

Creation and Sabbath Rest

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn together this evening to Genesis chapter 2, focusing on the opening verses of Genesis chapter 2, verses 1 to 3.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host 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, or sanctified it, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

We mentioned briefly, as we've been going over the account of creation, that there are three particular creation ordinances they're usually called.

That's to say, things which God established at this point in creation, before anything else happened that we read of from chapter 3 onwards, with regard to our sin, our fall, our rebellion against God, and then God's provision of salvation for us against that.

[1 : 0 8] If I had already had that happened, three important ordinances were instituted or established. The first of these is the Sabbath, or Sabbath rest, or the Sabbath day as we know it, that came to grow from God's principle here of taking rest and establishing the seventh day as a day of rest.

The second ordinance is the ordinance of marriage, where God established marriage very plainly between a man and a woman, the first man and the first woman.

And it's very obvious from the New Testament, quoting the final verse of chapter 2 here in the likes of Ephesians, chapter 5, where you find Paul bringing from the creation account this testament to a man and a woman coming to be joined together in marriage.

And that obviously has huge implications for what's happening in our own land, as was mentioned in prayer, with regard to this week's final establishment of gay marriage as something that is now legal in our country.

And indeed the pride, the human pride, the worldly pride, that's taken on the part of so many, in regard to that, not least on the part of governments. That's the second ordinance, the ordinance of marriage.

[2 : 3 0] The third ordinance is the ordinance of work. Maybe that's one we don't think about all that often, but God established work, or labour, in the best sense of the word, at creation, before man even left the garden of Eden.

He was given the task of keeping it, of working it, of tilling the ground. And we have to remember the fact that work in the proper sense of it, although it become again distorted, just like marriage and just like the Sabbath have been, by the fall and the sinfulness of man, nevertheless it was established before any of that, that work was good for human beings.

And that God gave that ordinance of work for the development of human beings in the best way, as they would apply themselves to that ordinance.

So, tonight we're looking at the first of these, and we may spend more than one study on it, because it is such a vast subject, the subject of Sabbath and Sabbath rest. It takes us not only into the New Testament, it takes us actually into the rest, as Hebrews 4 calls it, that remains for the people of God in eternity.

There is a connection right through from what you see in hope, and look in eternity as the provision of God, rest for his people, the peace of heaven, a direct connection from that through the pages of Scripture back to Genesis, but also through history, back to the establishing of these things in the creation by God.

[4 : 03] So, we'll just look at it and take time as we need to study the various aspects of it, because the Sabbath and Sabbath rest, and an understanding of the Sabbath, again in our society, for us as Christians, is absolutely crucial.

It's crucial to understand the basic principles of it, because that helps us then, to move on to the more detailed aspects of it. You don't begin with the detail as to what is or isn't allowed, and what should and shouldn't be done.

You begin with the principle, the principles of how it was established, when it was established, why it was established. And we'll see that Jesus himself went right back to the basics of it being established by God, when he disputed with the Pharisees more than once about it.

So, we're looking at two things. First of all, God's establishing of the Sabbath, and that'll involve his establishing of it in relation to creation, but also in relation to his work of redemption.

So, God's establishing of the Sabbath. Secondly, God's blessing and sanctifying, or making holy, declaring it holy, the Sabbath day, the blessing and sanctifying of the Sabbath.

[5 : 17] And that'll involve two things as well. Firstly, the fact that sanctifying, or making it holy, means setting it apart distinctively, which means setting it apart from the other six days.

And secondly, it'll involve a specific kind of rest, because God took his rest on the Sabbath day. It wasn't a rest of inactivity.

He didn't cease to do things in the sense of that he didn't do anything after that. And that means that, as we follow that pattern, the Sabbath rest for us is not a rest in the sense of doing nothing.

It's just a different kind of work that we do on the Sabbath day. And that is, in fact, a work of taking satisfaction, as God did in the creation, that we take our satisfaction in God, and in his work, for us and for our good.

So, these things, just briefly, as far as we can. God's establishing of the Sabbath, first of all. Notice here in the verses at the beginning of Genesis 2. Recall also, if you will, the fourth commandment, we all know it, I'm sure, of by heart.

[6 : 27] It begins, Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work.

Exodus 20, verse 11. So, there again, as it goes on to say, For in six days the Lord God made the heavens and the earth, and he rested on the Sabbath day. So, Exodus 20, verse 11, the fourth commandment, itself makes specific reference to God resting after his six days work of creation.

And that he established the Sabbath when he had actually finished that work of creation. That's what it says here in Genesis. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them, and on the seventh day, God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the Sabbath day.

So, God blessed. The whole thing really joined, is joined closely together in the argument of these three verses. Now, notice, when the Sabbath day and Sabbath rest was established.

It was established after God's six days of creation, of his work of creation, but before man fell and became a sinner.

[7 : 41] And that's an important point to bear in mind. The Sabbath was not given to us, to human beings, after the fall of man into sin. It was not given by God because he saw that man had sinned and needed something like the Sabbath to keep him in check.

The Sabbath was not given primarily, and first and foremost, within the Ten Commandments. That was many, many years later in the time of Moses. And that's why the fourth commandment begins with the word remember.

Remember means cast your mind back to. Remember the Sabbath day really takes the people of Israel then on Mount Sinai back to the creation to remember how the Sabbath day and when the Sabbath day was established.

Established in the creation. In other words, the Sabbath day is not in its establishing tied to things like our salvation, our sinfulness, our need of salvation.

It is given to man before he became a sinner. Nor is it something that you and I should see as immediately related to the way work became for man something of a weariness after the fall.

[9 : 00] Remember how God himself specified that as part of the curse that man brought in by his sin. That the ground would no longer bear for him a crop or product easily.

Thorns and thistles it will bring forth for you. In the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread. And then you return to the dust. And there's God saying work has become a real toil through the effect of sin.

And the Sabbath day was not given so that there would be at least a 24 hour relief from the drudgery or the sin affected labor of human beings.

Before man ever left the Garden of Eden before he sinned before he rebelled against God God had given him a Sabbath rest. God had established a day of rest subsequent to six days of labor.

That's the cycle that you find in the Garden of Eden. There are six days of work followed by one day of rest. That's the seven to one cycle that God established in relation to his work of creation.

[10 : 17] Now that tells you that the Sabbath has ongoing relevance. If the Sabbath began with the Ten Commandments and the Fourth Commandment people could argue as they do still argue but it would be much more difficult to argue against the idea that the Sabbath day was just specifically given to Israel and it was something given to Israel because they represented if you like the church of the time so therefore the Sabbath is really just for the church and people outside of the church who don't believe in God they are under no obligation to keep the Sabbath day to regard the Sabbath day any differently.

Now you can argue against that on the basis very successfully on the basis of what you find there in Genesis first and foremost. The Sabbath was given to man at the point of creation before the fall before the law was given to him he had it as part of his creation environment his creation relationship to God.

Therefore it is for man as man for human beings as human beings for human beings in their entirety and not just for a select few who follow God as believers.

The Sabbath was established by God in relation to his work of creation. Therefore its continuing relevance you can see is derived from that among other things but that is one of the primary things that shows us how the Sabbath is still relevant and that day of rest following six days of labor is relevant for human society and relevant for our day as well.

That's the first thing then. It was established in relation to his work of creation but secondly it was established too in relation to his work of redemption.

[12:13] It's interesting when we flick over if you like for a minute to Deuteronomy the passage where we're in Deuteronomy because there just as they were about to enter the promised land God was taking through Moses taking the people back to things like the creation and establishing again for them the terms of the ten commandments but what's interesting in regard to the fourth commandment is that there isn't actually a mention of the creation.

What it says is observe the Sabbath day six days you shall labor and do all your work but the seventh is a Sabbath to the Lord your God on it you shall not do any work and so on and then it says you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand.

In other words in that passage God is connecting or keying in the idea of the Sabbath and the meaning of the Sabbath not with the work of creation but with the work of redemption with salvation because he's mentioning there the exodus the deliverance from Egypt that great Old Testament event that stands as the Old Testament representation of salvation or of redemption which stands as a representation a type a symbol whatever word you use of the redemption that we know we now have in Christ but there it is in the Old Testament in relation to the Sabbath and Sabbath rest we are required to keep a Sabbath to the Lord because he is our redeemer as well as being our creator now that's not meant to replace the Exodus emphasis or the emphasis in Genesis Genesis really sets it in the creation and that's the basic foundation of it but God is then adding to that alongside of that he's adding to that this matter of his redemption and that we are required to regard the Sabbath as much in relation to redemption as the creation of God or the law of God in itself and sometimes perhaps we've not really emphasized that enough because when we come to just emphasize the Ten Commandments on their own and there's nothing wrong with doing that emphasis of course and you come to the Exodus version of it and confine it as we usually do to that keying it into the creation then you run the danger of people seeing the keeping of the Sabbath days just simply a requirement of the law that goes back to the idea of creation and that's it and the thought of it really becomes rather tedious it's important that we present

I know things are going to be until the heart is renewed for many people it's going to be boring anyway to think of spending a Sabbath day in the Christian fashion but the point is we have to present the gospel and present the likes of the Sabbath as positively as possible it's not just a matter not even a primarily a matter of not doing certain things in keeping the Sabbath day it's a matter of doing the things that do belong to the Sabbath day because it's tied so closely to our redemption and that's where the worship of God and thankfulness to God and praising God and taking rest in God's provision of redemption is so important that's where obviously the Lord's day as well you could follow this line through in more detail just mentioning it as because it's keyed into redemption that's where the issue of Christ's resurrection from the dead also comes into the picture of the Bible with regard to the Lord's day and it relates to we're not going into it at the moment but the way that it's become the first day of the week in relation to the New Testament practice where the apostles marked the resurrection of the Lord and took that itself in its logical meaning as now anticipating a rest in heaven but also a provision for us that has been accomplished in

Christ in his work of redemption so there's both a reflection of the work of redemption in Christ in other words it's a memorial to the resurrection as it looks back but it also looks forward at the beginning of the week to the rest of heaven to the peace of God to the provision of that eternal Sabbath so again you see the continuing relevance of the Sabbath is argued from that and if people come and say to you look your Sunday your Sabbath whatever name people give it it's actually just an Old Testament relic you should just get away from the idea that this day has any relevance as a day that's different to the other days and of course that's coming largely from disposal of the teaching of the Bible or the Bible itself or the whole idea indeed of God but the ongoing relevance of the Lord's day of the Sabbath of Sabbath rest is abundantly obvious from these two points alone that God instituted or established it in relation to his work of creation before the fall and that God also established it in relation to his work of redemption and particularly so now in Jesus Christ you take these two things with you you cannot actually not argue for the Bible's principle of the Lord's day the Sabbath day but one other thing in relation to it as established in relation to the work of redemption remember Jesus when he was disputing with the Pharisees we'll just take the account we have in Mark chapter 2 where they came with certain questions to him as he was going through the grain fields remember he and the disciples as the disciples were going through there they began to pluck the heads of grain and the Pharisees were saying to him look why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath not lawful of course because they had established such minute laws as not being able to pluck grain on the Sabbath the Lord had not specified that in his institution of the Sabbath and then he said to them have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry he and those who were with him how he entered the house of God in the name time of

[19:07] Abiath or the high priest and ate the bread of the presence which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat and he also gave it to those who were with him and he said to them the Sabbath this is really one of the most important texts or statements about the Sabbath and what it means and why God has given it the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath the first part of that means the Pharisees had turned that around instead of the way that God had given the Sabbath to man and for the benefit of man the Pharisees by all these additional minute laws and regulations had actually made man for the Sabbath they had actually choked a proper view of the Sabbath they had actually choked people benefiting from the Sabbath as God intended by just burying it under their own traditions and regulations and Christ turned it back to the way that it was in the beginning the Sabbath was made for man

God gave it to man for his benefit so he says the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath and that's such an important statement too who is it that protects the Sabbath that guards the Sabbath who is it that continues to emphasize its relevance and its importance who is it that actually takes the Sabbath as a day that God has appointed and makes it beneficial to his people it is Christ his resurrection from the dead and his ascension to glory is Christ being established as Lord over all things including the Sabbath day and because he is the Lord of the Sabbath and because our proper benefiting from the Sabbath cannot be detached from the

Lordship of Christ your observance and my observance of the Sabbath whatever that entails and however much or little it entails but a proper let's say a proper observance of the Sabbath is not possible by merely keeping rules and regulations it has to be inclusive of being subject to the Lordship of Christ willingly we can have everything in place outwardly as the Jews often had and one of the things God through Isaiah for example specified to them is that God had become weary of their Sabbath why because they were trampling it they were not actually keeping it in the spirit of worship to God they were keeping it for their own ends they had actually come to move far away from the original attention of

God in giving the Sabbath to man and by the time of the Pharisees that of course had become even more complicated and out of order so our observance of the Sabbath friends is something that requires for it to be as God intends and to be God pleasing it has to be in a proper worship of God and a proper acceptance and bowing to the lordship of Christ as the lord of the Sabbath so God's establishing of the Sabbath has these two things in it it's in relation to his work of creation and in relation to his work of redemption which takes in Jesus and Jesus' resurrection and Jesus being therefore established as the lord of the Sabbath through his resurrection and ascension what about God's blessing and sanctifying of the Sabbath let's look again at Genesis and what it says at the beginning of chapter 2 on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done and he rested so God blessed the seventh day and made it holy he blessed it and sanctified it you can take these two things together there may be a slight difference in the nuance of the meaning of it but what it effectively means is that God first of all set apart this day as a particular day that was different to the rest by God setting it apart that too is very important it's interesting that the first thing in the Bible that's mentioned as being made sacred or holy or sanctified is the Sabbath it's the first thing that God declared as having sanctified that itself should be important to us

God sanctified it in the sense of he set it apart in the garden of Eden to man before the fall before sin before any of that it was set apart by God in other words it is not the church or tradition afterwards that decided that there was to be one day separate from in the sense of different to the other six days God did that the Sabbath day is different because God appointed it as such God made it different God established it and blessed it and sanctified it and in sanctifying it there's a setting apart by God's appointment of this day to be different to the other six and if somebody asks us why is the Sabbath kept as different the simple answer to that is because God made it so and God specified it so and God deliberately set it apart to be different to the other six days of course people will say but every day isn't it holy to the Lord aren't we supposed to make every day days when we remember the Lord and worship the Lord and pray to the Lord yes we are there's nothing here that's opposed to that but there is something here that specifically mentions God setting apart the seventh day the one day out of the week and the fact that God did it means that God has made it different and it should retain its distinctiveness in comparison with the other six days on the basis of God himself having done that of course the problem is that people get rid of the idea of God from their minds people are so much given to departing from the truth of the Bible even people who are within the wider church church and it's a serious issue when the difference between the Sabbath day and the other six days is minimized or even lost or abandoned altogether you look out over society out over the practice of our people of our land of our government's thinking of all of these things where's the difference between the

[26 : 53] Lord's day and the other six you go to any large town or city in the land and stand watching the shopping centres for seven days and then ask you which of these days looks different to the others you can't pick it out because they're all the same there is no idea of there being a day different to the rest and if there is then it doesn't really matter because it's a relic of the Old Testament so we've done away with it but there it is at the creation God blessed the seventh day and made it holy and because he did this at the creation it's intended to last for mankind it's intended to be a day that man regards as made different by God to the other six days and it's such a serious thing and it's such a damaging thing when any society loses sight of that distinction and that setting apart and the fact that God did it not the church not human beings not bishops or archbishops or medieval

Catholicism or anything like that God did it and it continues to be relevant by God's appointment and different by God's appointment and the blessing and the sanctifying secondly involve a specific rest it says here so that God rested from all his work so therefore God blessed the seventh day and made it holy in other words the giving of the Sabbath day to man as a day of rest different to the other six days is based on or patterned on what God himself did that when he rested from the Sabbath from the work of the previous six days and rested on the seventh day it doesn't mean that God became inactive you don't think of him as no longer doing anything and one of the interesting things in relation to that is that in contrast to the other six days the seventh day has no reference to the evening and the morning being the seventh day closing the day as it were because

God's work continues the rest of the Sabbath day is for God a rest of satisfaction in what he has done the perfection of his work of creation that's why it begins there the heavens and the earth were finished and the host of them he completed it there's nothing more to be done every detail of it is as he had planned and designed and now brought to pass and therefore he rested there's nothing else to do in the sense of the work of creation but God is still active upholding the creation communion with man so many ways in which God continues after this to be active and even active on the seventh day and that tells us that our pattern to the Lord's day and what it includes for us is not to be thought of as a day of doing nothing it's that day of doing things that are different to what we do on the other days now as you well know yourselves there are certain categories of work that have come to be regarded as work that is legitimate on the

Lord's day I'm not going into that just now but they're generally called works of necessity and of mercy where things are necessarily kept up for the benefit of human life for mercy works of mercy and things like that but what we're saying is that in the principle of the Sabbath and as a day of rest it's not in activity but it's a different kind of work just like God himself began a different kind of work on the seventh day in contrast to the other six days so we engage in the work of worshipping God work of satisfaction with God's redemption and creation and his relationship with us it's interesting that in Exodus 35 as well as Isaiah 58 the end of that chapter is a really important passage on the

Sabbath day and the benefits of it for mankind but in both of these the references to taking of sanctifying this on our part of sanctifying or keeping the day holy to the Lord and in Isaiah God says why are you doing this to my day when they were desecrating it and not treating it properly he called it my day it's a day that belongs to him and it belongs to us to give it to him in the way we use it to sanctify it if you like in our keeping on it and incidentally just in the way of passing but it is important too that we don't lose sight of the fact of what is through of the other six days God sanctified the seventh day he made it different he set it apart but the sanctity of work belongs to the other six days it's just as true of the fourth commandment in as much as it says you shall do not work remember the sabbathly in it you shall not do any work that's a command it's also a command within that to say six days you shall labor and do all your work that's commanded work is commanded just as rest on the sabbath is commanded so that's the lord's day blessing and sanctifying of by god specifically designed for man for man's benefit for man's satisfaction and contemplation and soul delight and nourishment in the things of god and of his redemption and of his creation too which is why there is nothing wrong at all with enjoying the creation on the sabbath day there is if you try and say that's all you need to do on the sabbath day that's all the worship you need on the sabbath day that's not what we're saying at all but you enjoy the creation you take rest and contemplative satisfaction in it you see the work of god in it you think about god and his work of creation and his kindness in giving you a day of rest to contemplate it you think of his redemption you come to worship him because of what he has done in christ you render to him as the psalm of saint praise and if you think about it that's what we read in the psalm a song for the sabbath as it's entitled to render thanks unto the lord it is a comely thing it's a thing of beauty because it is in relation to what he has done creation and redemption and we've been thinking there of how it is following the pattern of god that we find ourselves in keeping the sabbath in the satisfaction of worship john calvin said this in regard to this passage of of genesis god cannot either more gently allure or more effectually incite us to obedience than by inviting and exhorting us to imitate himself i'll read that again god cannot either more gently allure us or more effectually incite us to obedience than by inviting and exhorting us to imitate himself keep the sabbath for this is what god did in resting on the seventh day

[35 : 33] and we imitate we follow this pattern in doing what we're doing in sanctifying the day for him let's pray gracious lord we have so much to give thanks for and we give thanks specifically now for your wisdom in appointing for us this day of rest lord we know that this day is so much now despised in our society by so many of our people and by so many throughout the world we know gracious lord the many attempts that have been made to further rid our society of any thoughts of this day being specific to the lord and to his worship and different to the rest we look to you oh lord to come and instill in the hearts of our people and of ourselves a true regard for your day a true regard for it as a day that you have appointed bring us back we pray lord to see this day in its design for our benefit and help us lord by your holy spirit once again to hold precious as a people the observance of the lord's day for his worship for all the activities that take delight in your creation and redemption we ask lord as we do so that we may closely follow ourselves the pattern that you have set us receive our thanks we pray and forgive our sin for

Jesus sake amen