

Saving the Sabbath

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, we come before you now desiring that you might speak. It doesn't matter much what I have to say.
- It only matters what you say. So grant me only to say what you say. Grant us to hear what you speak. Grant us hearts that receive it, believe it, and obey it.
- And the only hope that we have for any of that to be accomplished is through your Holy Spirit. So will you send your Holy Spirit among us now? We ask this in your name. Amen.
- Well, please keep your bulletins in front of you. We're going to be looking mainly at the second reading, the reading from the Gospel of Luke. And so you'll want to keep that handy.
- We'll be focusing in on that first bit of chapter 6 where it tells Luke, rather, speaks about the Sabbath.
- [1 : 0 7] But my guess is that for most of us over the past few weeks, we have been following the spreading global financial crisis. My guess is that most of us can't get away from it, even if we would like to.
- Every time you turn on the TV or the radio or the Internet, it's right there in front of you. And you've probably heard that the subprime mortgage industry, you can't get away from that right now either.
- Evidently, the subprime mortgage industry is kind of right at the heart, right at the root of many evils in our current economy. Well, I suppose confession is good, and so I need to confess that for about, I'm increasingly ashamed to say that for about five years, from 2001 through 2006, I worked right in the middle of the subprime mortgage industry.
- And I was there right in the heyday. And I'll leave it to you to interpret what it means that I left the industry and I left the United States of America at the same time.
- I'll let you draw conclusions about that. But like I said, I was there right in the heyday of when all this money was being made. And the company that I was part of was making money hand over fist.
- [2 : 3 6] It was remarkable. Each day at three o'clock in the afternoon, there would be an email that would come out that would tell us how much we had funded so far that day.
- And when I first started, we were excited when we had funded 19 million in a day. By the time I left, we were bumming if we hadn't reached 150 million or so in a single day.
- My company once threw a party in which they rented out the L.A. equivalent of the GM place for our company and brought in Jay Leno and a few others.
- And they dropped over a million dollars on that one evening alone. It was an enormous amount of money being made and spent at that time. And I admit that there wasn't an excitement to it all.
- But there was also a darker side. And the darker side isn't so much what you're hearing about now, although clearly that was there.

- [3 : 39] In spite of all the money and in spite of all the success, it was never enough. The more money the company made, the more energy there was in seeking more business.
- The more success, the more there was a desire for more and more and more. There was this kind of insatiable appetite to produce. And looking back, I realized that so often North Americans are the richest slaves that the world has ever seen.
- I mean, we're enslaved so often by this compulsion and this compulsive drive to earn and produce and labor and toil.
- And it goes so often beyond what is healthy and normal. It happens in our careers and we call that workaholism.
- It happens in our religious life and we call that legalism. But it infects all the rest of our lives as well.
- [4 : 53] Our family, our hobbies. And it's a sign of our sinfulness. It's a sign of our fallenness. And it's something that Jesus wants to address in our lives.
- And Jesus wants to save us from it. In our reading, Luke gives us two Sabbath stories. And we're going to focus in on the first one. And at the root of this story, Luke wants us to see that Jesus is our rest.
- That Jesus offers rest from that compulsive drive to produce and earn. And Jesus says to us, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.
- So I want to look at that first Sabbath story. We're looking at Luke chapter 6 verses 1 through 5. So have it in front of you right there. It's a Sabbath day.
- The story opens up. It's a Sabbath day. We don't know, but it might have been right after the synagogue services. Perhaps Jesus and his disciples were coming out of the synagogue and out of the services.
- [6 : 05] And the disciples get munchy. They get hungry. Which I think is very understandable. Because I don't know about you, but every time I walk out of church, I'm always hungry.
- Almost every single time. And, you know, the disciples, you figure, they're in their early 20s in all likelihood. They're growing boys. And so they walk out and they're hungry. So they walk into the field that was right there.
- And they begin picking some grain, rubbing it together in their hands and popping it in their mouths like popcorn. Now, evidently the Pharisees were there watching this go on.
- And you can just watch them as they get more and more stressed out with what they're seeing. But they're not stressed out because the disciples are, you know, stealing somebody else's food from somebody else's field.
- That's not what they're stressed out about. That would have been very appropriate to walk through somebody else's field and pick grain. Strangely enough, that wasn't seen as theft at all. The Pharisees were stressed out about Sabbath keeping.
- [7 : 11] Because by the beginning of the first century, Sabbath keeping had become this precise science. In fact, it was so precise, what you could do and what you couldn't do on the Sabbath, that by this point you kind of had to work really, really hard to rest rightly on the Sabbath.
- Which might have been an indication that something was a little weird. But we'll leave that off to the side. Anyways, the Pharisees are getting stressed out.
- They look at the disciples and they come to Jesus and they complain to Jesus. And so Jesus responds with this very strange, very interesting response and example.
- And essentially what he says, he uses this as a teaching point to correct the Pharisees. He looks at them and he says, guys, you're missing the point. You're missing the point of the Sabbath.

There is something more important going on. There is something more important about the Sabbath than simply ritual precision. Look at verse 3. Verse 3.

[8 : 25] Jesus looks at the Pharisees and says, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry? He and those who were with him. How he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him.

It's kind of a strange thing. Jesus looks at the Pharisees. They're stressed out about the Sabbath. And he tells them a story about David. Jesus says, you remember David. They would have been reading their Bibles and known their Old Testament very well.

This comes from 1 Samuel 21. And Jesus says, you remember that when David was on the run, when he got hungry, he went to the tabernacle and he looked for food.

But there was no food that was there except for the food that was reserved only for the priests. But in that situation, David went ahead and ate the bread that was only allowed for the priests.

And in the rest of Scripture, never is David condemned for doing that. And apparently, Jesus is pointing out that at that moment, David's life and the survival of the people around him were more important than ritual precision.

[9 : 43] And Jesus' point is this. He's not saying that we can play fast and loose with God's law. He is pointing out that the Pharisees had missed the point of the Sabbath.

Jesus says that the point of the Sabbath is not ritual precision. From time to time, ritual precision can flex, like what happened at David's time.

There is something, Jesus says, that is more important than ritual precision when it comes to the Sabbath. The point of the Sabbath is somewhere else, Pharisees, than where you have thought it was.

And then Jesus tells the Pharisees and he tells us what the real point of the Sabbath is. And it is an absolute bombshell what he says. Look at verse 5.

And he said to the Pharisees, The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Now, it's important that we look at this closely.

[10 : 48] Because that line, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, is really, really important. For a long time, I thought that this was Jesus' kind of divine power play. Some of you may have read this and thought this way.

For a long time, I thought Jesus was just saying, Listen, Pharisees, I'm God, and as God, if I want to disregard the Sabbath, I can do that. And so, I want to right now.

That's not what Jesus is doing. Jesus never disregards the Old Testament law. Jesus never abolishes the Old Testament law.

Jesus always, everywhere, fulfills the Old Testament law. And that's what Jesus is saying he's doing right here. Jesus points to himself and he says to the Pharisees, Pharisees, you thought that the Sabbath was all about ritual precision, but you're wrong.

The Sabbath is about me. I am the Lord of the Sabbath. I am the Lord who invented the Sabbath. And I'm the Lord who fulfills the Sabbath.

[11 : 59] Now, like I said, that was an absolute bombshell of a thing for Jesus to say. It was a bombshell then, and it is a bombshell for us as well. But my guess is that we're a little underwhelmed with it at the moment.

My guess is that it sounds less to us like a bombshell and more like a little firecracker at best. But that's because we don't really understand the Sabbath a whole lot. So what I want to do is push pause on the Gospel of Luke, back up and go into the Old Testament, and think about the Old Testament for a little bit, and think about the Sabbath, and think about work.

And once we understand work and the Sabbath in the Old Testament, then we'll come back to the Gospel of Luke, and I think it'll be a little bit more like a bombshell. So let's go back to the Old Testament.

You remember Genesis chapter 1, 2, 3. Most of us will know the story. Humanity was created in God's image, and then humanity rebelled and fell. And at the moment that Adam and Eve decided to switch their allegiance from God to the serpent, as soon as they fell, it ruined everything.

And one of the things that it ruined was work. Work became twisted and deformed the moment Adam and Eve fell.

[13 : 27] Before they fell, Adam and Eve worked in the garden. They tilled the garden. They looked after the environment there in the garden. And it was a joyful thing, and it was a freeing thing.

And the reason that work before the fall was a joyful thing and a freeing thing is that their work did not have any ultimate bearing on their value or their significance or their sense of satisfaction.

Before the fall, in the garden, God gave Adam and Eve as a free gift their value, their significance, and their satisfaction. And so Adam and Eve did not go to work trying to earn these things.

They went to work more like a kid who goes with his dad into the garage to work on a hobby. And undoubtedly they worked hard in the garden before the fall, but there was a restful, restorative aspect to their work.

But then they rebelled against God. And the moment they cut themselves off from God and cut themselves off of depending upon God, what used to be restful and restoring work was twisted and turned into this futile, anxious toil.

[14 : 55] Look at the first reading. Look at Ecclesiastes for a moment. This is from Ecclesiastes chapter 2. And look at verse 22. The writer of Ecclesiastes captures the human experience of toil after the fall.

What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation.

Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. Now we're not exactly sure. There's some debate on who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes.

I think Eeyore did. Clearly, the writer of Ecclesiastes has not had a good day at the office. But the writer of Ecclesiastes has his finger on something that's very deep within the human heart.

And I want you to see it. He has his finger on a flaw in the human soul. Do you see that phrase in verse 22? The toiling and striving of heart.

[16 : 10] You see, fallen human beings, this is true of all of us, fallen human beings have this inner striving, compulsion to earn, produce, labor, and toil.

And like I said, it goes beyond the healthy, God-given aspects of desire to produce. Because the inner compulsion drives us to earn, produce, labor, toil, but it is never enough.

We seek satisfaction in it, but it is never enough. Verse 23 of the first reading, Even at night, our hearts do not rest.

You see what he's saying there? Our hearts are continually gnawed by this anxiety to produce more and to perform better and to achieve higher.

And like I said before, this twisted, deformed aspect of our heart exhibits itself in our career, and it turns into workaholism in our religion, and it turns into legalism, and it infects every other aspect of our lives.

[17 : 26] Wherever we really care about something, there's that danger that we will begin, our heart will toil and strive to produce and seek satisfaction by what we achieve, but it never comes.

And so we become enslaved by this. Now, that's why, or one of the reasons that God created the Sabbath. When God saved Israel out of Egypt, when God rescued Israel from slavery, God commanded them to keep the Sabbath.

And part of the reason God commanded them to keep the Sabbath was to be a sign that they were putting their trust in God, in what God did, rather than what they could do, in what God accomplished, rather than what they accomplished.

It's a remarkable thing. You realize that in the Old Testament, one of the defining marks of the people of God is that the people of God rest.

And part of the reason is that resting in God is a sign of trusting in God. So the Sabbath was a wonderful gift.

[18 : 42] It was a wonderful sign of trusting in God, but there was a problem. There was a flaw even in the Sabbath. And the flaw is this. The Sabbath could never truly get at the heart of the issue.

The Sabbath could never relieve that inner striving and toil of heart. I mean, taking a day off is good. We should all do it.

But it will never give our souls the rest our souls desire. It will never give our souls rest any more than having a good night's sleep will give our souls rest.

And like I said before, by the time you get to the first century, keeping the Sabbath has become so rigorous and so precise that you had to work really, really hard to keep the Sabbath rightly and religiously at all.

So let's go back to the Gospel of Luke. When Jesus says that I am the Lord of the Sabbath, He's saying that all that the Sabbath was intended to give you, I will give you.

[19 : 55] That the rest the Sabbath promised but could never fully deliver, I will give you. Jesus is saying, I will give your soul the Sabbath rest it desires.

You see, keep thinking with me. Our hearts, as we've already said, are restless. Our hearts are constantly striving. But we can never produce enough, we can never earn enough to gain that satisfaction we desire or that significance that we seek or the salvation that we need.

And so Jesus comes to us as our Sabbath rest to give us, as a free gift, what we can never earn for ourselves. When Jesus hung upon the cross, He earned for all time the favor of God.

So that now, those of us who receive Christ's gift, when God looks at us, He delights in us as if He were looking at Jesus.

And that means, critically, that there's nothing that we can do or fail to do. There's nothing that we can add or subtract from our value that Jesus gives us, from the significance that Jesus gives us, from the satisfaction that Jesus gives us, and from our salvation in Christ.

[21 : 20] And what that means is that you and I get to look in our heart and look at those areas where our heart is striving and toiling for significance, for value, for satisfaction, for salvation.

And it's there that Jesus wants to bring rest and Sabbath to our souls. I graduated from college in 2000.

And immediately after college, I was hired on staff at a church in Southern California. And so Amber and I moved there and I served on staff as a pastor for a year. And it was one of the worst years of my life.

And it was a bad year for lots of reasons. But part of the reason was my own fault. I ended up using my work, I used my ministry to try to earn value and significance and satisfaction.

My heart was striving and toiling even as I did everything within the church because I didn't know how to rest in Christ. And it ended up infecting every aspect of my life.

[22 : 40] I was a bad husband. You can ask Amber. I was a bad pastor. I was a bad pastor. Or I was not as good as I could have been. And at the end of the year, I knew that I needed to get out of public ministry.

And it was one of the hardest times in my life. And God, ironically, moved me right into the bank. Which I won't even comment on that.

But it was His grace and His mercy and His love. Because at the bank, He began to teach me to find my value and significance and satisfaction in Christ alone and not in what I could do.

Even what I could do in the church. And the ironic thing is that as I learned to begin to rest in Christ, I became a better worker.

I produced more. I definitely became a better husband. You can ask Amber on that one. And I'm pretty sure I became a better pastor. And I wonder where you're at with regard to that striving and toil of heart.

[23 : 54] Because some of us will try to find our satisfaction in career. Others of us will try to find our satisfaction in how we look, in our body image, or whatever else.

Some of us will try to find it in our hobbies and our recreation. Some of us will try to find it in our academic marks and our grades. And some of us will try to find it in our religious observance.

And all of them, friends, can end up being idols. And Jesus wants to smash them. So where's your soul striving?

Jesus says, Come to me, all who 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. Come to him. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we affirm, we proclaim that you indeed, you indeed are the Lord of the Sabbath.

[25 : 08] You are the only one who can give rest to our toiling, striving souls. So will you come by your spirit?

And will you show us where our souls still strive and toil trying to produce what we can never attain? And will you bring us to our knees that we may give you those areas of our lives and that we may know that rest that you promise?

We ask this in your name. Amen. Continuing in an attitude of prayer, we kneel or sit as you are comfortable as we bring some issues before our Father and ask them to bless them.

And when you hear me say, Lord, in your mercy, if you are comfortable, would you respond with, Lord, hear our prayer. We ask you, Father, to fill us with the knowledge of your will, with all the wisdom and understanding the Spirit gives, that we will be able to live as the Lord wants and will always do what pleases him.

We ask that our lives will produce all kinds of good deeds and that we will grow in the knowledge of you, Father. May we be made strong with all the strength which comes from your glorious power so that we may be able to endure everything with patience.

[27 : 09] may we with joy give thanks to you, Father, who has made us fit to share in what you have reserved for us in your kingdom of light.

You rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of your dear Son by whom our sins are forgiven.

Lord, in your mercy. Father, we pray for our Christians, brothers and sisters who are suffering great persecution in areas of Africa, Egypt and India.

Give them strength in their hour of testing that they may remain true to your Son, we pray. We also pray for our brother Felix as he leads his congregation out of the Episcopal Church of the USA and we pray that they continue to walk in your truth.

Protect and bless Felix, we pray. We pray for the Diocese of the Upper Shira as they meet to appoint a new bishop.

[28 : 29] We pray that your Holy Spirit would lead to the election of a bishop keen to walk in your ways and to continue the good work already begun.

And we pray for many more in this country to come to know you as their Lord and Saviour. Lord, in your mercy. Amen. We pray for the churches of the Anglican Network in Canada.

we pray for those worried about the loss of funds, property, and those who will have to face legal battles. Help us to play our part, Lord, by supporting the Legal Defence Fund over and above our normal giving.

We pray that our youth have benefited from their recent retreats and that they have a deeper understanding of who you are. We also pray for Ken and Julie.

Refresh them, Lord, after all this activity, we pray and we thank you for their sacrificial giving of themselves and their time to our precious youth.

[29 : 44] Lord, in your mercy. Amen. As we approach Remembrance Day, may we remember with gratitude the ultimate price paid by young men and women in all wars.

And we pray protection upon those currently in the field of battle in order to improve the lives of others, many whom they don't even know.

Thank you, God, for these courageous men and women. Amen.