

Rest and remember the Lord

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[0 : 00] I'd love you to keep Leviticus 23 open in front of you just over the next 20-25 minutes. And we're going to talk today about holidays and holidays and holy days and festivals.

It is pretty good, isn't it, to have a day off or a holiday. Today is Sunday and you're here and you're not working right now, which is good.

For well over a thousand years, Sundays have been special set-apart days in the UK, a Christian Sabbath really, as you think about it. Have time off work, get together with others, go to church and relax and rest as much as you can.

Like for sure, not so many people go to church these days in the UK. And most shops are open on Sundays with shop workers working, as do lots of other people on a Sunday, deliveroo drivers and prison warders and hospital porters.

Life goes on as it does. And on Sundays now, you can bustle around, you can spend your money, you can be entertained, you can open your laptop and see the work emails coming in. You can keep going non-stop. You can be forced to keep going non-stop. You can feel the pressure around you to keep going non-stop.

[1 : 16] But Sunday, I think, does still feel like a bit of a different day, right? Like the weekend as a whole, this really nice 100-year-old invention of, just for a few people, two days off, some people might say.

More than that, today is Sunday, tomorrow is bank holiday Monday. So have another day off, watch the snooker, and then try and fit five days of work into four for the rest of the week, really, really frantically.

The word holiday comes from holy day. Like old days set aside where you stopped work for a Christian feast day, for a religious festival. Bank holidays in the UK are still stop-working days. Christmas Day is a bank holiday. Remember that Jesus was born. New Year's Day, another bank holiday. Good Friday is a bank holiday. Remember that Jesus died. Then have Easter Monday. Remember that Jesus rose.

Have the day on Monday, because you get Sunday off anyway. Why not take a May bank holiday, a spring bank holiday, a summer bank holiday too? And if you can take another longer holiday in the school holidays, when kids are on holiday and parents feel less on holiday, then great, take it.

[2 : 36] This kind of weekly, yearly rhythm is good, right? It can also be quite revealing. The truth is, you can tell so much about what a culture values by their holidays.

Not just which days we choose, but also what we do on them. Binge the next Netflix series. Get drunk, then recover. Spend your cash. Try and grab as many presents as possible.

Seek out leisure. Remain glued to your phone. Working and obsessing. You can spend your days like that. Or rest. Spend time with others.

Find refreshment in God and his goodness. Days off, holy days, holidays and festivals. We just read from Leviticus 23 in this adventurous series in this Old Testament book.

They're words from three and a half thousand years ago. They're spoken by God to Moses for the people of Israel. If you know the story, having rescued his people out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to himself.

[3 : 43] In the book of Leviticus, God sets out for his people how they are now to live as those who belong to him. The summary verse of Leviticus may be chapter 19, verse 2 on the screen here.

Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. It's a command quoted in the New Testament and applied to Christian believers.

Be different. Live in a set-apart way. Be consecrated to me because I am your God and I am holy. This call to live distinctively and be holy for us today, as for then-then, applies to all of life.

A few weeks ago in chapter 18 and 20, it starts with your body and what you do sexually. Be holy, live differently from those around you. It continues, it spreads out in chapter 19, how to relate to your parents, how to treat the weak, how to love your neighbour. Honesty in business, justice in your relationships. Be holy, live differently. In chapters 21 and 22, instructions for spiritual leaders.

[4 : 57] Have integrity, live purely, treat God as God, be holy, live differently. And now this morning in chapter 23, this call to holiness, it spreads wider still.

I think that's how it works. As the Lord speaks and he outlines for his people a calendar. A weekly, yearly rhythm of days and holy days and festivals that will, well, it will be good for them. But more than that, it will mark them out and shape them as a nation and a culture that belong to God. Let's dive in together.

We're going to see, over about 10 minutes, how their year was to be shaped and why. And then we're going to ask, so what for us now and today? At the beginning of chapter 23, verses 1 and 2, just look at this.

The Lord said to Moses, speak to the Israelites and Satan, these are my appointed festivals, the appointed festivals of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.

[6 : 04] So notice a couple of things straight up. First, these are the Lord's appointed festivals. They come from him. They're given by him. They focus on him, the Lord.

And then two, they are sacred assemblies. They're set apart times when people are to stop and assemble together. So here then is a first point this morning, trying to cover the significance of all these festivals that we're going to look at briefly.

Rest and remember the Lord together. That is, don't keep bashing on every single day as though your life depends on it.

No, stop and rest. And as you do, don't sit doom scrolling on your phone by yourself or shopping till you drop. No, remember the Lord together.

Turn over to verse 3 onwards if you've got your Bible open and here it all is laid out for you. Just notice the structure of the chapter.

[7 : 12] Firstly, there is one weekly day to observe, the Sabbath on the seventh day. And then from verse 4 on, there are seven annual festivals in the Jewish year.

Passover, unleavened bread, first fruits, weeks, trumpets, the day of atonement, and the festival of tabernacles that take the Jewish nation through a whole year. And no in-depth detail on everything right here this morning, but get a sense of things.

First, the Sabbath day. It is a chance to rest and remember the Lord who rests. Look, verse 3.

There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You're not to do any work wherever you live. It is a Sabbath to the Lord.

Sabbath means cease and stop and rest. For the people of Israel, after non-stop forced labour in Egypt, what a gift that God would command this.

[8 : 17] One day in seven, stop working and switch off. Catch your breath. Gather together with others in sacred assembly and rest.

I think what a relief to live like that. I mean, what an exercise in trusting the Lord as well, right? That the world will keep turning even if we stop.

But of course it will. Because he's the God who created the world and then rested himself on the seventh day, enjoying and ruling over his creation as he does today.

This weekly Sabbath rest is to the Lord. Rest and remember him together. Would you? At verses 4 to 23, we're moving through quickly, outline the springtime annual festivals.

Remember the Lord who rescues and provides. First off, he's the God who rescues. At the Lord's Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, in verses 4 to 8, look back to the time when God rescued his people out of slavery in Egypt.

[9 : 29] You might remember, you might know what happened back then. God had said to his people in Egypt, I'm about to come in deadly judgment and I will rescue you and bring you to myself.

They'd be instructed to slaughter a lamb and daub the blood on their doorframe and eat bread without leaven, without yeast, because there's no time for dough to rise.

God is going to rescue you quickly. And that is exactly what he did. He came to Egypt. He saw the blood of the Passover lambs on the doors. He passed over the people as he meted out judgment

on the Egyptians.

And then he brought his people out with their non-yeasty dough on their shoulders. It was the great act of rescue from slavery as the Lord brought them to himself.

Now, says God, celebrate that. And remember me every year. At verse 5, the Lord's Passover begins at twilight on the 14th day of the first month.

[10:36] That was the annual day to kill and eat a lamb. It was the Passover meal that Jesus eats with his disciples the night before he himself is killed.

It is the meal that Jewish people still share today, like this. On the 15th day of the month, the Lord's festival of unleavened bread begins. For seven days, you're meant to eat bread made without yeast.

As a community, you're meant to act out together what it had been like, as you remember. There's a sacred assembly, verse 7. No work. Seven days of food offerings to God.

Then a seventh day, another gathering. No work. See what they were meant to do? Don't stop.

Rest. Gather and remember him with food.

This God who rescues you so wonderfully. He rescues. He provides this God. Remember that about him too.

[11:38] Verse 9. And the Lord said to Moses, speak to the Israelites and say to them, when you enter the land I'm going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest.

He's to wave the sheaf before the Lord and it will be accepted on your behalf. This is a harvest time celebration. Starts at the springtime barley harvest. Why would you bring the first fruits and offer them?

Because you've provided it, Lord, in the land that you've given. And it's yours and we're thankful and we know there's more to come. Seven full weeks, 50 days after the first fruits, comes the festival of weeks.

It becomes known as Pentecost. It's the end of the barley harvest. Bring loads of offerings to the Lord and have a sacred assembly and do no work. Rest and remember him.

How he provides. And as you do that, verse 22, when you reap the harvest of your land, don't reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

[12:44] Leave them for the poor and the foreigner residing among you. I am the Lord your God. That's a wonderful thing. In a society of greedy grabbers like ours, with holidays all about me and buying stuff for me, more for me, you won't see much of this.

But when you trust in the good God who gives rest and rescues and provides, you won't take all you can for yourself. Verses 23 to the end outline the autumn time festivals in month seven.

The first is Jewish New Year. It's Rosh Hashanah, remembering the God who remembers. It's another day of rest.

Like our New Year bank holiday. But instead of watching films on the box and recovering from New Year's Eve, it's a day for big trumpet blasts. To kind of say to God, here we are.

Remember us. I'm accelerating through. On the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the most solemn day of the year. Remember that the Lord forgives.

[13:56] Our sins are serious. Bloody sacrifices must be offered. Stop your work. Deny yourselves. Humble yourselves before him. And then five days later comes the biggest and loudest feast of all, the Festival of Tabernacles.

Remember that he is the God who carries you. I'm going to read from verse 39. I wonder if you can imagine this. This big kind of jamboree in Jerusalem.

So beginning with the 15th day of the 7th month, after you've gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days. That's a long party, seven days.

The first day is a day of Sabbath rest. The eighth day also. On the first day, take branches from luxuriant trees, from palms, willows and leafy trees, and rejoice before the Lord for seven whole days.

Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. Celebrate it in the seventh month. And live in temporary shelters for seven days.

[15:03] Stick up little tents and live in them. All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters, so that your descendants will know that I made the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I

brought them out of Egypt.

I am the Lord your God. So on this seven-day festival, you're all together. You're acting out what it was like when God rescued you. You're camping.

You're celebrating. It is one enormous, solemn, messy, happy street celebration of the God who has carried you and will carry you.

There it is. We made it through. A year in the life of the Jewish nation. Leviticus 23.

There are days off, holidays and holy days, to shape your life around, to look forward to, as a holy nation, as people who live differently and belong to a good and holy God.

[16:09] I think you made it through that little moment there. I wonder what you think of that. I wonder if you think it would have been good to live out your year like this.

I think it would. Rather than every day the same, rather than being by yourself and always doing stuff, working, grinding away, doom-scrolling, spending, never switching off, head down, instead of that, you're part of a community with a rhythm to your life and the Lord God whom you belong to. And your whole year, from one week to the next, is shaped around him and how good it is to know this God who gives rest and rescues and provides and remembers and forgives and carries through every year.

That is good. That is the good life. So let's ask this question then, as we begin to draw things together.

Should we just get on and start doing this then? In a few weeks' time, on May the 21st, should we simply join in with Jewish friends in celebrating the Festival of Weeks and take it for there?

[17:32] And the Bible's answer is, no. You don't need to do that. Rather and instead, if people like us want to live and experience lasting rest, and if we want to be part of a community, the community, that knows and belongs to this good and holy God, there is really one straightforward thing that we must do.

That you must do, that I must do, that all our neighbours, both Jewish and non-Jewish, must do. What must we do? very straightforwardly, from the Bible, now and today, we must come to Jesus. And that is because, let me explain what I mean, everything that these old festivals are about, knowing and belonging to God, they find their fulfilment, in Jesus Christ.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Colossae. It's a church where some people were trying to force festival keeping onto others.

And in Colossians 2, 16 and 17, Paul writes this, on the screen. Therefore, do not let anyone judge you, by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day.

[19:02] Don't let anyone judge you, by whether or not you keep, these Old Testament holy days and festivals. These are a shadow, of the things that were to come.

The reality, however, is found in Christ. This is such an important verse. Do you see this? All those Jewish feasts and festivals are a shadow, and the reality is found in Christ.

I was cycling along the guided busway on Wednesday morning, thinking about this. I'd have enjoyed thinking about something else, but I was thinking about this. I was thinking about how these festivals are a shadow, and the reality is Jesus Christ.

And lo and behold, on the ground in front of me, and I cycled along, I realised I was looking at my shadow on the pavement, with the sun behind me, on my way up to Impington.

And as I was cycling, I could see my shadow in, I could see my outline in shadow form, just on the ground in front of me. My cycling helmet, two slightly sticking out ears, two bobbing shoulders, and then the rest of me, my outline, my shadow.

[20:12] My shadow, my outline was there in front of me on the way up to Impington, and then, following along after, was the reality, me, on my bike. And Paul says here in the New Testament that all the festivals of Leviticus 23, they're like a shadow.

They're an outline in advance, and then following after that comes the reality, Jesus himself.

Explain what that looks like, what that means, why it's so good. Though what a weekly Sabbath, cease and stop and rest. What a relief, what a shadow.

It is a shadow, the Sabbath. Because the Lord Jesus stands up in public in the first century, and he says, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Every weekly Sabbath, that the Jewish nation enjoyed, a shadow, because true

and lasting rest is offered to us in Christ.

[21 : 36] At the Passover, the festival of unleavened bread was a reminder that God rescues. But that rescue from slavery in Egypt, remembered year after year, it was but a shadow.

The reality is found in the one final Passover lamb, whose blood shed on the cross is able to shield us from God's judgment as he rescues us from sin and death.

Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed, the New Testament says. Well, think of the festival of tabernacles.

It was such a joyful, raucous celebration of the God who carried his people through the desert, feeding them and giving them water to drink, but only a shadow. Two thousand years ago, in first century Jerusalem, amid the tents and the noise and the celebration of the festival of tabernacles, Jesus stood up.

On the last and greatest day of the festival, John 7, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, let everyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

[22 : 56] And whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. I love that. to festival keepers camping out for seven days remembering the God who carries and feeds and drinks, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, come to me, inviting and commanding, because he is the reality to which all the festivals point.

And we're talking today, this morning, Leviticus 23. If you've ever read this chapter before, about days off on holidays and holy days and festivals. Today is Sunday, tomorrow is a bank holiday, and then we're back to it.

Every society has its own pattern for sure. In a culture that loses sight of God and ultimate reality, days off and holidays can end up being not much more than binge watching and spending and grabbing and doom scrolling and trying to relax.

We mustn't settle for that. Do you want deep and lasting rest more than a day off here or there? Are you thirsty to know the God who rescues and provides and remembers and will carry you? Do you want to be part of not just a community, but the community that lives differently and belongs to the Holy God?

[24 : 31] We should see the festivals of Leviticus 23. We should see the shadow of the life that we're made for. and then we are invited and commanded to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, to turn to him and put your faith in him and take him as your Lord and God and then every week and every year experience with others around you just the sheer goodness of having the Lord as your God.

Leviticus 23 back then, rest and remember the Lord together. Now, come to Jesus today. And then thirdly and finally, let me say this.

We are meant to remember him. We are meant to remember Jesus together. Sitting here this morning, 2,000 years after the coming of Jesus, what can we do?

What should we do to remember the goodness of our Lord Jesus together? one, why not use your Sunday really well?

Like it is such a wonderful thing that as God would have it, many of us have time off work and are free to assemble together on Sundays. don't need to say this to you but you're here because you're here but come to church to this assembly and to all of us part of St. John's and to others why not make church a number one weekly priority if you can to stop your work and gather together once a week with Christian brothers and sisters here and remember Jesus because that is what we're doing here this morning.

[26 : 25] Right now this morning you're here and we're living differently from those around. You're not watching Netflix right now I don't think. You're not checking your emails, you're not buying stuff on Amazon and you're not mowing the lawn.

We're doing something different. We're meant to live differently because we belong to a holy God. Every Sunday when you can come to church and listen to the words of Jesus together.

Confess our sins and know God's forgiveness together. Take the Lord's Supper and remember God's rescue together. I wouldn't recommend taking branches from the trees around you don't need to do that but sing and rejoice before the Lord together.

Make the most of this day to rest and remember Jesus Christ. Why not use our Sundays the very, very best we can to remember the Lord?

Two, why not use your year well? I mean the lead up to Christmas all eyes on Jesus. On the day itself which the government give to us as a bank holiday thank you very much make your focus not

stuffing yourself and getting goodies.

[27 : 41] Why not rest and remember Jesus? Together on Good Friday a bank holiday remember his death for us together and Easter Sunday his resurrection.

And you don't have to there are other times through the year when in your family you might decide to stop and rest and fix your eyes on Jesus because well coming to church and having a weekly or yearly rhythm to your life where you stop and rest and remember that is what we're meant to do together as a community of people who belong to a holy God gather together and remember how good it is to know and belong to God through Jesus and we should keep gathering and we should keep remembering and we should do that week after week and year after year until the day when we're at home and we rest with God in his presence for all eternity rest and remember the Lord come to Jesus and remember him together

I'm going to pray let me lead us in a prayer and then we're going to sing come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest gathered here this morning heavenly father we remember that you're a God who rests and rescues and provides and remembers and forgives and carries you are our God and you have acted fully and finally in Jesus Christ to grant us the rest and forgiveness we so desperately need please make us those who centre our lives around Jesus Christ help us to build in structure to our weeks and our years that we may rest and remember him please help us together to live differently from those around us and to trust you and fix our eyes on you our God all the days of our life we ask in Jesus name
Amen that Thank you.