it in Jesus. And so the first application for us as Christians is to rest in this work, in Christ's work for us. What He's done for us on the cross, what He's secured for us, our place in God's kingdom, is true rest. And what's more, now that we have this peace with God, we are at rest with our imperfections in life as well.

We're no longer trying to be perfect in order to have a relationship with God. because we know that our relationship is not dependent on us, but on Jesus. And we have that assurance that even though we're not perfect, because we have God's Spirit, God is now at work in us to make us perfect.

[16:00] And we might not get there till eternity, but God will complete that work in us. And we don't have to work in that sense, strive in that sense, to achieve that without God.

That's the deep assurance that we can rest in when we put our faith in Jesus, when we come to Him and find rest in Him. But even when we found rest in Him, it doesn't mean, does it, that we have, it doesn't mean that we're idle in this life.

Rather, we still have work to do. And that's the second point in my application. And that is, we are to work having found God's rest. Work in God's rest, or work as we rest in Christ.

And so Jesus continues in verse 29, And so right after Jesus offers His rest, He says, take up my yoke.

Now when I was a small boy, I thought this was a yoke. But of course, I was wrong, wasn't I? This is a yoke, but not the yoke that we're talking about.

[17:21] Rather, this is the yoke that Jesus is talking about, isn't it? It's that huge burden that is put between two oxen. It's a very heavy burden used to pull the plow in the field.

And so it's amazing for Jesus to say, take my yoke, take this heavy burden on you, and do the work I've assigned to you. Because, not only does He say that, He then also adds, my yoke is easy. And my burden, light. And what's even more astonishing, He says, as you take my yoke upon you, you'll find rest for your soul.

Now, how can this all be? How can it all be that this heavy yoke, so it seems, or the yoke of Christ, gives rest? Well, first of all, it means that resting in Christ doesn't mean that there's no more work. But rather, it means that you take on the work that Christ gives to you. Paul puts it another way in Ephesians 2, verse 8 to 10, For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourself, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

[18:33] For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. So you see, saved by grace, not of your own work, and yet, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

This work then, has as its foundation, resting in Christ. You rest in Christ first, and then you respond by doing the work that God gives to you to do, as a response to the grace that you found in Him. And so that changes entirely, doesn't it? Our motivation for work. We don't work to be saved, but we work with eternity in mind. Our priorities change.

When we ask ourselves why we are doing this work, our answer should be, it's for God's kingdom. It's for God's glory. So let me ask, have you reflected on how you work?

Is it to try and still prove yourself? To try and store up treasures on earth? Or are you working with eternity in mind?

[19:46] When you measure what you do, the output, can you see the eternal value that it's creating? Now, I'm not suggesting that simply then kingdom work is all about just sharing the gospel and teaching the Bible.

That's a very simplistic way of looking at kingdom work. But rather, I'm saying that even the very so-called mundane or secular things that you think you're doing, we ought to now do in a way that reflects God's kingdom, that reflects God's eternal values.

When we deal, for example, with our colleagues or friends, do we treat them in a way that reflects God's kingdom? Is our attitude to work consistent with the fact that we know of God's eternal rest? It changes, doesn't it, why we do things and how we do it. It changes our heart and our motivations for why we do things. You see, when we're resting in God and looking to eternal rest, we don't need to be working to prove ourselves to others anymore.

We don't need to try better. We don't need to be envious of people that are doing better than us. Why? Because we're not working to find rest or success. We already have that.

[21 : 07] We have God's very best, the rest that He gives us. And our response then, our work is then a response to that rest, an outworking of our faith in Jesus.

And it should be filled with thanksgiving and praise because we know we're not trying to do it to earn our merit, but actually as a response of thanksgiving to God.

And ironically, when we work like that, it actually increases our capacity to work because we're not expending energy on what Tim Keller calls our work under the work.

The work under the work is all the anxiety and stress that we do, you know, that we feel that we have to please people or whatever. That's the work under the work. But when we get rid of all that and we're just doing the work that God gives to us, then actually we have more capacity, don't we, to work.

I want to also touch on one little point and that's people often ask, well, does that mean now then therefore that we have to take Sunday off as the one day across the week in order to rest?

[22 : 14] Well, I think it's actually more profound than that. So yes, physical rest is important but sometimes you can rest physically and still be restless, can't you?

Remember the Pharisees had all these rules about what you can and can't do on a Sunday and remember what Jesus said? He criticized them by saying that the Sabbath was made for us and not the other way around.

And even here in Exodus, I wonder whether you realize that the tabernacle was actually functioning seven days a week, wasn't it? Which means that actually the priest had to work on the seventh day.

And so because Christ has freed us from the law, us as Christians even have less reason to be legalistic about this. And so I know some of you do shift work as nurses and doctors or pastors even like me.

Imagine if I said I can't work on a Sunday. That would be good, wouldn't it? But we do all this to serve others. So I don't think we're meant to take this legalistically. But the more important question to ask is whether our lives, all your individual lives were slightly different, but how does your life reflect God's good pattern of work and rest?

[23 : 29] Do you rest physically to reflect your spiritual rest? Do we stop working and give our minds and bodies rest because we trust God to provide for our needs?

Are we motivated to work by the rest that we found in Christ, taking on Christ's yoke rather than our own burdens? And if our rest is found ultimately as a body of Christ, do we set apart time to come together when we can physically, but even when we can't online, so that we can praise God together for setting us apart as his holy people, his holy nation?

Friends, the Bible's promise is very clear, isn't it? In Christ, God has given us rest. This is first and foremost spiritual and eternal rest. It's the certain hope of our home in the new creation.

It's the assurance of peace with God through our sins being forgiven. And as a consequence, we are then given a pattern for this life so that we can work and rest in light of eternity.

And so today, whether you're a Christian or not, if you still find yourself restless, then let me encourage you to think why that might be. Is it because you don't yet know the rest that comes from trusting in Jesus and peace with God through Jesus' death?

[25 : 02] Or maybe you know these things in your head, perhaps, and yet you have not allowed it to apply to your lives, in your work, and in your rest?

Do you perhaps need to take stock and take Christ's yoke so that you find true rest for your souls?

Well, whatever it may be, let me give you some time to just reflect, perhaps give thanks, or ask God to help you find that rest.

Father, teach us to find our rest in Christ. Thank you again for your reminder that it is his work and not ours that brings peace with you. May our eternal salvation motivate us in the way we work and rest, so that we do the good works that you have prepared for us to do in full dependence on your spirit.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.