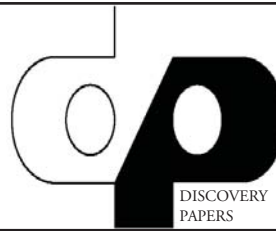


A REST REQUIRED

SERIES: SABBATH: REMEMBER TO REST. REST TO REMEMBER.



Catalog No. 5300
Ex 20:8-11, 31:12-18;
Deut 5:12-15
1st Message
Paul Taylor

Are you really tired? Do you feel sleepy? Do you often feel like if you could just close your eyes for just a few minutes that you would be refreshed and energized? What about that lull in the day right after lunch? Can you really get anything done? Doesn't that dip in energy just sap your productivity for the rest of the day? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then there is a solution available for you.

We're called MetroNaps, and we manufacture the perfect solution to your mid-day drowsiness. What you need is an EnergyPod, this futuristic looking bed that allows you to take a twenty-minute power nap in the middle of the day. Researchers say that a twenty-minute power nap in the middle of your day can dramatically increase your productivity for the rest of the day. So if you want to work better, if you want to be more productive, then talk to your employer about installing EnergyPods in your office. Or if you're in the New York area, stop by our MetroNaps Nap Center on the twenty-second floor of the Empire State Building. A twenty-minute nap costs only \$14 – with an additional twenty minutes available for only \$9.50 more.

So, what do you think? Is a power nap in the middle of the day what you're missing in your daily rhythm? Is it worth \$14? Honestly, taking a nap in the middle of the day doesn't sound too bad, but the idea of having twenty minutes in which I need to hurry up and fall asleep so that I can wake up and work even harder in the afternoon doesn't sound all that relaxing.

And yet, these EnergyPods point to a real need in our lives. We need rest. Many of us are exhausted, pushing ourselves faster and harder than is healthy. When was the last time you asked someone how he was doing and he replied, "Really great! I'm feel rested and relaxed"? When was the last time you answered that way?

Is a power nap the answer? If you ask me, it seems more like part of the problem than an answer. What is it that we need? Where do we find rest? Real rest? Why are we so addicted to activity? Why do we complain about our schedules but refuse to slow down? What is it that we need?

The answer is simple. Sabbath. Sabbath. In Hebrew the word comes from the word "to stop" and is very similar to the word for the number "seven," which signifies completeness. Sabbath. It's a theme that is woven throughout Scripture from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation. Sabbath. Rest. True rest.

This week we're starting a four-week series talking about Sabbath. What is the Sabbath? Why does God command it? When do we get to enjoy it? How can God justify resting when so much work remains to be done? What

we're going to find out is that Sabbath is about who God is. It's not about what we need to live healthy lives. It's not about making sure we get our rest so that we can be productive at work and nice to our family and stay awake in church during the sermons (though none of those things are bad things). We don't need a power nap. We need a powerful God. We need Sabbath. Sabbath reminds us who God is.

On the Sabbath, we remember to rest. But we rest to remember. We rest to remember God.

Next week, we're going to talk really practically about how to celebrate Sabbath in our lives. On Palm Sunday, as we celebrate the anticipation and excitement of Jesus entering Jerusalem, we'll talk about how all of creation is moving toward a final Sabbath rest. And we'll conclude on Easter by seeing how the resurrection of Jesus from the dead provides the foundation for our ability to rest, both now and in the future.

But this week, we're going to start by looking at why God commanded His people to observe the Sabbath. We'll talk about some of the major reasons why resting is so hard for us and see how God's reasoning addresses those concerns. And my prayer is that we'll discover what an important role resting plays in our relationship with God. We frequently talk about what we can *do* to foster our relationship with God. Today we want to talk about how *not* doing anything affects our relationship with Him.

Rest to Remember that God Has Created Us

To start off, we're going to look at the first time God commanded His people to observe the Sabbath. This command comes in the Ten Commandments, the first listing of which is found in Exodus 20. Sabbath shows up in the fourth command, found in Exodus 20:8-11. I'll start by reading it.

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. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. 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 first sentence gives the basic pattern of this command. "Remember the Sabbath" because it is holy. The rest of the command explains it means to remember the

Sabbath and how it is holy. Apparently, remembering the Sabbath means not doing work. Notice that remembering isn't a cognitive activity. Remembering isn't thinking, "Oh yeah, it's the Sabbath." Remembering means doing something. Or in this case, not doing something. In fact, in Scripture, remembering is never an intellectual exercise. Remembering always involves activity. And for Sabbath, the activity is simple: six days you work, the seventh you don't.

Then, the last verse of the passage explains the reason for remembering the Sabbath: because God rested after He created the earth. So our remembering of the Sabbath is patterned after God's behavior in creation. We are told to rest because God rested. Our rest tells us something about God. But what does it tell us? Why did God rest?

Let's go back to Genesis. Genesis 2:2 reads, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work." Why did God rest? Because His work was finished. God rested because His work was finished. He didn't rest because He was tired. He didn't rest because the six days of creating had really worn Him out and He had another busy week ahead of Him. He didn't rest because He had done a great job and He deserved a little mini-vacation. He rested because His work was done. So why do we rest? We rest to remember that God's work in creation is done. We rest to remember that God has created us.

But for most of us, this idea of work being done is completely foreign. We always have something left to do; we always have something we should be doing now. If it isn't school responsibilities, its professional responsibilities. If things at work are okay, we have family responsibilities. Or maybe church responsibilities. There's an old song that says, "A cowboy's work is never done." But you could say that about whatever we do. Most of us always have something left to do.

I have a vivid memory of a Saturday afternoon shortly after Rachel and I got married when we were living in Sunnyvale. We had packed a blanket and some snacks, had gone to a park, and were just sitting on the blanket reading and talking. I distinctly remember having this thought: "There's nothing I should be doing now." I'd been a student most of my life, and students always have something they should be doing. Students don't rest, they procrastinate. But I wasn't a student anymore. I had just started in my job, so I didn't have any responsibilities that spilled into the weekend. We didn't have kids or very many time commitments. I felt like I was experiencing the first Saturday that I had ever known. I was resting because my work was done. In hindsight, I think that may have been the last Saturday I have ever known, as well.

These days, most of us rarely have the feeling that all our work is done. If we do rest, we rest only to work more efficiently. This is the idea behind the MetroNaps EnergyPod. Have a little rest in the afternoon so you can be that much more productive when you work. This is the way most of us think about rest. We can get more done

if we are well-rested. We can be more efficient if we take a day off to rejuvenate. That may be the case. But it assumes that our job is to get as much done as we possibly can but have to live with the sad reality that we can't work every day, so we have to take a day off so that we can get back to work and be more productive when we're working.

Why do we think this way? Why does it seem like we have to work so hard to get to where we want to be? I think part of the problem is that we want it all. We want exciting careers and perfect marriages and dynamic churches and compassionate friends and loving families and obedient children and generous parents and forgiving critics and stimulating hobbies. We want to reach our full potential. We want to become who we want to be. And we think, "If I want to reach my goal in ten years, then I need to make it happen. If I want to get into a good college and find a good job, I need to make it happen. If I want to succeed in this company, I've got to make it happen. If I want my kids to be happy and go to good schools and have a good life, then I've got to make it happen. I want it all and it's up to me to make it happen."

In all of this, we think that we need to create ourselves. But Sabbath is different. Sabbath isn't about creating ourselves. It isn't about getting where we want to be. Sabbath reminds us that God created us. This makes us uncomfortable because the task of becoming who we want to be is far too important to be trusted to a God who might not even be there. I'll take care of it myself. I'll create myself. Thanks, God, but no thanks; I'll handle this one on my own.

The Israelites thought the same way. At first, Sabbath probably didn't seem like a gift to them. Think about the people to whom God originally gave this command. They were an agricultural economy; they lived off of what they could grow and harvest. And God tells them to take a day off every week without doing any work. Now, maybe if you're a computer programmer, you'll be more efficient if you don't turn on your computer one day per week. But that's not true for a farmer. Farmers don't take a day off. In fact, it's irresponsible for a farmer to take a whole day without doing anything for his crops. It doesn't make sense. And so God gives doesn't give these people the command to remember the Sabbath because doing so makes them better farmers but because the day off forces them to remember something about who He is. God created them. God will sustain them.

Do you really believe this? Do you believe that God created you? Do you believe that sustaining your life is His responsibility? So much of my life is still lived under the false impression that I'm responsible for creating myself. I try so hard to get to where I want to be, to make things happen in my life so that my life looks just the way I want it to look. It's so easy for me to forget that God created me, and His work

is done. Do you feel that way? Like you have to make sure that you become who you want to be?

Audrey Hepburn did. She once said: “Are you bored with life? Then throw yourself into some work you believe in with all your heart, live for it, die for it, and you will find happiness that you had thought could never be yours.” And many of us live this way, throwing ourselves into work that we believe in with all our hearts. Or work that we’ve convinced ourselves that we believe in with all our hearts. And yet, this lifestyle ignores the basic fact that most of us came here this morning to acknowledge or investigate that there is a God who created us. We don’t have to create ourselves.

So the first reason behind Sabbath in the Bible is that God’s work in creating us is finished. We rest to rightfully acknowledge the role that God plays in the world. We rest to remember that God has created us.

Rest to Remember that God Has Chosen Us

We’ve looked at the first time in the Old Testament that God commanded His people to observe the Sabbath. Now we turn to the second time. After Moses gave the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, he gave a number of more specific descriptions as to how these commandments were to be applied in daily life. Then, in Exodus 31, we find more detail regarding Sabbath.

Exodus 31:12-13 reads,

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.’”

Verse 16 reads,

The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.

The first listing of the Ten Commandments required the Sabbath to remember that God created His people. This second passage offers an additional reason. Now God adds that the Sabbath is to serve as a sign of the covenant between Him and His people. These are important words to Jewish ears: “sign” and “covenant.” Covenant describes the fundamental way in which Old Testament Jews understood their relationship with God. They were bound to Him in a covenant. God gave them particular signs to remind them of the covenant relationship that they enjoyed with Him. Circumcision was one of the most famous signs, but here, God says that Sabbath was to be a sign, as well. As Scott described last week, by Jesus’ time, Sabbath observance for the Jewish leaders has become a sort of prideful badge of loyalty. This is where that idea originated. In Exodus 31, God requires the Sabbath as a way of reminding His people that He has chosen them. We rest because God has chosen us. The Sabbath reminds us of our basic identity.

We also have labels and identifiers that tell us who we are. Think about how you conceive of yourself. Who are you? A mother? A father? A student? A child? A brother? A sister? A man? A woman? As much as our culture talks about the dangers of labeling people and stereotyping them, labels and identifiers are crucial to our society. When you first meet someone, you want to find out a few basic things about them. When I meet a student, it’s natural for me to ask, “What year are you? Where do you go to school? Where are you from? What are you studying?” You look for labels; you look for basic identifiers to understand what a person’s life is like. These create a sort of framework that allow you to get to know someone more deeply.

What is behind Sabbath is the idea that being a member of God’s chosen people is the first and most important part of any Jew’s identity. Sabbath was the most observable way to demonstrate that identity. So not honoring the Sabbath wasn’t just about disobeying God. Not honoring the Sabbath was about renouncing your very identity. Jews don’t work on the Sabbath. If you work on the Sabbath, you are renouncing your claim to being Jewish. By working on the Sabbath, you are declaring that you aren’t a Jew, that you don’t identify yourself as one of YHWH’s chosen people. This is a slap in God’s face and an affront to the rest of the community of Jews.

I moved from Connecticut to Texas in the middle of high school. I was all too aware that being “Texan” came along with a particular identity. I decided that I wanted nothing to do with that identity. I didn’t want to listen to country music. I didn’t want to wear cowboy boots. I didn’t want to be a Texan. Sure, I lived in Texas, but I wasn’t a Texan. If you know anything about Texas, you know that when you live in Texas, it’s important to be a Texan. I don’t know how many times while in Texas I was reminded that Texas is the only state in the US that is allowed to fly its state flag at the same height as the US flag because Texas is the only state that was once a sovereign nation. So for me to live in Texas but to systematically refuse to be identified as a Texan was often an affront to my friends. In some ways, it kept me on the outside. This is just a fraction of what was communicated when a Jew decided not to honor the Sabbath. This is why the punishment for failing to observe Sabbath was death. A Jew was born as a privileged member of God’s chosen people. If he decided to forfeit that allegiance, he may as well forfeit his life.

So who are you? Think about the labels and identifiers that apply to you. What is your primary identity? For Old Testament Jews, honoring the Sabbath made a clear statement about what their primary identity was. First and foremost, they were a part of the people of God. Who are you?

We live in a culture where busyness is admired. Sometimes I think that I have to feel busy to feel important. If someone asks me how I’m doing and I say, “Well, it’s a really relaxed week for me this week,” then I must not be all that important. But if I say, “Oh man – it’s such a busy week. I’ve got meetings all week and a big project due this weekend and lots of stuff going on at home and

evening activities every day of the week...,” then I feel better about myself. This is not to say we should never talk about the things we have going on for fear of sounding self-important. Sometimes we *are* overwhelmed with the various things going on in our lives, and talking about it is helpful. But sometimes we play into our culture’s activity addiction and show off our frenzy like a trophy.

Sabbath is a way to say that busyness isn’t what makes me important. My activity is not who I am. Sabbath rest reminds us that we are chosen by God. He makes us important. Our membership in His people is the most basic label that we can apply to ourselves.

This can get twisted in our religious circles. Sabbath reminds God’s people that He chose them. But we can turn Sabbath into the way that we declare that we are serious about God. This is where the Jews went wrong in Jesus’ day. Sabbath became a way for them to prove that they had chosen God. But they had it backward. It was YHWH who had chosen them.

We get confused over the same issue. We can use Sabbath—and other church activities—as a way of showing others how serious we are about God. Even the language we use about entering into a relationship with God can demonstrate this. We “ask Jesus into our hearts.” We “invite Jesus to be our Lord.” We “put Jesus on the throne of our hearts.” The way we talk about it, you might think that we are electing Jesus to be our Lord over all the other candidates running for the position. But Jesus isn’t a candidate for president of our lives. Jesus isn’t running for election. Jesus is a king. People don’t elect their king. The people submit to their King. We don’t elect Jesus as our Lord; we submit to Him as our Lord. Sabbath works the same way. We can sometimes rest as a way of proving that we have cast our vote for God. But Sabbath isn’t a way to prove that we have chosen God. We remember the Sabbath to remind ourselves that God has chosen us.

Rest to Remember that God Has Redeemed Us

So far, we’ve looked at two different reasons for remembering the Sabbath. We rest to remember that God created us. We rest to remember that God has chosen us. We’re going to look at one more passage where God gives a slightly different take on why He requires His people to remember the Sabbath.

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, right before the Jews were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses gave a series of sermons to the people to prepare them for this new season of life as God’s people. In doing so, he repeated the Ten Commandments. This version is mostly identical to the one on Exodus, but not when it comes to Sabbath. The commandment is the same, but the reason behind it is different. Listen to Deuteronomy 5:12-15,

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

The first listing of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 linked remembering the Sabbath to God’s completed work in creation. But here in Deuteronomy 5, forty years later, observing the Sabbath is linked to God’s work in releasing the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. The first listing looks back to creation. The second listing looks back to the Exodus. Why should God people’s observe the Sabbath? Because God saved His people from slavery. He redeemed them. So we find the final reason behind Sabbath: We rest to remember that God has redeemed us.

This moment of redemption was the defining moment for the nation of Israel. When God saved His people from Egypt was when the Jews became a nation. The text reminds them that they were not an attractive people; they certainly had a lot less going for them than the people gathered here in this room today. These people were slaves. But God had made a promise to these people, and the Exodus was the first stage of fulfilling that promise. This is the event that the Israelites looked back to as defining their national identity. If Judaism was born when God called Abraham out of Ur, the nation of Israel was born when God redeemed the Jews from slavery in Egypt. And Sabbath reminded God’s people that He created them as a nation. He rescued them. He redeemed them from slavery.

I think it’s helpful to think about our own national identity. In this country, we celebrate July 4th as a way of remembering the defining moment for us as a nation. In 1776, around the fourth day of July, a group of men signed a document saying that although they were subjects of a certain king, they were declaring their independence from that sovereign and establishing a new nation. We call this document the Declaration of Independence. We celebrate July 4th as Independence Day. The story of the Jews isn’t that different. They were subjects of a foreign king who oppressed them. They eagerly desired independence, and they eventually became a new nation. But at the same time, their story is completely different. We declared our independence. They were rescued by their God. We created this nation. God created their nation. We redeemed ourselves. God redeemed them. Every July 4, we celebrate the creation of our nation and call it Independence Day. Every Sabbath they celebrated the creation of their nation. But for them, we might call it Dependence Day.

Is it any wonder that we find it hard to acknowledge our dependence on God? That we want to turn Sabbath into something that we use for our own empowerment -

to make us more efficient and more productive? Is it any wonder that we prefer power naps over a powerful God? I need to rest so I can work harder. Sabbath helps me make it on my own. We desperately want to be self-sufficient. We want to make it on our own. Nobody likes a crutch. Nobody wants to be dependent. We can make it. Resting is like an acknowledgment that I can't do it. It's a failure of sorts. But of course, all this self-sufficiency that we're addicted to is nothing but empty lies. The truth is we *can't* make it on our own. Sabbath is a practical way to remember that. You stop working to remember your dependence on God.

This is one of the hardest parts of being a pastor. Sometimes I get overwhelmed with the very act of writing a sermon--having the audacity to stand up here and preach to you, trying to use words to foster your relationship with God. And being overwhelmed is hard. But other times, I think I can do it if I just work hard enough. It's up to me to get what God wants to say into you. If *I* just work hard enough, if *I* just get the right illustration, if *I* just find the right words, *I'll* be able to say what I want to say. I. I. I. I've forgotten about God. I've forgotten that God redeemed me and is in the process of redeeming me. I've forgotten that God redeemed you and is in the process of redeeming you. Even as I was preparing this sermon on rest, I had to realize that I was ignoring the very words I was planning to say to you. God is the one speaking to you. God is the one working in your life. As a pastor, I just get to be along for the ride. I rest to remember that. I rest to remember that it is God who works in our lives, not words or illustrations or sermons or music. God redeems us.

Conclusion

So this is the *why* of Sabbath. God commanded Sabbath for His people as a reminder of their dependence on Him. Sabbath reminds us that God created us. Sabbath reminds us that God chose us. And Sabbath reminds us that God redeemed us. Sabbath is about God.

This morning we've been looking only in the Old Testament. For the Israelites, Sabbath was a reminder of who YHWH was. But things have changed for us. We'll be talking more in the next several weeks about how Sabbath observance has changed for us with the arrival of the New Covenant. But on a broad level for us, Sabbath is about Jesus. It's about the role that He plays in our lives. For us, Sabbath reminds us that Jesus took part in our creation. And Jesus is in the process of bringing about our re-creation, which He has already accomplished. Sabbath reminds us that Jesus chose us. Our identity as followers of Christ and members of the kingdom of God that He initiated forms the very core of who we are. And Sabbath reminds us that Jesus redeemed us. YHWH brought Israel

out of Egypt as a foreshadowing of how Christ saves us from our own sin and leads us out of slavery to the darkness of our hearts.

So tomorrow when you go to work and have a big lunch and then start to feel drowsy right around 2pm, you might think about taking a power nap to get through the rest of your day. Maybe you can convince your company to invest in some EnergyPods because they will make you that much more productive the rest of the day.

Just know that what you're doing isn't Sabbath. Sabbath is about dependence. It may seem like a lot is resting on my shoulders. But I feel that way when I forget about God. And it's so easy to forget about God. So I stop working as a way to acknowledge Him in my life. I stop working to remember. The very act of resting forces me to remember that I am dependent upon Him. It's not all up to me. I can't do it. God reminds me to rest. And when I rest I remember. I remember God.

