

The seventh day

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[0 : 00] 11, verse 28, page 977. And Jesus is speaking here.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.! Take my yoke upon you and run from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.

And you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Great, thank you, Jude.

If you turn back to Genesis chapter 1, start of Genesis chapter 2, that's where we're going to spend most of our time. Although you might notice the passage is very short, which means we are going to do a bit of flicking throughout some other bits of the Bible, and then we're going to come and land in that passage that we just had read to us, Matthew chapter 11.

But before we look at the text, let's pray together for our time. Our Father in heaven, thank you so much that you speak to us, that you reveal yourself to us, and your will to us.

[1 : 13] Father, please, as we study the Bible here together, please teach us. And Father, we pray for the children too, that they would learn good things about you too.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're thinking this morning about rest. We all want a rest, don't you?

Life can feel like quite a constant juggling act of family and work and all other kinds of responsibilities and unexpected challenges too. There's always things and clamouring for our attention, even more than one thing at once all the time.

And so just long for a moment to catch our breath and rest. But rest feels pretty hard to come by. Don't know about you, but sometimes it feels like if I had a fuel gauge on me, I'm running closer and closer to empty. Perhaps it's the responsibility of caring for others, or staying on top of your job, or just managing the day-to-day things.

[2 : 20] Think, there's a lot going on. I'd just love a rest. And you look around and think, how on earth do other people seem to manage this? It just seems exhausting.

The other day, Emma and I went to Ikea. And did you know, Ikea, just as you go up the first escalator, they advertise that you can book a sleep appointment.

Free, approximately 45 minutes. You think, wow, doesn't that sound quite appealing? A sleep appointment. Finally, a chance to slow down, to close your eyes, and rest.

The reality is, a sleep appointment is actually just a 45-minute appointment where they try to sell you bedroom furniture. But it's quite an appealing idea. And they've captured something, right?

We're all desperate for a rest. When we're always on the go, it takes a toll on our bodies, on our minds, on our souls. You can feel like life is a blur, and you begin to disassociate.

[3 : 23] Or just levels of anxiety grow and grow, because you're always on the go. Or the feeling where you just become a bit numb about it all, because you're just so perpetually tired.

But what if good, true rest was actually possible? Rest that would make life a bit more manageable, and rest that is deeply healing, all the way down to our souls.

That is what we're going to explore for the next 20-25 minutes. And it's not a gimmick, a kind of fix-your-life-quick scheme, but something genuine that God offers to us.

And it begins with the seventh day of creation, when God rested and showed us how to rest.

Genesis 1 finishes, if you look at verse 31 with me.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. We see in days 1-6, God's creation work is building and building and building, and then day 7, he's made it.

[4 : 30] Creation is finished. And what does God think about his creation at the end of these six days? He sees it and declares it to be very good. I need to imagine a farmer at harvest time.

There's been months of sowing the seeds, tending the crops, and even the big job of bringing the harvest in. But once the harvest is finally brought in, the farmer can sit down to a meal made from those crops and enjoy it.

Enjoy the hard work that's been done. It's a little bit like that. God has done the work of creation. It's finished. And now he can effectively sit down to a job well done and say, that was very good.

Now we need to understand what the Bible means when it says that creation is finished. The first thing is that it doesn't mean that God has just checked out now, like he's left the office for good for the last time.

Rather, it means that this stage in God's plan is complete. The six days of creation that he was doing are now finished and the stage is set.

[5 : 43] It's like the harvest has been brought in. In a sense, then the next stage can begin. Even the real work can begin. Of enjoying the food that's been made. Actually, Jesus has some words which can help us here.

He says this. When he's asked why he's healing people on the Sabbath, Jesus says, My father is always at his work to this very day.

And I too am working. The ending of Genesis 1 is not like God has finished all he's going to do and then just checks out. Actually, creation only exists moment by moment because of God's choice to uphold it.

As new babies are born and new creatures are born or plants grow, God is making that happen.

He's at work. But the creation is finished in the sense that day one to six, he set the stage.

That job is done. Creation is finished. Which shows us that creation really is under God's control.

See, God has not left this project half complete or got distracted halfway through doing it.

[6 : 58] He set out to create the heavens and the earth. That's what he's done. He can effectively tick it off his to-do list. Creation has no parts which are outside God's control.

And secondly, creation being finished and even God declaring it to be very good doesn't mean that the world is perfect. Now, you know that because life is not perfect.

We look at the news and see the world is not a perfect place. Or that creation doesn't have any problems. And actually, as we keep reading through Genesis, we'll see only on the next page why it is that the world is not all perfect.

And I want you to imagine it like this. Creation is like an amazing painting that's beautiful and valuable, but it has been damaged and distorted. But underneath, the creation, the painting, is still beautiful and valuable.

God doesn't hate creation. He says it's very good. And so we shouldn't hate it either, even if it has problems, even if it has things which we find really difficult and frustrating about it.

[8 : 15] The world is God's. He saw everything that he had made. He finished it and he said it was very good. Stage one of God's plan for the world is complete.

Creation is finished. And secondly, we see that creation is finished by God the finisher. I have a new colleague, Josh.

And here he is, just at the back. I don't know if you can see him. A little bit up there. I don't know Josh very well. I've literally met him once. He's my new colleague. But one of the first things I learned about him is that he really loves Lego.

He's pretty serious about it. To the point that he's made this massive model of Hogwarts, the school from Harry Potter. It's like two or three meters long or something like that.

And he's designed it himself without following any instructions, from the little details inside all the classrooms to the whole design. I think he's very impressive. I don't know Josh very well.

[9 : 18] You know Josh even less than I do, because this is literally all you've seen about him, I assume. And I need to discuss with the person next to you for just a moment. Assuming that this is all you know about Josh, what can you learn about him?

Assuming this is all that you know about Josh, what can you learn about him? Discuss with the person next to you for a moment. Does anybody have any thoughts that they want to shout out? If this is all that you know about Josh... A lot of patience. A lot of patience. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Thanks. Anything else? Creative. Yeah? About the details and the big picture.

Details and the big picture. Anybody else? Sharing it with others at the exhibition. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Milton Keynes, in fact. Any other thoughts? As you see the work that in this case my new colleague Josh has made, you get to learn a bit about him.

That, well, probably he'll be actually quite a good colleague if he's patient and creative and sees the details and the big picture. One thing I think it shows about him is that if Josh sets his mind to a task, he will make sure the job is done.

[11:12] I'm excited to work with Josh. In a similar way, we look at creation. We see that as this text says, God finishes it.

It teaches us something about God. Genesis 1 is the first page in our Bible. It's teaching us about the world, why it is the way that it is, and about God. And what do we learn here?

That actually, if God begins something, he will finish it. He's powerful, and he's committed to the job that he sets out to do. We see that multiple times in the text.

Do you see the word in verse 1? His work was completed. Then in verse 2, by the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing.

Completed and finished. Creation is finished by God, the finisher. And we know what it's like for a piece of work to not get finished.

[12:12] The thing that you sent your colleague to do that never came back finished. Or the room that your child said they would tidy, but it never got finished. Or the TV show you were actually quite enjoying, but you never got around to finishing it.

God is not like that. God is a finisher. And learning this about God, even from these beginning verses in the Bible, one of the first things we learn about God is that he's powerful.

When he sets himself on task, he will finish it. The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 1, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

Every good work that God began, he will make sure that he finishes. Every promise that God makes, he will keep. And day seven of creation is just like a little first tease of that about God.

He doesn't give up on a project or get distracted by it. It's not outside of his control. And so then we think the Bible's promises of God, that he will bless the whole world, that he will build his church and the gates of hell won't overcome it, that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, that he will make us more and more holy into the image of Christ.

[13:36] These promises that God has made, well, actually we can have confidence that God is a finisher, that every promise he has made, he will see through to completion. When God begins a good work, he will carry it on to completion.

Because what do we learn about God? He's a finisher. He's powerful. He's in control of things. He doesn't get distracted. Day seven of creation teaches us something about the world.

It teaches something about God that we can have confidence in him. Creation is finished by God, the finisher. And then what's the third thing?

Well, what does God do once creation is finished? It's strange in some ways, but he rests. God didn't immediately move on to the next part of his project.

He had rest. And actually, so the point for us, you might see in the handout, if you're following that, is enjoy rest. I was reading a book recently, which describes proper rest a bit like this.

[14:45] A cat lounging in the sun. You know what that looks like? A cat soaking up the sun. It's warm and it's peaceful. It's that kind of genuine rest that refreshes your body and soul.

The verses of Genesis really emphasize that God rests. Look at the text in verse two. By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing.

So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. It carries on. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it, he rested from all the work of creating he had done.

God sets out this pattern of doing work for six days and then finishing it and having a seventh day of blessed rest. Work is important.

So is the need to rest. If we ignore one without the other, life gets out of balance. And you might have heard of the word Sabbath. It's not actually in this passage explicitly, but it's a word that you might have heard of.

[15:50] It's the Jewish practice of having a day of rest. And it comes from God's command to the Israelite people. In fact, it's one of the Ten Commandments. You might see it here, Exodus 20, where God says, Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. For, why do we do it? 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 Sabbath day and made it holy. The Ten Commandments recalls this bit in Genesis 2. And so this commandment becomes absolutely key for the Jewish people. It shapes the whole week. It shapes the whole economy. They come up with long, long lists of all the things that you can and can't do on the Sabbath. And actually having this practice of the Sabbath makes you stand out.

For Jewish people in the Roman Empire, it made them weird where everyone else in the culture would kind of relentlessly work seven days a week. Suddenly you say, actually, I'm going to take one day off a week.

[17:02] It makes you look like the lazy one. But the Jewish people believed it's really important. Because just as God completed his work in six days and rested, so too we should take the seventh day as rest.

So the first reason that Jewish person should keep the Sabbath is because God sets it forth as the example and command. But you know, there's actually two other key reasons that the Old Testament gives for why the Israelite people should keep the Sabbath.

The first comes from the story of manna in the wilderness. I don't know if you know this story. The Jewish people are travelling from Egypt, where they were slaves, to the Promised Land.

And as you can imagine, wandering through a desert, there's not that much food going around. And they complain to God. And God gives them manna, which is like bread from heaven, to sustain them each day.

And that comes down for six days in the week. And on the sixth day, there's a double portion. But on the seventh day, there is no manna to collect. So you can't do any work of collecting it on the seventh day.

[18:16] And it shows them and us that taking a Sabbath is an act of trusting God. By resting on that seventh day, you say, I trust that God will give enough to provide.

We don't need to do long work every day of the week. Instead, we trust that God will provide for us. So we'll rest. The last reason why God commands the Sabbath in the Old Testament is actually when the Ten Commandments are restated in Deuteronomy rather than Exodus.

It's the same commandment, but it doesn't have the same reasoning, the same, why should you do this? For, da-da-da-da. Rather than looking back to Genesis 2, instead looks back to when the Israelites were in Egypt.

Back then, they were slaves, forced to work without rest. But now, they're a rescued people. And so, observing the Sabbath means they can celebrate their freedom.

Before, they had harsh masters in the pharaohs who wouldn't let them rest. You had to work relentlessly for seven days a week. But now, God is this good and kind master who actually mandates that you must have a weekend and take a day off once a week.

[19:38] So every week, what's another reason for taking a Sabbath? It reminds you that God has saved you and is kind. And we thought a bit about what it means for Old Testament people.

The key question that I suspect everyone has, though, is so what does this actually mean for us today? Now, there are basically two main options as you think about rest and Sabbath as Christians.

Some Christians would see that the Old Testament law to have Sabbath absolutely still applies just as much then as it does today. And to be fair, it is one of the Ten Commandments, so that is quite a reasonable way of thinking.

Other Christians, and I think this would personally be my conviction, if it's helpful for you to know, is that Christians aren't bound by the law to keep a Sabbath because it's not a command that's restated in the New Testament.

And lots of the Old Testament law is fulfilled and complete in Jesus. As well, there is a slight complication in our culture. Sabbath would always be on a Saturday and still is for Jewish people.

[20:49] But actually, for Christians, as Jesus rose on the Sunday, the day after the Sabbath, that has been the day of worship and rest that Christians have celebrated for the last 2,000 years.

So there's a slight complication that even on which day of the week that we do it, there is a difference between how Jews would take the Sabbath and how Christians would. That being said, even though personally I don't think it is a mandated law that we must keep the Sabbath, I think it is a good thing for us to do.

You think about it like this. If God told the Jewish people to have one day of rest in seven, it might just be a good idea for us to do that. Even if it isn't a law that we have to do, it might be a really good idea to follow God's pattern here.

And secondly, why I think having a Sabbath is really important is that actually, as our Bible reading in Genesis 2 is, is that it far predates the law of Moses.

Actually, God sets the pattern for all of creation and all of humanity. It's not only an idea that he seems to come up with when writing the Ten Commandments.

[22 : 03] And we know this. Humans are creatures that need rest. Our bodies get tired. Our bodies wear out. But God has woven this pattern into the very creation that it is good for us to do some work and have some rest.

If rest is good enough for our all-powerful God, then it is good for us who are weak and feeble and get tired. I am far from perfect at managing to do this.

I haven't really done it very well this week, to be honest with you. But it's a really good thing to carve out one day of your seven in the week to have a day of rest.

And I know the challenges when there are work responsibilities to perhaps Monday to Friday, along with things to do in the house and other things that you need to do. I don't know personally, but I see secondhand, the challenge of having children and looking after them.

It's not like you can just one day a week chuck them out of the house and say, sorry, I need to have a rest. But I think even though circumstances will make it variously more difficult, it's a good pattern to have one day where we can as much as possible of rest.

[23 : 23] And perhaps for those with families, it might look like having one day in seven, where as a family you try to do things that are enjoyable and restful for all of you, which is good for parents themselves and good for children in their lives and as an example to follow.

And for some of us, Sundays might feel like a really good day for a day of rest. And for others, coming to church might be the most exhausting part of your week because of family or because of responsibilities, like leading a children's group or something like that.

If that's so, Sunday probably ought not be your day of rest. I suspect for Chris, it's not his day of rest. But it's good to have a day, perhaps a Saturday, to have a day of rest.

When I grew up, lastly, my dad did shift work and he worked in the ambulance service. And that meant both Saturdays and Sundays were days that he might have to work.

You can't just have no paramedics on a Sunday because they all say, sorry, I'd like my day of rest today. But for those on shift work, if that's any of us, I'd encourage you still, make sure that you have one day of rest a week, even if that's not the same day of rest every week.

[24 : 45] What do you do on a Sabbath? Well, this is not a to-do list, but some good ideas. Have a delicious meal. Take some time outside.

Spend quality time with family. Be romantic with your spouse if you're married. Devote some time to pray. Curl up with a good book and a candle lit while it rains outside.

Enjoy a good movie. Take a nap. Go for a long cycle ride. They're not things that you have to do on a Sabbath, but they're things that you might find really restful and refreshing.

It's not always going to be easy to take a Sabbath. In my work, I work with Cambridge University students, where some of them will have university hours that they have to do every single day of the week.

And for all of them, lots of their friends will be doing university work every single day of the week.

And for them to say, I'm going to take one day where I don't do any university work, it's a sacrifice and it's difficult.

[25 : 51] And it makes you worried that I'm going to do worse in my exams because I've taken one day off a week. But actually, I think it's really good for us. It's sustainable. I don't think I've ever met a student who has failed their exams because they took a Sabbath.

I think probably if they failed their exams for other reasons, you know. But actually taking a Sabbath is just a good thing to do week by week. So there we see from these verses in Genesis, it teaches us something about creation, teaches us something about God, and it begins to set up this pattern, which is fleshed out throughout the rest of the Old Testament, of taking a Sabbath day of rest, one and seven.

And we're just going to finish by looking at one last thing. And that is the idea that these verses begin to go into a theme, that on a blessed day of rest, we can enjoy God.

You see, as God creates the heavens and the earth, what is he doing? He's creating a space in which we can know him. And we are designed to know and enjoy God. Humans are given the role to work and look after the rest of creation, but also to know and love our creator.

[27 : 10] And so then you think, well, I don't feel very restful. I don't feel like week to week I'm in this perfectly happy paradise of doing six days of work and just knowing and loving God every day.

And life is actually pretty tough. People get really tired. And it begins to show us that actually not all is right between the creator and his creatures.

And you think about it like this. If humans were given this role to take care of the earth and to relate to God, well, actually, if we say, I would rather do that without God in the picture, then things are going to start to go very wrong.

And actually, we suddenly have to find our sense of identity and value and worth somewhere else. If you think, I'd rather do life without God, then suddenly it is just your achievements and how productive you are and how popular you are that make you a valuable person.

Yet actually, that desire to be more and more productive drives a further wedge between us and God. And that's where Jesus comes in with our New Testament reading with an antidote to the exhausting cycle.

[28 : 30] Maybe you want to flick there with me again to Matthew chapter 11. Jesus says this, 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Jesus invites anyone who is exhausted, who is overwhelmed, who is burdened, to come to him for rest. He invites us to journey alongside him.

A yoke is what two cattle would share over them as they pull a plough through a field. He invites us to journey alongside him and take the yoke next to him, to do life with him.

And he promises that with him there is deep, soul-level rest. God creates the heavens and the earth so that it's a space in which we might know him.

[29 : 42] Jesus invites us back into the right relationship with God, which enables us to have worth as humans and enables us to know God and have the rest that comes from knowing him.

You see, continually proving ourselves, if work is all that you have to make yourself valuable, it will be totally exhausting. But here's the big thing.

That while, through our work, through our popularity, things like that, we're always asking the question, am I enough? Have I done enough? Have I got enough? Actually, on the cross, Jesus says incredibly amazing words.

He says, rather than all the work that you need to do to be valuable before God, he says, it is finished. And they're powerful words because it means that in his sacrificial death, Jesus finished the work that we could never do to be in right relationship with God.

He took upon himself the burden of our striving, our failures, and our need to impress God. we desire for that job to be well done.

[30 : 56] And Jesus says, it's finished. You see now, the door is open for us to enter God's rest and know him.

And yet, perhaps the last question is, but does that actually make any difference to life now?

Because you think, great, I have this kind of spiritual state of rest, rest.

But is there any sense in which I have practical rest in life now? You see, if we're once again in right relationship with God who made us, God who made the creation, the heavens and the earth, so that we would be able to know him, if Jesus has restored that and so that we can again, it means that the kind of relentless pursuit to be enough, to do enough, to have enough, is actually put on hold.

It's rested. It means that we can see, as humans were supposed to, that work and responsibilities that we have are good things, but they're not ultimate things.

Day one to six of creation lead to day seven, where there's rest with God. And the idea is that humans don't have to prove themselves before God, because God already loves you as his creatures and his saved people in Jesus Christ.

[32 : 20] It means that we don't have to excel in every area of life to be valuable or for God to like us. It means that your children don't have to excel in every area of your life for your family to be valuable or loved by God.

Jesus offers rest to the weary, inviting us back into a right relationship with God. We've been thinking about day seven.

In some ways, I've been reflecting on this. I think it is strange that day seven in Genesis is included in the Bible at all. And you think about this, all the action really happens on day one to six.

Why is it that God decided we would need to know about day seven? Well, I think there are important things for us to learn. Firstly, it shows us that creation is finished.

It's under God's control and he thinks it's very good. Second, it shows us that God who sets out to start a task will complete it and he's powerful and committed to doing that.

[33 : 25] And third, day seven begins to set up this pattern of rest throughout the whole Bible. And fourth, it just begins to give us a glimpse of what it looks like when humans and God are in right relationship with one another.

That picture of day seven rest is a little bit like the farmer who's harvested his fields and can sit down to a meal and enjoy it and say, this is very good.

The work's been done and now I can enjoy it. Life is not about what we can do on our own. Life is not all about the day one to six for us.

Ultimately, day one to six lead to day seven where we can know God and enjoy his rest. We are creatures made not to work relentlessly but to enjoy God and know him forever.

Let's pray together. our Father, creator of all, thank you that you didn't just make work but that you also made rest.

[34 : 42] Please would you help each one of us to know that kind of week in, week out in our lives. We pray, please help us also and most deeply to each know the rest that comes about through Jesus.

thank you that through him we can be in right relationship with you with the peace and rest that that brings. Pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're going to sing together and we're going to sing a song which looks at God's love and you might notice throughout this song it's been deliberately chosen that there are words about rest and the rest that we look forward to one day.

So would you stand and the music starts as we sing together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.