

Genesis 2:1-2:3

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[0 : 00] Well, I want to add my welcome to James, and it's very good to have you gathered together here in person and online as well.

And I invite you to turn to Genesis 2, 1 through 3. This is a wonderful passage for us that is particularly good for you if you feel a stress or a weariness from your work or your full schedule. If you are striving to prove yourself to others or to God, you're anxious about it, well, this little passage is for you.

And it is a gift. It is something that is incredibly important and central for us as Christians because it is about the Good News Day, the Sabbath day, the seventh day of creation.

And it is the source of this day of rest and worship that's called the Sabbath or Shabbat, which means to cease or desist from work literally.

[1 : 06] So it's a day of the body and the soul and the mind to be rested. And it goes right down into the very depth of who we are.

Now, there's a lot of pressure to not recognize the Sabbath in our culture. We're a workaholic culture, and we often define ourselves by our work.

You know, at one point in our history, in fact, most of history of humanity, we are defined by our family, who we are related to. But now we are often defined by what we do, by what we accomplish. And even our families become a means of accomplishing as well. And so we get our identity, our security, and our status from our work.

Society says, if I'm productive, then I am good. And it's very seductive because work is a gift from God. It is something that's very, very good. But there is a striving that goes into our souls and bodies and minds, a striving after wealth or success status that means that we are willing to sacrifice our time and ourselves for it.

[2 : 24] And one of the things that we were talking about just before the service is that in COVID, boundaries have also been taken away. So our home often can become our place of work as well.

Our work calls from us right around the corner, literally, in our home. And so there is a good concern that is rising up in our culture about a healthy work-life balance so we don't burn ourselves out and harm our families and our relationships.

You see, there's a recognition that rest is very, very important. But the seventh day is more than thinking about physical rest or a mental break.

It is about a much deeper rest that actually affects everything about us. It's relevant perfectly to our time and our culture right now.

Because in it, we see God's design for our well-being, that we need rest for our souls as well as our minds and bodies.

[3 : 33] They go together. And that deeper rest goes to the heart of our strivings for recognition and identity and purpose. The idea of Sabbath is at the center of our life with God.

So in a very short while that we have here, I'm going to look at three questions about the Sabbath. The first is, what is the Sabbath? The second is, why is it important?

And then I'll just end briefly with talking a bit about what I can do, what you can do about it. So let's look at the beginning of it in our Bibles. We're right near the beginning, page two.

In the last two Sundays, we've gone through the six days of creation. And in chapter one, we saw this marvelous ending in verse 31, just above our passage, where it said, God saw everything that he had made.

And behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. And that leads us into our passage that says, In this way, the heavens and the earth were finished.

[4 : 43] And that's a word that means perfectly completed. Very important word. God carried out his good and his loving, his beautiful, perfect will in creation.

And that's what is there. And on the seventh day, God does something very different. He ceases from creating. He doesn't bring anything else into existence.

Instead, he rested from his work that he had done. You can see there. Now, why did he rest? Was God exhausted from all that creating?

That was a big job. And did he expend so much energy that he had to take a break? Well, the answer is no. It's impossible for God to tire.

So that word rest does not mean having to take a break to recover. It is the root word of Sabbath, which literally means ceases, as I said earlier.

[5 : 42] God stops that creative work. And he is perfectly satisfied with what he has done. That is the meaning of that rest.

His creation is very good. And on this day, the seventh day, he takes great joy in all of it. It is very good. That number seven in the ancient world was known throughout as a number of perfection.

And so in verses 2 and 3, that word seventh day are repeated three times. It is emphasizing that this is the perfect day about a perfect creation.

All of God's creation was working towards this day of rest. And the purpose of all the gathering, all that growing that we heard about, the giving of light, all of the flourishing, it is so that God will dwell in his creation in perfect harmony.

That is what that seventh day that God delights, he takes joy in being in the home that he made for humanity and for all his good creation. So that's that universe, the gift of creation we see around us and all that is in it is really the spilling over of his love and his goodness and his will.

[7 : 07] His desire is to give goodness to his creation. And so verse 3 says that God blesses that Sabbath day and he makes it holy.

And what that means is that holiness is that he creates us to be set apart to be deeply blessed, to flourish in our relationship with him and with the rest of creation.

At the very heart of creation is this understanding that we are created by relationship with God, for relationship with God, so that we live in relationship with God.

That is the whole purpose of creation, created by relationship with God, for relationship with God, so that we live in relationship with him.

That's why this is a good news day, the seventh day. It actually leads us to Jesus. And it leads us to him because we are in a world that does not look like day seven.

[8 : 12] So whether you are a Christian listening to this today or you are not, you are exploring Christianity, you're new to church, all of us can see that there is disharmony in this world, in our relationships as well.

There is destruction, there is disease and fear and loss and pain. And perhaps that's more magnified this past year than it has for a very long time.

Evil has come into a very good world. And we may be asking this morning, where is God in all of this? We may not see God's pleasure in us or his satisfaction with the world.

And that is because every one of us have sin, a certain rebellion against God, in our hearts. It is part of who we are and it needs to be forgiven and healed.

We are all created beings who are meant to be that seventh day kind of creation where we have peace with God. And we are going to be restless.

[9 : 23] This will be our condition. We will be restless because we want to know that God is satisfied with us. You have probably heard this marvelous prayer by Augustine, one of the most famous prayers in the history of the world from his confessions.

It goes to the heart of the truth of our relationship. It says, You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.

That is true. That leads us to Jesus because Jesus is the only one who can invite us and bring us into that rest, that satisfaction in God.

In Matthew 11, he says this, Come to me, all who are labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. And do you know that it's only eight verses later, it's no accident, in Matthew, that Jesus says, I am the Lord of the Sabbath.

[10:38] And that that Sabbath is made for humanity. It's not that humanity is made for the Sabbath to keep certain rules. It is made for your well-being, for your goodness, for the center of what life is all about, relationship with God that is perfect, that is in harmony.

And so, this is what, this is what Jesus is saying. He's the only one who can bring you Sabbath rest. He is Lord of the Sabbath, where you find rest for your souls.

And that's true because of Jesus' death on the cross. That's why this day is a gospel day. He died, and you can look in this in John 19, 30, when he died, the last words he said was, it is finished. It is finished. Those words are familiar to us today because just as God's creation was finished in Genesis 2, Jesus' work of redeeming and freeing that creation from sin and death is perfectly completed on the cross.

He gives a new creation through that cross. What is happening there? What is that powerful thing that's happening on the cross? Well, 2 Corinthians 5 says, 20 says that Jesus, in Jesus, God was reconciling himself to us, and for our sake, God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[12:20] Do you see what that marvelous gift is here? The incredible gift of Jesus. God is satisfied with us by Jesus, by his death on a cross for our sins.

That is the great news. That is the basis of his invitation to us in Matthew 11. Our strivings to be important, to be accepted, to be recognized, bring a deep weariness, and that weariness can cease in Jesus.

There is one person who matters. That is the God who created us, and in Jesus, he delights in us. We receive the righteousness of Jesus.

He says, you are very good, my creation. So you can see that in Jesus, not only has God created us, but he has redeemed us as well.

That's that work on the cross. Redeemed means we are freed from being separated and in disharmony with God. We are freed from the slavery of sin. We are freed from our striving, freed to love, to enjoy, and to live for the one who created us.

[13:37] That's the deepest kind of rest, and that's why we celebrate the Sabbath on a Sunday. That's the day Jesus rose from the dead, and his work is given to us.

So that's the first part. That's what the Sabbath is. It is a good news day. Now the second thing is why is the Sabbath important for us today? Well, God commanded us to keep a Sabbath very simply, and it's central in the Bible.

It was a joyous, freeing law and not a drudgery. Now I looked up the Sabbath in, what the Sabbath in Vancouver has been like, and the Vancouver Sun has a This Week in History column.

And did you know that for much of the 20th century, you who are older probably know this, but for much of the 20th century, Vancouverites couldn't see a movie or a concert or a ballgame or play on Sunday because of a federal government Lord's Day Act of 1907.

And so that prohibited any kind of commercial activity on Sunday. And they are popularly called blue laws. And that's because they prevented fun.

[14:51] And so that's how people looked at the Sabbath. And in 1962, in December, Vancouverites very joyfully voted to repeal those laws and free people to be able to have fun on Sunday.

So the idea of a repressive and joyless day was really the thinking of this culture. But that is not the Bible's understanding of the Sabbath day.

In fact, quite the opposite. When Moses brought those Ten Commandments to God's people, they hadn't had a day off in 400 years. They had been slaves in Egypt.

No days off at all. And the Sabbath was all about God's work in and for them to free them, to be redeemed by God.

And so here's the thing you do on the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments. 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 and an outstretched arm.

[15:59] Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. There's two things that's being said there about the Sabbath. It is a day of freedom, God delivering you, and it is a day of remembering that you are his people.

It is the Lord your God. You are in a covenant relationship with him. That is a joyful, joyful thing. The most joyful thing in this world.

And the Sabbath day, therefore, is important because it is a good news day when we remember, we fill our minds with the news that God has powerfully freed us to be his own, to belong to him, to be freed by him and for him.

So Jesus forgives your sins by his world-shaking, powerful work on the cross, and this is a day where you know and remember that the one who really matters, the one who created you, delights in you, makes you his daughter and son, and frees you from all kinds of idols and striving, anything that enslaves you, including your need for money and recognition.

And it is a gift that allows us to freely know and serve the living God. The God who created you has redeemed you. You can rest in him and his work for you.

[17 : 26] And that news transforms us. It renews us. It gives us soul rest. And that affects our bodies and minds as well. It's what Sabbath is all about.

So we go to church on the Sabbath to hear that good news, to experience the deep rest for our souls. And the Bible is very clear about the joy of the Sabbath.

It says in Isaiah 58, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy days of the Lord honorable, if you honor it and you don't go your own ways or seek your own pleasure, or talk idly, then you shall take delight in the Lord and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth.

You see, the Sabbath is about us taking delight in God. And why do we do that? It is because God is satisfied with us by Jesus' death for our sin, by his work for us.

that's the basis of his invitation, recognized, accepted by God himself, the God who created us. And when we look at this, when we think about this joy, it is something that we neglect at our own loss and our own peril.

[18 : 47] I know that I shared with you about our Jewish neighbors who are such a good friend and blessing to us. We became like family with them and unfortunately they moved a few years ago.

But we experienced as we lived with them a deeply faithful keeping of the Sabbath week by week. It was the law that they kept actually, which helped.

And sometimes we joined them in that as well when we could. And I can say that this was a day to look forward to. Friday was a busy day of preparation for them. There was lots of cooking happening and cleaning.

And we would smell the most delicious smells coming from their side of the duplex. And certain days Gina would make cinnamon buns. Now that was the pinnacle of creation that she had.

And our boys would always smell that and say, I hope we get some. I hope we get some. And she would always come over and share them with us. And so our family would look forward to Shabbat as well in that way.

[19 : 48] But Shabbat for them would begin with prayers on Friday night. Very simple prayers, lots of candles, and a simple meal. And then the Saturday was a day of rest with no phones.

No business could be done. There was no urgency. There was a very different feeling about time in their place on the Saturday. There was a sense of well-being as well.

And Friday morning was a quiet, or Saturday morning was a quiet morning. And then there was a time of walking to the synagogue with family and friends. And then there was an open house at two o'clock in the afternoon as well.

And that was a louder, more noisy, joyous time. It was a time where Ralph, who would invite people a lot, would say, my house is like Abraham's tent.

It has no doors. They're wide open. And so the neighborhood would be invited in as well. There was always laughter. It was a day of just being and just being with one another and being very conscious at the same time that God is at the center of all.

[21 : 02] And that he is the reason why we have this goodness that they are experiencing. That day was all in the context of God. But it was very joyful.

It was a time very different from what the world thinks of as Sabbath. And so when we think of this day, it is a day that requires intentionality.

And this is how I want to end the sermon. To think through how can we keep the Sabbath. Our neighbors were very intentional. The whole week led up to that Sabbath.

And I must say what happened on the Sabbath informed the whole week for them as well. And what we need to do, I think, and learn from this is that we need to know there is a great challenge for us in our culture.

We need God's help to be intentional about this day because work very easily takes over our lives. One of the biggest challenges we face is that we are over-scheduled in our lives.

[22 : 08] And I fall victim to that as well. I need to repent of that as well. Technology also brings work into our homes. We get our identity and worth from it. And therefore, we need God's help to be intentional, to set aside 24 hours in a week, to cease from normal week, and to make it a day of thanksgiving.

When I think of that time that we had with our neighbors, there was always thankfulness there. Christian people are grateful people. They are grateful because what we have received at Jesus' hands in the good news of his gift of relationship with God.

It is a day that we need to rejoice in God which gives, and that gives us rest and restores our soul. Eugene Peterson says, you know, if you're thinking about how to structure a Sabbath day, it is about praying and playing.

And I liked his, definition because it was so simple. It is about praying and playing. And, you know, we do this by enjoying God through his word.

That's what we're doing this morning. To hear it read and preached and prayed and sung and call one another to rejoice in the relationship with God that Jesus has granted to us in his gospel of grace.

[23 : 29] You see, Sabbath celebrates that our strivings cease, that God has given us salvation. He has given us eternal security in him. He has made the universe and the world for us to be in relationship with us.

It's a day of resting in that relationship with him. Jesus has given you his satisfaction, his righteousness. God sees you as his beloved daughter, as his beloved son.

No striving is needed. And the gift of a Sabbath day is there's no striving in it. There's an urgency that's taken away. So we begin in that day and end it with his word.

That's a critical thing. Secondly, it is good for us to rejoice and revel in what God has made, his creation around us, the people that he brings into our lives.

And so outdoor activities, times with family and friends are very, very important that we do that in the context that this is God's gift. And that's why this third thing, besides enjoying his creation together, it's actually welcoming.

[24 : 39] There's a sense of hospitality about the Sabbath which was actually new to me until I moved next to this family that we were so close to. It was a day of hospitality.

That those that you have family and friends and especially those who are alone and single together, to enjoy one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Very renewing to be able to do this. And finally, there will be times of being quiet and alone with God. So you see, the Sabbath is for introverts and extroverts.

Our time alone with God to reflect on who he is for us, to reflect on our lives in the context of what he has done for us, puts everything in our week of work into perspective.

The perspective of God seeing things through his eyes, through the good news of Jesus of this seventh day. This is all worth doing. It is actually a foretaste of heaven where time is redeemed.

[25 : 41] There is not an urgency. There is a goodness of resting in God in active, joyful ways, worshipping and living for him. It is really believing what Philippians 1.6 says, I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of the Lord Jesus, the day of rest, the permanent eternal life.

God help us to know and keep the joyful rest of this Sabbath. You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until it finds its rest in you.

Amen.