

0310

The rest Jesus gives

Genesis 2:1-3

Sunday, December 4, 2022

Text

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² 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. ³ 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.

Prayer

Introduction

The day without a president.

March 4, 1849 was set to be the inauguration day for Zachary Taylor as America's twelfth president.

But there was a problem.

At the time, the constitution mandated March 4 as inauguration day. But in 1849, that fell on a Sunday.

The Lord's Day.

And Taylor had made his plans known that he was going to wait and take the oath of office on Monday, the fifth.

Taylor's predecessor was James K Polk. And at the time, the constitution did not specify the hour when a presidency ended. It just said March 4. So Polk did some official presidential tasks in the early morning hours and signed a couple of last bills into law but he had vacated the White House by early afternoon and Taylor still had not taken the oath of office¹.

There was no sworn in president or vice president.

Eric Lidell was a Scottish track star who had grown up as the child of missionaries and would spend his life serving in the mission field in China. He was the fastest man in the world and his best event was the 100 meters, but there was a problem. For the 1924 Olympics, the race was on a Sunday. Lidell would not participate but he would go on to win the gold in the 400.

Throughout our nation's history, many states, counties, and municipalities had various blue laws which limited or outright prohibited various transactions and activities on Sunday.

Even today, numerous states have different laws regarding alcohol sales on Sundays. Several states, including Illinois, do not allow car dealerships to operate on Sunday. And numerous states and counties within states disallow hunting on Sundays.

Even for people who might not have been religious, generations of Americans benefited from Sunday as a day off.

In our town, there still are some places that are closed on Sundays. But as someone who's lived in Columbus, in the Chicago area, in St. Louis, it's a rarity in cities. Famously, Chick-fil-a is closed on Sunday, as is Hobby

¹ Stathis, Stephen W. "Our Sunday Inaugurations." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1985): 12–24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27550161>.

Lobby retail chain. But most of our society treats Sunday like it's any other day.

From the beginning of the Bible, we see rest introduced as an important theme. It's part of creation. It would be one of the Ten Commandments. In Israel's history, their observance of the Sabbath becomes a barometer for their overall Spiritual health. During the ministry of Jesus, he is involved in Sabbath controversies in all four gospels, and we will see how he ultimately points to the true rest which God has for his people. For the Jewish people, Sabbath observance was sacred, and a way of life.

Series context

We're continuing our advent series: Christmas in Genesis.

Rest is not traditionally associated with advent. But the point of this series is looking at these major creation themes and how they're fulfilled in Christ, as we're in a season of the year which revolves around celebrating the coming of Christ into the world.

A couple of notes before I get to the subject of Sabbath and rest. The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word Shabbat, which simply means rest. I use Sabbath and rest interchangeably.

The main idea for us today is that Jesus gives rest to a restless world.

With that, we'll get into our passage this morning.

Genesis

Last week, we talked about the six days of creation in Genesis 1.

Chapter 2 begins:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² 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. ³ 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.

God doesn't get tired. He never stops ruling and reigning over his creation. So what does it mean that he rests?

Instead of thinking of that rest as an act of leisure, this rest is more about cessation of work. God's creative activity is complete and so he rests from his creation. God isn't kicking up his feet in a recliner and watching football. But he is no longer creating. There is rest.

The ESV uses the word that the heavens and the earth were finished. By "finished," what is meant is that, to quote Victor Hamilton, "the universe is no longer in a process of being created²."

The seventh day is also the only day of the seven which does not give us the refrain "there was evening, and there was morning" as we saw on the first six days.

That's actually pretty interesting.

You have this established pattern. You have the first mention of rest here. The weekly sabbath would become something very culturally influential to the Jewish people.

Yet, no mention of evening and morning.

Why not?

² Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 142.

Think about that and I'll revisit this in a little bit.

The text says that the Lord blessed this day. Of the seven days, it's the only one that is said to be blessed.

As with all themes of creation, rest is introduced in Genesis but it doesn't tell you the full story. We see a continued expansion of the rest theme.

Moving forward into the Book of Exodus.

In Exodus 16, the Israelites have recently been miraculously freed from slavery in Egypt. They're in pursuit of the Promised Land.

They need food, and the Lord miraculously provides them manna. Bread from heaven.

But in Exodus 16, they will be commanded to rest from this work every seventh day.

Exodus 16:22-23:

²² On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³ he said to them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' "

It's beginning to establish a future pattern of work and rest.

Now consider the perspective of these ancient Israelites. They're all alone, out in the desert.

And they're told to rest.

Keeping the Sabbath is an act of faith. Because it can be really tempting to fear the anxieties of life, the world, our responsibilities and feel like “I don’t have time, I can’t.”

God provides.

The Sabbath command will be restated four chapters later in the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Of the ten commandments, only the command to rest is given prior to the Ten Commandments.

We come to that passage and see the fifth commandment.

Exodus 20:8-10:

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ 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.

You see that the Sabbath command is universal. The entire community was to keep the Sabbath, even servants, even the livestock were not meant to work on that day.

The rationale for the Sabbath command is given in verse 11 and it points back to creation.

¹¹ 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.

We again see it emphasizing that the Sabbath is blessed.

That’s the thing that has to be kept in mind over all of this. God gave the Sabbath as a blessing.

Future rest

I have to digress a little bit now.

So far, our focus on rest has been on the weekly Sabbath.

But in the Old Testament, we already start to see this branching off with another idea of an ultimate rest which is at a future time. That could be the subject of its own sermon, but I'm going to be brief in hitting these points.

In the Old Testament, this rest is tied to the Promised Land. It's connected to being in a blessed land that is safe from God's enemies and where the people of God are free to worship the Lord.

We see this theme introduced during the desert wanderings.

Deuteronomy 12:9 says:

you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you.

We again see the Promised Land referred to in this way at the beginning of the Book of Joshua. At the time, Moses has recently passed away, and Joshua is the new leader as the Israelites are outside the Promised Land.

Joshua 1:13:

“Remember the word that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, ‘The Lord your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.’

Later passages, will talk of a lack of rest and this will be seen as symbolic of the sin of the nation.

Lamentations 1:3 says:

**³ Judah has gone into exile because of affliction
and hard servitude;
she dwells now among the nations,
but finds no resting place;
her pursuers have all overtaken her
in the midst of her distress.**

Lots of other places we could look.

One last passage before we move into the New Testament. And it's theologically the most significant.

At the end of Psalm 95, it's looking back at Israel's desert wanderings. In particular, it's referring back to a series of events in the Book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14.

In those chapters, the Israelites are just outside of the Promised Land and so they send in scouts to investigate the land. It's awesome. As good as advertised. But they see the people who live in the land and they're afraid. All these years the Lord has provided, has sustained Israel, he has brought them to the edge of the Promised Land, and they're fearful.

And so God pronounced a judgment on the Exodus generation. They will not inherit the land. Their kids will.

Numbers 14:29-30:

²⁹ your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, ³⁰ not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

And so Psalm 95 looks back to that as an example

**¹⁰ For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways.”
¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath,
“They shall not enter my rest.**

The Psalm ties the withholding of the Promised Land to the withholding of rest.

Hebrews 4

Finally, we come into the New Testament and the most theologically significant passage dealing with rest is Hebrews 4.

In Hebrews 4, the author is using the language of both Numbers 14 and Psalm 95³.

Hebrews 4:1-2:

while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened

These verses are drawing this distinction between Israel and the church today. Both have an opportunity to enter God’s rest by faith, but the first generation had been faithless.

Will pick up the language of Psalm 95.

Verse 3:

³ Douglas J. Moo, [“The Letters and Revelation.”](#) in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 2203.

³ For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

**“As I swore in my wrath,
‘They shall not enter my rest,’ ”**

Once again linking the idea of belief with this rest.

There’s so much more that could be said, but I’ll move us to the end of this section.

Verses 9:

there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,

Again, the talk of rest here is no longer about a weekly Sabbath. It’s referring to an eternal Sabbath.

The true rest is given by Jesus.

As the Exodus generation pursued the Promised Land under Moses, Jesus is a new Moses who leads his people to God. And the true Sabbath is kept by virtue of faith in the one who brings this true rest.

Verse 10:

¹⁰ for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

This verse seems most likely to point to the final rest from our efforts. But in another sense, we already have this rest by virtue of the work of Christ.

We have rest from needing to try to earn God, trying to live up. It’s resting in the grace of Christ and in his works.

The most significant teaching from Jesus on rest comes from the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 11:28-30:

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

So that is a short theology of rest.

True rest and true Sabbath are accomplished by Christ and the true Sabbath is kept by virtue of having faith in the one who has fulfilled the Law, including having fulfilled the Sabbath requirements perfectly.

Let's talk about Christianity and weekly rest as we wind down.

In the Old Testament, Sabbath was on the seventh day.

Conclusion

The Lord's Day is on the first day of the week, Sunday. Because Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday. In the New Testament, we see some examples of Sunday becoming a day for worship in the early church.

Acts 20:7:

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

Rest can still be as much of a challenge in the modern day as it was for the Israelites of the Exodus generation.

Some people get too much rest. That's not good either. Those people are called "lazy."

But in a small town, for most of us, I don't think that's really the struggle.

If anything, we're the opposite end of that spectrum, and might even risk working too hard.

Even hearing the idea of "work too hard," some of you might immediately dismiss as crazy talk. Do you find time to rest? If not, you're working too hard.

And I say this as someone who's not always a good rester.

We've got that German work ethic. And that's a great thing. Strong work ethic is absolutely a virtue. But with any virtue, you can take it too far and make it a master. Sinful people are good at that.

There are different reasons why people might struggle to rest.

But I'm going to just focus on one reason why some people struggle to rest. You don't know how.

We work so hard and are in such patterns of work that that becomes what we know. And resting becomes almost a foreign concept. To truly take one day in seven and rest.

It seems simple.

It's given by God as a blessing.

Something that should obviously be a good thing.

And yet, so many of us can't do it.

Rest does not make you lazy when God ordained it and created us for it.

So I close with some thoughts on resting well.

Rest is about time with God. On Sunday, we come together to worship the Lord. To pray, to sing to God, to hear from God's Word. God gave us a day to keep holy and that involves time with God.

But Sunday is not a 24 hour church service for a reason.

Because there are also other aspects to a restful Lord's Day.

And some of these can vary from person to person. What are things that refresh and recharge you? For some people, that might be spending some time in a garden.

For me, that sounds absolutely miserable, but some people like it.

For some, maybe it's taking some time to read, or play a game. Restful activity is valuable.

Fellowship with other people. Enjoying a meal or time with friends and family. And on the opposite end of that spectrum, there's also a place for solitude and being alone when one is arresting.

Enjoying the beauty of nature and God's creation.

Those are just some brief thoughts.

I'm not saying a person must check all of those boxes off every single Sunday, but to thoughtfully practice a Sabbath which is meant to be worshipful and restful.

And remembering that we have a savior who has come into the world and who brings the greater and ultimate rest in the presence of the Lord.