

Rest and Jubilee James Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Katie and I went to Bali for our honeymoon. We had an amazing time of surfing and relaxing and resting. And after planning a wedding, you need that.

You really do need that. Because planning a wedding is a very stressful thing to do. We need that holiday, and Bali was that just for us. Holidaying and resting presents an ideal many of us have for what work is and what work is about.

We earn enough money so we can indulge ourselves in holidays and travel and rest. Where instead of waking up in a 9-to-5 job, we wake up late and drag our feet to the resort pool and lounge and sip cocktails all day until we go to sleep.

And do all over again. Or we might do the opposite thing. And we seek a thrilling adventure holiday where we might go hike mountains or dive in underwater caves or surf the best waves ever.

Rest for these people is escaping the mundane cycle of life. And whatever throws themselves into an adventure where they don't know what might come next.

[1 : 07] For many, the goal of their work is rest. The goal of their work is holiday and travel. And it's not a wrong way to think of it. For we see in the Bible, God has the same goal for work.

Rest. Rest. In Genesis 1, we have six days of creating, of working. As God creates, He works. And after He has made the heavens and the earth, after He has made man in His likeness to bear His image, on the seventh day we read that God rested from His work.

Our desire for rest from work is not simply due to our being limited or finite. Our desire to rest is actually patterned after God Himself who declared in His own rest that the crown, the jewel of all work, is rest.

But because of man's rebellion, this work became fraught with toil and hardship. As we read in Genesis chapter 3, the crown of rest could no longer be realized because of sin.

The wonderful hope, though, is that God, out of His freedom and desire to know us and make a way for us to be in His presence, sets up a system in which we are able to enjoy rest with Him.

[2 : 23] The kind of rest we were created for. Resting with God. He creates a day called the Sabbath, which you read about in Exodus chapter 20. A law that required the people of God to rest on the seventh day of the week, after working six days, just like in creation.

We see that despite our sin, despite our rebellion, God intends to dwell with His people. Sabbath rest is the climax of the working week for the Hebrew people, as they gather as God's people in God's place to enjoy God's blessing and God's mercy.

And as we've been noting throughout this series, the book of Leviticus, this book is a book about how God graciously provides a way for people to live in His presence.

They may become holy, set apart, and distinct from the rest of the nations. At the heart of this program for holiness was keeping the Sabbath. As long as they kept the Sabbath rest, they could enjoy the presence of God, that which was like the Garden of Eden.

And the back end of Leviticus is mostly about instructions on the Sabbath and the different kinds of Sabbath there are. And I believe from chapters 23 to 26, these chapters helpfully critique our modern world today and its approach to work and rest.

[3 : 48] But more than that, they also foreshadow the rest that is to come, the rest that shapes the gospel as well. That is to say, the goal of the Sabbath laws was not to be an ending of themselves, but to point towards the rest that is to come in Jesus.

But first, let's look at Leviticus and see how it critiques our modern day world. Firstly, it promotes the importance of rest and the danger of overworking for humanity.

Jesus said Himself in Mark's gospel that Sabbath is for man and not man for Sabbath, which is a helpful reminder when we read about Sabbath in Leviticus.

It's there to serve us, to help us, to enjoy us, to rest. In chapter 23 of Leviticus, we are given an outline of different kinds of feasts and festivals that the people of God were to celebrate. But it's the Sabbath day principle that informs all of them. From verse 1 of 23, it says, These festivals were called sacred assemblies.

[5 : 14] That is, they were special gatherings of God's people. They were holy gatherings, set apart from the rest of the life that they lived. That the weekly Sabbath is also called a sacred assembly, characterizes the nature of these feasts and these festivals.

That the point of them was to continue to underpin the importance of Sabbath rest. The regular pattern of life was constantly interrupted by the various festivals and the weekly Sabbath. Their whole calendar centered around it in order that they would be constantly aware of the God who called them to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy.

Our world today is nothing like this. We revolve our calendar around our work, around the end of financial year, not rest.

We've seen this in the recent push to cut penalty rates on weekends. We no longer think it's necessary to compensate those who forego their rest for the sake of others.

[6 : 23] The modern day economy is seven days. Seven working days. God gave Sabbath rest to his people to show that work is relative, that no matter how much they work, it's still God who provides for them.

It's still God in the end who gives them what they have. Everything they have is by the grace of God, not due to their effort in their work. That's what the weekly Sabbath pointed towards.

That everything they have was given to them by God. These festivals and weekly Sabbaths remind people of that, to stop and be thankful. Such is an important lesson for us to remember.

That everything we have is by the gracious provision of God. That everything we have is by the grace of God.

We have to be like the world, who in the end worships work. Devoting themselves to it. Centering their whole lives and their calendar around it, so they can feel secure and comfortable.

[7 : 54] We devote ourselves to the Lord God. And Sabbath rest is a constant tool for the Israelite people, giving them the opportunity to do that. To teach them, not to revolve their lives around their work.

Not to trust in themselves as the ones who provide for themselves. But to trust in God, who is good and gracious. Who makes a way to provide for them. To enjoy His presence.

So that's the first thing. Secondly, it promotes the importance of rest and the danger of overworking for the land. Sabbath rest is made for man, but since it's made for man, it ought to benefit the land as well.

For in creation, mankind and the land enjoyed a perfect relationship in which He could work without struggle, without toil, the ground. But because of sin, our relationship with the ground became disordered and dysfunctional and corrupted.

Work became a struggle. By the sweat of your brow, you will work the ground, as Genesis 3 says. And so it was important the ground also enjoyed Sabbath rest.

[9 : 02] Leviticus 25, the first two verses. The Lord said to Moses at Mount Sinai, Speak to the Israelites and say to them, When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the Lord.

My dad, in the last couple of years, has taken up gardening. He loves gardening now. He plants all his fruit and vegetables. He's got four garden beds in his property at home, in the backyard.

And I myself have actually taken quite a bit of interest in this. I've actually really enjoyed going back to my parents' place and looking at the garden and surveying all its wonder and just sitting back and going, Oh, wow.

Where are you growing, Dad? Where are you growing this kind of fruit, that kind of vegetable? One of the really important things about growing a garden, I'm sure if you're interested in it, you'll know, is that you can't just continually grow things in the garden bed.

You've got to let the garden bed every now and then rest, to fallow, to sit for a time period, and then plant again in it. If you want sustainable growth from the best kind of crop, you've got to allow for this resting period.

[10 : 12] It's the same here in Leviticus 25. God wants the land to have rest, its own Sabbath, every seventh year, to rest from being worked upon.

The land then would have the freedom to produce whatever it could on its own, and the Israelite people would feed from that. Such a Sabbath rest, though, ultimately allows for man to be reminded of their place in creation and the immense value of the land.

It allows the people of God to humble themselves, to not see the land as theirs to consume and to pillage and to take from it, but the land as God's given to them to work and to take care of, to be image bearers as they do so, to show God's goodness in creation.

God loves everything he has made. And from the beginning, in Genesis 1, before there even was man, there were six days of creation in which God said, it was good, it was good, it was good, it was good, it was good, it was good.

Creation has its own value apart from us as people. And God won't take any injustice and abuse lightly. He has no patience for it.

[11 : 35] In the following chapter, he says in verse 27, verse 33, I will scatter you among the nations.

He'll kick them out and draw out my sword and pursue you. He'll drive them out from the land. Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate.

All that time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during its Sabbath you lived in it. God immensely cares for his creation.

The land is precious to him and has immense dignity and value in its own right. Wouldn't it be awful if he lived in such a society that abused and pillaged the land for its own financial gain?

Many of us don't think about the idea of justice for the land. And if we're honest, we probably don't care. I know I'm guilty of that.

[12 : 46] We may ignore all the science that tells us that our constant consumption is causing more harm than good, that our foresting and mining, our pumping into the air of CO2 emissions is having a detrimental effect on the wildlife and the earth itself.

And the most scathing indictment upon us as believers is that the secular science are the ones who are leading the charge in providing justice for the land.

People who are not believers, they're the ones leading the charge, not God's people, not the ones who bear God's image, who are called to take care of the land.

Now, I don't want you to think the application of this sermon is to recycle and vote for the Greens.

Although those things aren't necessarily bad, but I do want you to be aware that the consumeristic society that we live in and rub up against daily not only harms our souls, it harms our earth.

It harms our lands. Many Christians have been sold a lie when we think the condition of our earth simply doesn't matter. I wish to be bold and say, yes, it does.

[13 : 59] It's a gospel issue as well. And it's not recycling or voting for the Greens that's going to solve this issue. It's the gospel that will solve it.

For at the heart of the issue is a failed grasp, as we have already talked about, that it is God who provides and sustains life. People are abusing our earth and the land itself because ultimately they're scared that they won't have enough or they want more than they need.

and they don't trust that God will provide for them. It's not the land itself, nor the people who work it, from which sustainability for life comes.

It comes from the one who's at the center of everything, the Lord of life. As we live and exist in this world today, we ought to remember the ground and who it belongs to.

It belongs to God, not ours. And He, the Lord, is at the center of everything. Everything that we enjoy producing the ground comes from Him who caused the ground to produce.

[15 : 06] The Sabbath year stops the Israelite people from getting out of control on their consumption and reminds them of their creational mandate to look after and to take care of the ground.

It reminds them to trust the Lord who will provide for them even if in a whole year they don't work the ground. Indeed, as we read in chapter 25, God is gracious in His abundance towards them that they will have crop into the eighth and ninth year.

We are called to represent Him well, not just in community, but in the way we look after and treat our earth. And so finally, from Leviticus 25, we see that Sabbath promotes the importance of rest and freedom as the goal of creation.

The climax of Sabbath rest comes in verse 28. Count off seven Sabbath years, seven times seven, so that the seven Sabbath years amount to a period of 49 years.

Then have the trumpet sound everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month on the Day of Atonement. Sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the 50th year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

[16:22] It shall be a jubilee for you. Each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan. The 50th year shall be a jubilee for you. Do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the unintended vines, for it is a jubilee and it is to be holy for you.

Eat only what is taken directly from the fields. In this year of jubilee, everyone is to return to their property, their own property. The year of jubilee was the climactic celebration of the Sabbath. It encompassed elements of the yearly Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath by bringing an exciting new element as well. All your debts were cancelled. You had your property returned to you. If you were a hired worker or even a slave, you were freed. That sounds pretty good. The stipulations listed for jubilee, though, weren't just for the sake of everyone's individual joy so we could take what was ours and, yes, get it back, finally.

Because it meant, for some, giving back and giving it up, losing their wealth. The day of jubilee was the great equaliser. Or as Von and I were discussing, she told me, it's the great reset button.

[17:42] For as years went on, some got richer and some got poorer. To allow that divide to get bigger and bigger was to run against the grain of creation that God had made us equal. And so, the return of property.

Also, as years went on, these poor people may have had to sell themselves for work, sell their property to pay off debt and to become hired hands. And so, they were freed every 50 years of their bondage to debt and obligation.

This day and year of jubilee remind the people that they were created by God and they were owned and belonged to God. That's the constant line we see in Exodus.

I will be your God and you will be my people. that everything they have is actually His and it is His to give back freely.

That anyone who works for them, indebted or even enslaved, is also God's. Indeed, as verse 54 says, even if someone is not redeemed in any of these ways, they and their children are to be released in the year of jubilee.

[18:53] They are my servants whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. The year of jubilee, this climactic Sabbath that happened every year, lived up to the idea of sacred assembly.

It protested the idea that the nation of Israel ought to be built upon tribute and forced labor and state-imposed slavery, which was so prevalent in the nations surrounding them.

No, it pointed to the people of God and to the nations around them. They were built upon the Lord God himself and upon his mercy and grace, upon his wonderful provision and that he would dwell with them.

Our world is nothing like that. Our modern world is nothing like that. In little things, like if one is able to get into the city market alone and buy a house, you are obligated yourself to a near-life, longer payment of debt, which will never be wiped.

The divide between rich and poor has never been greater than it is today and will continue to grow if generating more and more wealth is the goal of our society.

[20:13] Most of the clothes that we wear, we may not be aware, but are made in slave-like conditions, if not in slavery. I found out a few years ago that the cocoa industry, that is, to make chocolate, is rife with corruption and slavery.

80% of cocoa made in our world comes from one particular place in Africa and is one major supplier that most of our brands buy from, brands like Nestle, and they use child slaves to make and pick the cocoa.

That's happening today. There's all kinds of slavery as well in the sex industry, in all kinds of places. The principle at the heart of these stipulations for the year of Jubilee was the law that summed up the entire law according to Jesus.

Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. It was a defining law for them that they wrote that into their moral code.

And that's why they sought to look after the poor, to free the slayer. That's why every 50 years they had a year of Jubilee. If there was a defining law for us today it would be this, love yourself with all your heart, mind, and strength and love your neighbor if it benefits you.

[21 : 42] The whole point of these repetitive Sabbath celebrations in their various forms were not to stop this from happening. So it was to stop this from happening for Israel.

That they would not end up loving themselves and only caring for themselves but they would live out a life of constant worship with God in his presence and looking out for the poor and those who were mistreated and the destitute.

They would look after the land and they would live for God and obey him. Only then would they enjoy his presence and blessing. But it didn't take long for them to end up living lives that look totally radically different.

To live individually and to live in a way that only benefits themselves. It didn't take long for their world to look like our world did today, does today. And therefore it did not take long for them to suffer the consequences where they were kicked out of the land into exile just as Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden.

But there is hope. Because Leviticus 25 is not just a staving perhaps critique on our modern world and our ideas of rest and work but it also gives us an idea of God's intention to dwell with his people.

[22 : 59] He wants to rest and he wants us to rest with him. And it gives us a picture of how the gospel impacts our world and shapes our community.

The gospel is not another festival or calendar law for Sabbath but it is the climax of all these things. As you've been reading it there's a big climax that's the weekly Sabbath and it's the seven yearly Sabbath and then after seven years Sabbath there's the year of Jubilee and then we get to the climax in the gospels where the Lord the Sabbath himself comes.

Jesus to bring the kind of rest we've been hoping for here in Leviticus. Leviticus shows that it is in the gospel that we can rest from our work and rest in the work of Jesus to bring us into a relationship with the Father that all of us who are weary and burdened and heavy laden can enjoy the rest that Jesus offers when he says come to me and I'll give you rest for your souls.

Leviticus shows that the gospel encompasses not only us as individuals or us as a community but the whole of creation a salvation that Jesus has come to bring is for the whole world it is cosmic in nature which is why creation looks forward to the children of God being revealed as Romans 8 says for that will be a time it will enjoy its own redemption and restoration as well and Leviticus shows us that the gospel is a call to freedom that we who were once slaves to sin now enjoy the wonderful freedom of the gospel having been redeemed by God through the blood of Jesus Jesus looks at his ministry as a kind of jubilee type when he reads from the scroll of Isaiah saying in Luke 4 the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free to proclaim the year of the

Lord's favour and then he sits down and he says this today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing the intentions of Leviticus to make a way for God's people to enjoy his presence is ultimately realised in Jesus it is he who fulfils the laws and requirements for the sabbath and allows for an ongoing eternal sabbath to happen in him for all who believe we don't need to do these laws in Leviticus to enjoy rest and the presence of God but what Leviticus does is it shows us what a gospel shaped community looks like a gospel shaped community doesn't allow work to consume them but stops in order to rest and remember the wonderful provision of the Lord almighty indeed a gospel shaped community in its desire and care to work for the creation is not to abuse it or to pillage it or to consume it but to look after it to take care of it to bear

[26 : 12] God's image as it's been worked representing its value well before all people in the wonderful glory of God and finally perhaps the most significant gospel shaping tool Leviticus offers us is that it is one of loving God and caring for the poor a community doesn't see themselves as better than the other but equal in Jesus who offers salvation to all a community doesn't abuse their power over people but who remembers that it is God who purchased and redeemed them from their sin a community that seeks to live in harmony with one another devoting themselves to the Lord in worship as they live out their lives in whatever it is that God has called them to do this is the shape of rest that Leviticus puts forward the shape of the gospel rest that we can enjoy from what does it look like to rest in God what does it look like to have

Sabbath in Jesus it is to live as God's people in God's place enjoying his blessing and going out from here and serving him and loving him in wherever he has placed you you remain faithful and always been thankful for what he has done for you seeing every bit of work that you have your

house your car the food you eat has been provided by him and him alone that is what it looks like to enjoy Sabbath rest in Jesus and that is what Leviticus 25 wants you to see here but the question is are we such a community do we love and remember that it is God who provides and therefore the relativity of work do we care for the poor and the destitute in our suburb in our city do we care for our earth that it belongs to God and it's created by him and given to us to take care of not to consume do we not even sometimes share in the guilt of how badly we have treated it and repent of our sin do we remember that we are not of our own that we were bought at a price and therefore hate the injustice of slavery that we see in our world do we see each other here who have come from all kinds of backgrounds of all ages on the same level enjoying equality and love before God do we continue to repent of our sin and seek to live in light of this gospel Leviticus asks these questions of us because this is how the gospel impacts our life so in view of all this has the gospel taken shape in your life in such a way let's pray heavenly father you great thanks and praise that although we are sinful you graciously provide a way for us to come to know you in your presence we thank you lord for your son jesus in whom we can enjoy an eternal sabbath rest beginning now and we pray father that we would not think lightly on what that looks like but that we see in giving us rest you have called us to live the life that we were created to live to live in accordance of your creation to live in accordance of your law to live in accordance of your way to love those around us to seek justice for our land and for people who don't have it to love each other and to live to serve you we pray all this in your son's name amen