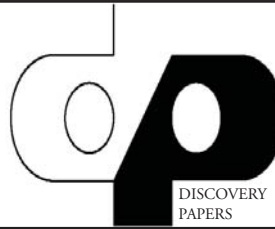


RESURRECTION REST

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



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Paul Taylor
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Good morning and happy Easter. It's great to be here with you this morning to celebrate Easter Sunday and the surprising resurrection of Jesus Christ.

On March 2, there was an interesting article in the New York Times. One of their regular columnists wrote about his experience trying out a new rhythm of life. His is an idea that has been gaining popularity among bloggers and other techno-geeks. He wrote about having a "secular Sabbath." He calls it "a day a week where I would be free of screens, bells, and beeps. An old-fashioned day not only of rest but of relief."¹ People who are addicted to their computers, cell phones, and MP3 players are toying with the discipline of taking a device-free day. Their practice has nothing to do with God. It's just a chance to reconnect with people and a slower pace of a life for one day per week. Coincidentally, on that same day here at PBC, we also started talking about Sabbath. For the last four weeks, we've been trying to understand why rest seems so important to God and what it means for our lives. We've seen that God's version of Sabbath is all about Him—it's a reminder to His people of who He is. I think it's been nice to see that God really wants us to rest.

We long for rest. If even the secular world sees their need for a Sabbath, then we must be living too fast. We need to learn to rest. Today we're going to finish talking about rest in light of what we celebrate today: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This morning is going to be an invitation to rest. I don't know what you've come into this room with. I'm guessing most of you are tired. We're tired from the way we're living. We're tired from the frenzy of a holiday—we have family in town and activities to figure out and eggs to hide and eggs to find. Maybe some of you are really hurting. Maybe your marriage is in trouble and you're tired of all the fighting. Maybe you've been single for a long time and you're just tired of being alone. Maybe you're trying to figure out what to do with your life and you're tired of uncertainty. This morning is an invitation to rest—because of the resurrection of Jesus.

There is a song I like called *Banana Pancakes*, by Jack Johnson, that I think presents a really attractive invitation to rest. "Maybe we can sleep. Pretend like it's the weekend now. ... We gotta wake up slow." That sounds really nice to me right now. An invitation to stay in bed, eat banana pancakes, and really rest. That sounds nice. Here's a guy giving someone else a genuine invitation to rest. This is rare in our culture. When was the last time you received a real invitation from someone else to rest? Do you remember one? You can buy rest in our culture. You can buy time on the beach, you can buy time on a cruise ship, you can buy a relaxing massage; we have plenty of opportunities to

buy rest. But when was the last time someone just invited you to rest? Without you having to pay for it?

Thus, if this morning is an invitation to rest, it is a unique thing. But what does the story of Easter have to do with rest? If rising from the dead is anything like getting out of bed in the morning, it doesn't sound like rest. Why would we talk about rest today? I want to suggest that Jesus' resurrection is all about rest—that His being dead and then being alive again three days later paints a surprising picture of rest for us. I also want to suggest that his death and resurrection are actually a kind of invitation for us to rest, just as inviting as the offer to stay in bed all morning and eat banana pancakes. To see this, though, we need to talk about what Jesus did before he died. We need to talk about what really happened when he died. We need to talk why it is important that He came back to life. Then we'll see how this story invites us to rest. So come along and let's see if we can find some rest.

Jesus Offers Rest

You could say that Jesus spent His life offering rest to people. He was preaching the coming of the kingdom of God: the chance for people to enter into what God is doing and become part of a new community of rest. This is kind of ironic because one of Jesus' constant battles was over what He did on the Jewish Sabbath, which was the day set apart for Jews to rest. In John 9, Jesus encounters a man who has been blind all his life. Of course, it happens to be the Sabbath when they meet. When He's asked why this man was born blind, Jesus has a curious response, especially for a day when nobody was supposed to be working. In John 9:3-4, Jesus answered by saying

This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work.

And then Jesus proceeds to spit on the ground and rub the mud into this man's eyes. This is perhaps not the most appealing method, but the result is that this man is healed of his blindness.

We have to ask, what is Jesus doing here? Why is He talking about working on a day when no faithful Jew is supposed to do any work? Why does He heal this man on this day? After Jesus healed this man, He gets hauled in before the Jewish leaders who want to catch Him doing something wrong. They are convinced that Jesus is a bad guy because they think He is breaking the Sabbath, so they ask this healed man how a sinner could heal him. His reply is priceless: he essentially says, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I

was blind but now I see.” This man doesn’t care whether Jesus did anything wrong on the Sabbath. He doesn’t care about the intricacies of their legal system. He’s just thrilled that after a lifetime of darkness, he can finally see. He’s been given rest. He can see. His eyes have been opened. Jesus offered Him rest from a lifetime of blindness. Jesus offers rest.

You see, the Pharisees offered God’s people a form of rest. It had to do with living by their system, following their rules, and letting them tell you what being part of the kingdom of God looked like. That’s why their idea of Sabbath was so important to them—it put them in control of who was in and who was out. But theirs was a false rest. Jesus comes on the scene and says, “What these guys are selling isn’t real rest. They’re selling you something, but it isn’t rest. And it isn’t free. I’m offering rest, and I’ll prove it by really celebrating the Sabbath by giving someone true rest on this day.” What better day to give someone rest? What better day to heal someone? Jesus heals this man on the Sabbath to demonstrate that He offers real rest in contrast to what the Pharisees offered.

Our world is no different. We can find all sorts of offers for counterfeit rest today. I came across a device being sold online called the MindSpa. It looks kind of like an MP3 player, but it has different programs you can play that help you to rest. There’s a ten-minute “quick recharge” program, a twenty-two-minute “light power nap” program, and a twenty-three-minute “complete relaxation” program. I don’t know about you, but I think it will take more than twenty-three minutes for me to completely relax. However, this is the type of rest our world offers us. Twelve convenient programs to help you rest—for only \$350. That’s not real rest. It’s no better than what the Pharisees offered.

Only Jesus offers real rest. One of His most famous invitations is from Matthew 11:28:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

This is His offer to us. In the midst of a world that offers counterfeit rest, Jesus offers real rest. For the man born blind, that meant healing from what had wounded him. The same thing is true for a lot of us today. We have been struggling with wounds in one form or another for a long time: issues from our past, relationships with our parents, abuse, neglect, expectations that we just can’t live up to. Jesus healed a man who had been blind his whole life. He had stopped hoping; he was blind and he always would be. But Jesus changed that. What wounds have you stopped hoping would ever heal? Where do you need rest today? I don’t know how Jesus will meet you, but I know that He offers rest to the weary. Maybe He’ll heal your wounds. Maybe He’ll give you strength in the midst of them. But come to Him. He will give you rest. Jesus offers rest.

Jesus Rested in the Father

Unfortunately, not everyone appreciated the kind of rest that Jesus offered people. Jesus’ offer to rest in the king-

dom of God ending up sounding pretty threatening to those who had their own kingdoms to protect. It threatened the Jewish way of life. It threatened the Roman Empire. So they killed Jesus on a cross. He was the Son of God, sent from the Father to restore the relationship between the living God and His creation. He was sent to offer redemption, sent to put things right in this world. But Jesus’ rest was too risky to too many people, so He had to die. Yet at the end of His life, as He let out His last breath, His final words were words of rest, because He knew that even His death was part of the Father’s invitation to the world to rest. And when Jesus died, his work would be complete. John 19:30 records his last words:

When He had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

“It is finished.” His life was over. His work was done.

Do you know that feeling when you complete a project? I’ve been a student for a good portion of my life, and one of my all-time favorite feelings is the feeling I have after finishing a long exam—especially one of the ones where you have to write for three hours straight in a blue book. I hate those. But when it’s over, when I can put my pen down, close the blue book, walk up to the front of the room, lay the book down on the desk, pick up my bag, and walk out of the room, that’s a great feeling. It is finished. At least for the moment, my work is done. I love that feeling. In college, I would always walk back to my dorm slowly after finishing an exam. I might have more work waiting for me when I got back, but for that moment, my work was done. For that moment, I could rest.

Yet, even though the exam was done, there was always a little bit of anxiety mixed with that rest. For, as long as I held the exam in my hands, it was in my control. But once I turned it in, all I could do was wait to find out how I had done. At this point, the results weren’t up to me anymore. All I could do was wait. This was true for Jesus, as well. His work was done, but from any objective perspective, it didn’t look like it had been much of a success. His task was to offer the reality of a new kingdom to God’s people. He was the rightful king of a heavenly kingdom that had broken into their earthly reality. Yet He had been rejected and executed. His work may have been finished, but it certainly seemed like he had failed.

At this point, the results were out of Jesus’ hands. The end of the story was up to someone else, and that someone else was the Father. We usually say “Jesus rose from the dead.” That’s correct, but it’s not entirely accurate. The Bible almost always says that Jesus *was raised* from the dead. Jesus didn’t raise Himself from the dead. Jesus *was raised* from the dead. In Galatians 1:1, Paul talks about “*Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.*”

The Father raised the Son up from death to life. When Jesus died, He died in complete dependence on the Father. Luke's gospel records Jesus' last words in 23:46 as "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.*" When Jesus died, He rested in the Father. However, that rest must have been mixed with some anxiety. Death is usually pretty final. Death is usually the end of the story. But the Father came through, raising Jesus from the dead and turning his failure into success, his defeat into victory. He made the end of the story into the beginning of a whole new era.

This is why baptism is such a powerful picture of what happens when someone enters the kingdom of God through faith in Christ. When you are submersed under water, you are completely dependent. Without some further action, the symbolic act of death would become not so symbolic. Then you are raised up out of the water to new life. This is why you must *be* baptized. You don't baptize yourself. Just as the Father raised the Son from the dead, in baptism you are raised up out of the water by someone else.

This is hard for us because we live in a productivity-driven environment. If you want something done right, you better do it yourself. In contrast, this rest that Jesus models for us is a rest of dependence. While that can be hard, it is what our hearts long for. For when we are honest with ourselves, we can admit that we just aren't up to the task of completely providing for ourselves. We can't control all the circumstances of our lives, and we are exhausting ourselves trying to do so. It just doesn't work. Wouldn't you like to depend on someone who is really dependable? Wouldn't you like to rest in someone you can trust to get things right? Jesus offers us that kind of dependence, that kind of rest. Just as Jesus rested in the Father, we can rest in Him. He offers us rest from having to provide for ourselves.

The Resurrection Changes Everything

We know that can rest in Jesus because of what happened when He rested in the Father. Jesus' life was about offering rest to others. When He died, He showed us what resting in the Father looks like. But if that was the end of the story, if his death was all there was, then that wouldn't be rest. Death isn't rest. Only life rests. Death doesn't rest. Death is just ... dead. Fortunately, Jesus' death wasn't the end of the story. The Father raised Him from death to life. This changed everything. The resurrection changes everything.

Have you ever seen a movie with a great surprise ending? Something you didn't expect at all? One of the best examples is the movie *The Usual Suspects*, which talks all throughout the movie of the dreaded mastermind criminal, Keyser Soze. Then, right at the end of the movie, the viewer is completely surprised to find out who Keyser Soze really is. It's the last person most people would have expected. When I finished that movie for the first time, my first instinct was to want to watch it again. That little bit of information, knowing who the real Keyser Soze was, changed everything. I wanted to go back to the begin-

ning and watch it again knowing who it was. It changed everything.

This is how it is with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It changes everything. If He didn't rise from the dead, Jesus would have been one more in a long line of people who said some really memorable things like "Love your enemies" and "Turn the other cheek." But when He rose from the dead, then and only then did it really become clear that He was much more. When He rose from the dead, people realized that something really big was going on. Maybe He is who He said He was. Maybe He is God Himself. Maybe He really is bringing in the kingdom of God. If this guy defeated death—something no one has ever done, and many have tried—then maybe He speaks the truth. The resurrection changes everything.

This is why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central story of what Christians believe. This day, Easter Sunday, is the most important day of the Christian year. This is the turning point that defines Christianity. Without the resurrection, you don't have Christianity. You just have a really clever ancient teacher. And that's what many people believe. They don't believe in the resurrection, so Christianity becomes just another system of principles that might help you get by in this life. What about you? Do you believe in the resurrection? If you do, then it changes everything for you.

Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 15. He is talking about the resurrection of Jesus and says this in verse 14:

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

Later in verse 19 he says:

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

His point is that the resurrection of Christ is the most important element in the story of Christian faith. If it turns out that the resurrection is a hoax, then his life's work is useless, faith in Christ is useless, and we who call ourselves Christians are revealed to be the biggest fools that ever existed. If Jesus wasn't raised—if the Father didn't raise up His son from the dead—then you shouldn't be here. All of this is useless. Even worse, we are all fools. No one deserves more pity than we do if what we're celebrating here today is just a nice little story.

Jesus Invites Us to Rest

However, if the resurrection is true and you believe in it, then the rest of your life becomes a journey of figuring out how it changes everything for you. Doing this is taking Jesus up on His invitation to rest. You accept His invitation by believing in Jesus, believing that He rose from the dead. And when you believe in Him, when you accept His invitation to live in the new kingdom that He ushers in, you rest.

Jesus invites us to rest because of the resurrection. Listen to how Paul characterizes this invitation in Ephesians 2:4-6:

Because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...

When we accept the resurrection, when we follow Christ, we join together with Him in His death and resurrection. We die along with Christ and we rest from our work. Our work is done. For us, "It is finished." In death we are completely dependent. But our story doesn't end in death because we are dependent on the One who deserves our dependence. And that One—the Father, the living God—raises us up from death to life. We get to rest, the same rest that Jesus enjoys.

The picture that Ephesians paints is of us being seated with Christ in the heavenly kingdom: that new kingdom that Jesus' resurrection announced and established. We are invited to come into the throne room and sit down. I'm not sure how many of you have experience with being in Ancient Near Eastern throne rooms, but if you're ever in one, here's a word of advice: don't sit down. You don't get to sit down when you're in the presence of the king. Yet we are invited to come in and sit down. We get to rest.

What a ridiculous rest! No one rests in the presence of the King, and no one rests in our world, either. We're never really resting. We're always working, trying to prove ourselves, trying to demonstrate how good we are, trying to please all the demanding expectations in our lives: those of our parents, friends, teachers, pastors, children, spouses. We're trying to show everyone else that we have it all together, that our life works, that things are okay with us. Nobody rests in our culture. It's ridiculous to rest.

This is where I really appreciate the rest that Jesus offers. For I want people to be happy with me. I want people to think I'm okay. I don't want to be judged. So I'm tempted to live up to their expectations, to prove myself, to show people that I'm capable. But accepting the rest that Jesus offers me means that I can be who I am. I can rest, even though I'm insecure, even though I'm proud, even though I get angry and scared and sometimes just feel like life is falling apart. I don't have to pretend, I don't have to put on a show. I can rest in who I am because Jesus offers me rest. It's ridiculous, but we can rest. We get to rest. We get to come here together and rest. Not that we always rest in here, because you can come to church to keep hiding. Easter dresses, pretty flowers, smiling families—this is a great time of year to look like you have it all together. Religion can become a place to keep hiding. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be that way. This is a place of rest, a place where you can be real. This is a place where, in the midst of a world that will eat you up if you stop for a moment,

you can find real rest.

What a cause for celebration! This is why we are here today. This day, the day that Jesus rose from the dead, ushered in a whole new era for this world. Because of what Jesus did, because of this new kingdom that He invites us to be a part of, because he came out of the tomb after three days of death, we can rest. That's good news. That's the gospel. Because of Jesus, we have real rest. And this place—coming together with His people, worshipping Him, relating to Him in the midst of a life of weariness—this place becomes a place of ridiculous rest.

Conclusion

This invitation is before us. Jesus offered rest to the people with whom He interacted. On the day of rest, He spurned the counterfeit version of rest that the Jewish leaders offered their people and instead gave a blind man real rest, true Sabbath rest. When He died, He rested from His works, and God the Father turned His death into life. He raised Him from the dead and invites us to share in that rest. Jesus invites us to rest.

As nice as it sounds to spend a whole day in bed, have someone make me banana pancakes, and pretend that I have no real work to do, that isn't real rest. It's just putting off the inevitable. But what Jesus offers us today is real rest. We can come to Jesus with our wounds. We can stop working so hard to provide for ourselves; we can rest from those things that consume our lives. We can stop trying to keep it all together. We can be ourselves. We don't have to pretend.

My prayer for you today is that this day would be a celebration of Christ's resurrection, and that you would celebrate by resting, by accepting His offer of rest for you and resting in dependence on Him. How do you accept this invitation? How do you enter into this rest? Believe. Believe and rest. Allow the implications of Jesus' rising from the dead to percolate throughout your life. Believe in Him. Believe and rest. Rest in His Resurrection.

He is Risen...He is Risen indeed!

NOTES

¹ "I Need a Virtual Break. No, Really." by Mark Bittman

