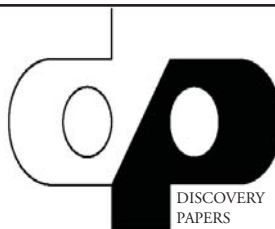


A REST RELISHED

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



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Ex 16:23-29, 35:3; Num
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Ps 46
2nd Message
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Good morning. I hope you had a restful week after last week's sermon. Did anybody manage to take a power-nap in the middle of the day? I have to tell you that my week wasn't very restful at all. I struggled a lot this week with an inability to rest in God. I need this message as much as you do. I've been asking God this question a lot: "How do I rest in You in the midst of my life?" Friday night and all day Saturday all the pastors, elders, and elder-advisers went on a little mini-retreat to think through what God is doing here at PBC. For me, it was a great time to rest. But it also highlighted what a hard time I've had this week with resting. Saturday morning I was walking down a trail through some redwoods to breakfast and feeling really peaceful and thinking to myself, "Can I really live like this all the time? Can I really rest in the midst of all my responsibilities? It's easy to rest on a retreat, but can I really incorporate this attitude of rest and dependence into my everyday life?"

Last week, we started our four-week series on Sabbath. We talked about rest as a reminder of our dependence on God. We focused primarily on why we rest. Today, we want to look at the question of *how* we rest. What might Sabbath rest look like in our lives? How can we live this way?

I want to start by talking about two different extremes: two versions of rest that I want to use to frame our discussion. Both are ways that people rest: practical actions that people have taken to facilitate their enjoying of some kind of rest. As you reflect on these examples, I want us to be asking the question, "Is this what Sabbath ought to be?"

Our first picture is from one of my favorite TV shows: *Seinfeld*. In one particular episode, George Costanza hires a contractor to build a napping area under his desk at work. It's too bad MetroNaps didn't exist for George. I think that would have served him a lot better than his desk. So is George observing Sabbath? His morning consists of a nap under his desk and then lunch. That's example one.

Example two is much closer to home. I have a practice of trying to walk to work once a week. It's about a two-and-a-half-mile walk straight down Middlefield road from my house in Mountain View to the church. Along the way, I've noticed something that many of you probably haven't seen. About a quarter mile away from the church, as I walk over Adobe Creek near the CAR center, there is a thin metal wire suspended along the length of the culvert about the height of a telephone wire. I've looked into this and discovered that this wire is part of the Palo Alto *Eruv*.

An *eruv* is something that enables Orthodox Jews to celebrate Sabbath more conveniently. You see, on the

Sabbath, an Orthodox Jew is prohibited from carrying an object anywhere outside of his or her private domain. That means that an Orthodox Jew can't push a stroller carrying her baby to Shabbat service. It means he can't carry anything from his house to the synagogue—not even forms of identification. The *eruv* is a mechanism that rabbis have come up with to create a symbolic boundary around an entire area, encompassing people's homes and the synagogue, that turns that area into a shared dwelling place. This means that people can carry objects within that shared dwelling place on the Sabbath. After much debate, the city of Palo Alto authorized this *eruv* around this section of the city. As one Orthodox Jew from Palo Alto stated it, "It is a real enhancement for the traditional Jewish community in terms of how they can observe the Jewish Sabbath."

So we have two pictures. George Costanza sleeping under his desk. Is this Sabbath? The Palo Alto *Eruv*. Is this Sabbath? That is what we want to talk about today. What is Sabbath? We know that we need rest. I hope we were convinced last week that we need to rest because it's so easy to forget our dependence. We need to rest to remember. But what does it look like? How do we rest? Did George have it right? Do Orthodox Jews have it right? We want to learn how to rest and how to enjoy it. We want to *relish our rest*.

To answer this question, we're going to do a bit of a fast-paced tour through the Old Testament, looking at most of the places where actually practicing the Sabbath is referenced. Two questions will guide our tour. What are you *not* supposed to do as Sabbath? Then, what *are* you supposed to do as Sabbath? My hope is that these questions will help us as we try to apply the concept of Sabbath to our own lives.

What Not To Do As Sabbath

Let's start by looking at the Sabbath prohibitions that are given in the Old Testament. What does God say should *not* be done on the Sabbath? The first mention of a Sabbath prohibition is in Exodus 16. It's interesting that God tells his people not to do something on the Sabbath even before he has introduced them to the Sabbath as a commandment. The Ten Commandments come in Exodus 20, but Sabbath is referenced four chapters earlier. Look at Exodus 16:25-30. When God gave His people manna, Moses explained to them that they would only collect it six days out of seven. Here's what he said,

"Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath,

there will not be any.” Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” So the people rested on the seventh day.

So right off the bat, even before we have a command to observe the Sabbath, God’s people were forbidden from gathering food on the seventh day. They couldn’t even stoop down to pick up some manna off the ground. They couldn’t bake it. They couldn’t boil it. They weren’t allowed to do even the most basic activity to sustain their life. I would have thought that the fact that God sent manna every day to sustain their life would be a pretty good reminder of their dependence on God. But even when the Jews were constantly reminded of their dependence on God by divine provision of food, the Sabbath gave them an additional reminder!

A little bit later in Exodus, after the Ten Commandments have been given, we have another specific prohibition regarding the Sabbath. Exodus 35:3 reads,

Do not light a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day.

So the Jews couldn’t collect manna. And they couldn’t light a fire.

Think with me for a minute about what it means for a pre-industrial culture to not have a fire. It means that on the Sabbath day, they had no way to cook any food. They had no way to warm themselves. They had no way to have light after the sun had gone down. They had no way to boil water. For a nomadic, agrarian Jew living in the area of Palestine, not having a fire meant that they could do nothing to provide for themselves. They had no way, absolutely no way, of sustaining their lives.

This is the first clue to what Sabbath looks like. The simple command is not to work. And it looks like working has to do with sustaining your life. Providing for yourself. So not working means not doing anything that sustains your life. Any of the normal, everyday activities that you do that sustain your existence—that’s work. You can’t do them on the Sabbath. And why? Why were God’s people prohibited from doing work that sustained their existence? As a reminder to them that they followed a God who sustained their existence for them. Sure, they had responsibilities and things to do, but the ultimate responsibility for their existence was with their God. Not with themselves.

So as we start to think about what Sabbath means for us, we have to start with the basic idea of not sustaining our lives, of stopping the things that normally take so much of our energy just to survive. This way of living is completely counter-cultural for us. Look around at how much time and energy most people spend on what they

consider to be activities to sustain their lives: working all the time, putting in extra hours, obsessing over family decisions. To live the Sabbath is to live against the culture. And that is hard to do, but as followers of Christ, we are called to it. We are called to stand out in our culture. The other night, Rachel was going to bed early and I stayed up a bit later. She joked with me that if I still had energy at the end of the day, then our division of labor must not be right. And it can feel that way in our culture. If you are rested and peaceful in this culture, something must be wrong. You must not be working hard enough. Don’t you know how hard it is to sustain your life in this valley? Or maybe we do know. But maybe we also know the One who is ultimately responsible for sustaining our lives.

However, Sabbath has to be more than just not doing work. Think back with me to George Costanza sleeping under his desk. That’s not Sabbath. He wasn’t working, but it wasn’t Sabbath. It’s not even that he was depending on God too much. He wasn’t depending on God at all: his rest was about himself. Bertrand Russell, the famous atheist who wrote *Why I Am Not A Christian*, once said:

To be able to fill leisure intelligently is the last product of civilization, and at present very few people have reached this level.

Is that what we’re talking about? Leisure? Surely not. What Russell considered leisure can’t be considered Sabbath. In a culture in which we are obsessed with entertainment and recreation, we can’t conclude that anything that doesn’t sustain your life is Sabbath. It’s got to be deeper than that. There has to be something more.

Shortly after Moses gave the command not to light a fire on the Sabbath, that particular restriction was tested in an interesting way. In Numbers 15, we have the first recorded legal question about Sabbath. Listen to Numbers 15:32 and following:

While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him.

So here’s a guy that wasn’t building a fire, but he was collecting firewood. Was he breaking the Sabbath? He wasn’t technically breaking any of the rules that had been given so far. So what’s the big deal?

Apparently it was a big deal. What did God say? Verse 35-36 reads,

Then the LORD said to Moses, “The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.” So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses.

Wow. This seems pretty severe, doesn't it? God commanded His people not to work on the Sabbath. He said that building a fire counted as work. And then the people find this guy collecting wood on the Sabbath. It seems like a warning would suffice in this case—he wasn't actually breaking any rules. And yet God said that he had to die. He didn't break the rules, but he broke the Sabbath. Or to say it another way, he observed the rules, but he didn't observe Sabbath.

So we realize that Sabbath is about more than just following the rules. Sabbath is more than what you do. Sabbath is an issue of the heart. It's more than just sleeping under your desk instead of working. But it's also more than erecting a metal wire that enables you to more conveniently follow rules on a given day.

Focusing on the rules can make Sabbath a work in itself. We can work by observing the Sabbath. Some friends of mine in college practiced a Sabbath every week by filling a day with sermons on tape, Bible studies, and deep theological conversations. For some people, this may be restful, but to me, this sounded like a lot of work. If I were to observe them and try to emulate them, I'd be working by observing the Sabbath. Even just using the term "Sabbath" can ruin it for me because then I feel super-spiritual about whatever I'm doing. It is lot more authentic for me to say, "I'm taking a day off today." It's like the frog that you have to kill in order to dissect it and understand it, but once you've understood it, you no longer really have a frog. Just calling my rest "Sabbath" can make it unrestful. But my hope is to give us some ideas and concepts behind Sabbath that we can incorporate into our lives. It doesn't have to be called "Sabbath." It doesn't have to look like anything we talk about it. But I want us to grow in remembering our dependence on God and finding avenues in our lives that help us to express that.

So we learn from Numbers 15 that Sabbath isn't about following the rules. It's about your heart. And so if George's rest was self-indulgent, then the Orthodox Jew's concept of Sabbath is self-dependent. It's all about finding the right way to follow the rules. So both of our extremes are essentially focused on self. Sabbath, on the other hand, is focused on God. Sabbath is about who you depend on, not what you do.

There's one more passage to look at that talks about what not to do on the Sabbath, and it comes much later in the Old Testament. By this point, God's people have entered the Promised Land, their nation has divided and then conquered by foreign powers. Finally, after seventy years, they return to their land and start to rebuild their existence. In this era, Sabbath again becomes an issue, but they are a completely different culture changed by almost a thousand years of cultural development.

So let's look at Nehemiah 13:15-16:

In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads.

And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah.

So the issue that Nehemiah is facing is that God's people who are living in Jerusalem, trying to rebuild the city, are engaging in commerce during the Sabbath. Some of them are selling wine, grapes, and figs. Others are buying fish and merchandise from other areas. They aren't lighting any fires. They aren't breaking the rules that were given in Exodus and Numbers. But they are breaking the Sabbath because they are engaging in commerce. And for them, in their new culture, commerce was the life-sustaining activity that was considered work. This was their work, so doing it on the Sabbath was breaking the Sabbath. The specifics behind Sabbath have grown and adapted with culture. Commerce wasn't an issue for Jews wandering in the desert, but it was for Jews trying to rebuild Jerusalem after the exile.

So the Sabbath changes over time and across cultures. How much does it change? This brings us to the question of whether God still requires a Sabbath for us as New Testament Christians in the same way that He required it of His people in the Old Testament. In short, I believe the answer is no. I don't think God requires us to observe a twenty-four period where we don't do work. I don't think we need to come up with rules about what defines work and then make sure to avoid those things for an entire day every week. Some people may argue that it is one of the Ten Commandments and we generally think the other commandments are still in effect. We don't have time to go into the details right now, but my understanding of Jesus' fulfilling of the Law is that the Law no longer applies to us *as law*. We live under a new law—the law of relating freely to God the Father because of the redemption offered by Christ the Son through the Holy Spirit who lives within us and among us. And ours is a law of love. We are in a love relationship with God, learning to love Him more fully and love others more deeply. The Ten Commandments express principles of how love is expressed in relationship. That's why most of them are still helpful to follow. And that's why we're talking about Sabbath for four weeks—because resting helps us to remember God. But after Jesus' ministry, the specifics of what that looks like are no longer bound by rules; they have been set free through love. So yes, we still need Sabbath in our lives. But no, it doesn't have to look the way it did for the Jews.

What is your work? What primary role or responsibility has God given you to sustain your life? Each of us takes part in sustaining our life. The call to Sabbath is not about abrogating the responsibility we've been given, but it is about remembering that our responsibility is as stewards under the sovereignty of God. He is ultimately responsible. Stopping work for a time reminds us of that fact. So what's your work? What does it look like to not work for you? How can you take a break from the activi-

ties that sustain your life?

What To Do On the Sabbath

We've looked in detail at what God says not to do on the Sabbath. Now we want to change our focus and ask what we *should* do on the Sabbath. We can't do nothing. We have to do *something*. What does that something look like?

To find that out, we're going to look at Psalm 46. This is a beautiful Psalm, often considered to be a Sabbath psalm because of its close connection with some of the Sabbath themes that we've been talking about. We don't have time to look at the whole psalm, so I want to briefly explain the first two sections and then focus on one verse as a model for Sabbath.

The first part of the Psalm talks about God as a refuge in the midst of natural chaos. Verse 2 reads,

We will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.

The author of this psalm looks to God as sovereign over the natural forces of creation. This connects with the first reason given to observe the Sabbath: because God has created the world. But then the psalm moves on to talk about God as a refuge in the midst of foreign enemies. Verse 6 says,

Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

God is sovereign over creation, but he is also sovereign over nations. Even though enemies pound at Israel's gate, God's voice melts them with a word. This connects with the second reason given to observe the Sabbath: because God has redeemed Israel from life in Egypt. So the Psalm begins by asserting God's control over nature and nations, reminding God's people that they can trust Him in each of those circumstances.

Then comes the finale of the Psalm in verse 10. The NIV reads,

Be still, and know that I am God.

"Be still." The word in Hebrew here definitely carries a sense of stillness, but it also carries a sense of stopping some activity that you are currently engaged in. That's why the NASB translates it as "Cease striving." It has to do with stopping whatever frantic activity you are engaged in. And it is emphatic. Something like, "Stop all your crazy activity and just be." Just be.

These are the words we need to hear. Sabbath starts by stopping. Stopping the work that we do. Remembering back to last week, we need to stop pretending that we can have it all. We need to stop trying to live up to our culture that values busyness and productivity. And we need to stop pretending that we are self-sufficient, that we can handle everything on our own. Sabbath starts when you stop. It's not all that hard. You know you're tired. You know that you are working too hard and forgetting that you depend on God. So just stop it. Be Still. Cease striving. Take a

Sabbath. Stop working. Turn off your computer. Turn off your cell phone. Don't check email. Don't return calls. Don't run errands. Take some time off. Just stop. Go home at 5:30. See what happens. See if God is able to sustain your life. The way we live our lives, how much we work, whether we are able to rest—these things all have to do with whether we really believe that God sustains our lives. Do you really believe that? If you remember one word from four weeks talking about Sabbath, remember this one. Stop. This word really sums it all up. If we could just get this one word into our heads, if we could just listen to this one word and obey it, then we could rest. That's what we long for.

This model for Sabbath also has a second element, because Sabbath is more than leisure. It's more than just sitting around. It's about God. "Be still and know that I am God." Stop and know that God is God. We stop and we remember God. We stop and we relate to God.

Remember that the specifics that define what Sabbath is are going to look different for different people in different cultures at different times. As each of us fosters a genuine relationship with God, they are all going to look different. No two relationships are the same. Your relationship with God is going to happen in a different way than mine is. So to honor the Sabbath, you stop and you relate to God, but relate to Him in whatever way best fosters your relationship with Him. For some that might be Bible reading. For others it might be song. For others it might be prayer. For others it might be being outside and enjoying nature. Find what fosters your relationship with God and enjoy it. It's not just leisure, but it is leisurely. And it doesn't have to be super-spiritual. Enjoy your rest. Did you hear that? You have permission to enjoy your rest. You don't have to feel guilty when you rest. Enjoy it. Stop. Relate to Him. Enjoy it. Relish your rest.

What does it look like for you to stop and relate to God? It doesn't have to be something huge. My purpose in this series is not necessarily to get you all to adapt brand new Sabbath practices and commit to a new regimen of disciplined observance of the Sabbath. Many of us already do things in our lives that involve these elements of the Sabbath. We stop and we relate to God. Every morning when I get to my office at church I fall into a black leather chair I have in my office to read or pray or something before I start working. That's a little Sabbath for me. Sometimes, when I know I have a busy day, it's really hard to do that. But that rhythm of rest helps me to remember my dependence on God.

So for some of us, these reflections on Sabbath will help us to better understand some of the activities we already engage in as part of our relationship with God. Others of us may want to consider how we can incorporate Sabbath more regularly into our lives: how some type of rhythm of rest might help us to remember our dependence on God. Some of you may want to consider getting baptized in a few weeks on Easter Sunday if you are a follower of Christ and haven't already been baptized. Baptism is all about expressing our dependence on God for salvation through

Christ. You are submerged under water to be brought up again by His power and live a new life in dependence on Him.

Maybe Sabbath comes into play for you in the little decisions. Should I vacuum before people come over for dinner? Should I study all night for this test? What time should I go home from work today? Should I put in a few more hours of work after the kids go to bed? Maybe these types of decisions are opportunities to express your dependence on God in really practical ways. One of Martin Luther's closest friends was a man named Philip Melancthon. There's a story told that one day Melancthon said to Luther, "This day, you and I will discuss the governance of the universe." But Luther understood Sabbath. He replied, "This day, you and I will go fishing and leave the governance of the universe to God." What does it look like for you to leave the governance of the universe to God? That's the question I've been asking myself this week: what does it look like to live as a pastor in dependence on God? What does it look like to be you, to live your life, to do whatever it is God has called you to do—in dependence on God? How might you or how do you already rest as a way of remembering that dependence?

Conclusion

And so we've seen what not to do on the Sabbath. It's not that complicated. It was pretty much summed up when we first got the command. Six days you work. The seventh you don't. On the Sabbath, you don't work. Sabbath is about taking a break from the regular activities that sustain your life. We've also seen what to *do* on the Sabbath. You stop. And you relate to God. We stop. And we relate to God.

I don't think George had it right. And I don't think the Orthodox Jews have it right. George is resting without God and the Jews are resting without Christ. Real Sabbath is resting and relating to God. That's a big part of what we are doing here today, this morning. You see, Sabbath is something that we do individually, but it's also something that we do together. We come here this morning to stop and relate to God. Together. Reminding each other of what we know to be true of God and what we know to be true about ourselves. This time is really a Sabbath for us. We gather together to celebrate our dependence on God. So think about other ways that you might practice Sabbath: individually or with other people. What does that look like for you? How do you relish your rest?

NOTES

1 http://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/show_story.php?id=5277

2 <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/27620.html>

