

Sermon for ABC May 12, 2019

Sabbath, but why? Texts: Deuteronomy 5:1-33 (**focus 12-15; 32-33**), Exodus 20: 8-11; 16:23-...
Genesis 1:1-2:3. **Luke 13: 10-17**

Message: Rest in the Goodness of God

Purpose: Remind people that we can rest easy knowing that God has set us free from the need to save ourselves

Introduction

I have been asked to consider the topic of Sabbath for this Sunday. And in doing so, I have tried to think like a three-year-old. William of course is now at the age where he can ask a frustrating number of questions. I break these down into 4 groups: Some are simple, some are silly, and some are surprisingly deep.

For example, here is how a conversation might go:

Daddy, what's Sabbath? – Well it means to stop – to stop and rest for a day

Why? – that's just what the word means

But why do we rest? – Because we need to rest sometimes

Why? – If we don't we get sick

Why? – Because our bodies are not designed to go constantly like a machine

Why? – Because that's not how God made us – he didn't want to make us to be robots

Why? – Because there is more to life than working – God wants us to spend time with him without worrying about getting other things done.

Why? – Because we are really good at using non-important things to distract us from important things

Why?

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You see where this is going?

Sometimes one good answer just isn't good enough is it?

In thinking about Sabbath – and how it is introduced in the bible – it occurs to me that the writers in the bible had to answer questions in the same way I just did. One good answer still leaves room for another one.

Let's look at what the ten commandments say about Sabbath in Exodus 20: 8-11

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep 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, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Why Sabbath? Why rest on the seventh day? Because God rested on the 7th day and made it holy.

Honestly this is what I always remembered about the Sabbath. This passage is well known. We rest because God rested. He didn't need rest but he wanted us to, so he set the example. Do you see how a three year old might still look at that reason and say WHY? Again?

But now look again at the passage in Deuteronomy the Sheila read. Verse 12-15

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God 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, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, (so far this is word for word!) that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Now wait a minute – that’s not what you said before Moses! What gives?

The other 9 commandments – if you take time to compare them in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 – are almost word for word. There are a few minor differences, but here we have a *completely different rational for the Sabbath command*.

It’s one of those wonderful places in the bible where we can ask “so do we rest because God rested, or because we are no longer slaves” and the answer is YES!

Today I want to unpack three applications from these two passages:

1.) Do not treat yourself like a slave.

The Israelites spent 400 years in Egypt as slaves. Generation and generations working everyday with no rest, no choice in the matter. That is a hard rut to get out of. In fact that’s what God has to do while they wander in the desert – he has to break them of the habit of working like slaves. (Exodus 16) God makes Mana (bread from heaven) appear every morning with the dew and the Israelites go out and collect it and cook it. But on the sixth day they are told to collect twice as much and save some for the seventh day – and then there is no mana on the seventh day. They live like this for 40 years! This is also the first time the word Sabbath is used in the bible – God initiated it while the people were in the wilderness learning how to trust God and not rely on human masters or on their own power to provide for themselves.

If we bring that home to us it makes me think about how our culture values self-reliance. We think that if we can just get enough money that we will be happy. So we don’t take a lot of time off, we stay at work late and come in early, we work on the weekends and we take overtime whenever we can. A full schedule is a mark of success. Sometimes we can’t get “enough hours” with one job – so we get a second or a third. In France full time is considered 35 hours a week. When I was in Peru I thought it was weird that my host dad would take two hour lunch breaks. We tend to prioritize productivity here. Now I’m not advocating laziness – but at what point is it not worth it anymore? How much money will you have to make to be able to rest?

God established the Sabbath to remind us that work is not everything – Everything has to start with faith, trust, in God to take care of us. We have work to do – but we are not slaves to that work. (There is a whole other sermon about how this plays out in our salvation itself – How nothing we can ever do can replace what Jesus did for us once and for all at Easter. But we are not going down that trail today.)

2.) Don’t treat other people like slaves. This law is specifying that not only you but your servants and animals, even the foreigners in your cities should rest on the Sabbath. Here God is saying “Treat your slaves – people over whom you have power – as God treats you.” Honor God by showing kindness to them.

This is a little harder to connect to us unless we are in a position of power. But if you ever find yourself in a situation where you are a boss – in charge of other people – then you are in a good position to help topple the idol of productivity. Have you ever had a boss who used shame tactics to get people to stay over to help with something “just this once” or say things like “we are really busy right now, we want to

take volunteers to work on their day off to get us caught up – and by volunteers they tend to mean “you will be here right? Right?”

We need to resist giving into those kinds of pressures because we know that proper rest is important. But remember, if you ever have the power to say to someone working for you – “you know, this project is important, but it isn’t that important, let’s call it a day.” You are honoring that person by enabling them to rest.

3.) Look for rest in the right place.

Often times, when I hear sermons about the Sabbath – or read a devotional about Jesus performing a miracle on the Sabbath – much is made of the Pharisee’s protests. The gospel writers are quick to point out the hypocrisy of the religious elites. They have taken a law that was written to remind people of their freedom and turned it into a list of dos and don’ts that you have to follow in order to be righteous.

Jesus understands that God’s kingdom is bigger than a list of dos and don’ts – consider one of many Sabbath related texts in the gospels: Luke 13:10-17

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.” And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

The Pharisees could not see past the legalism of their custom – they were missing the point. They had made themselves slaves to the law. That is why elsewhere Jesus says the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Is there anything in your life that has you feeling bent over? Like you can’t even look up anymore because it is so heavy? Take a minute now and think about the thing that stresses you out the most. What burden do you carry? Think about that now. I can hear your heart rate going up already... Hold that thing in front of you.

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If you take nothing else away from our service today, know this: In Jesus we are free from the bondage of Satan. We are not slaves any longer. We are not slaves to Productivity, or power, or prestige, we are children of God and the bride of Christ. Lay down your burden and follow him – his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

And one thing more and then we are done:
Do you remember the story of creation?

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, let dry land appear and let plants grow, And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—and “Let us make Human in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

I skipped over quite a bit, but do you notice what it doesn't say?

It does not say “and there was evening and there was morning the seventh day?”

Why is that?

Could it be that the seventh day has no beginning and no end because every day is the seventh day? Every day is a day that God has blessed and made holy. We as humans have been placed on earth to glorify our Good Creator. We are called to live as Sabbath creatures not seeking our own glory or power but glorifying God for his Goodness, not trusting anything we can do for ourselves but clinging to what he has done for us. Working, yes working, diligently in the name of Jesus, but resting in the power of his love.

Amen

Benediction: