

# RESTING IN GOD SERIES: SABBATH BLESSINGS Mark 2:23 – 28

Can you imagine how exasperating it was to camp in tents for 40 years, and to camp in the Wilderness of Sinai 3,500 years ago, and to camp living around perhaps as many as three million plus Israelite also living in tents?

Just to feed three million people would take 1300 rail road box cars of food each day, or a daily train 9 1/2 miles long! Can you imagine the deafening buzz of all those people talking, walking, bartering, gathering, cooking, cleaning and caring for their campsites?

But on the Sabbath all the sounds and din of worldly toil would cease. And for one day they were given the opportunity to listen and hear the still small voice of God. The dust of all those feet rushing in every direction subsided so that a clear view of the heavenly horizons could come into view.

God taught them to set one day aside in seven for worship so that all the nations around them would see that they were a God-Seeking People. This was demonstrated by the sacrifices they had to make to worship God (both schedule and livestock). As F. B. Meyer, the devotional writing Baptist Pastor from England in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century said<sup>1</sup>, "No nation can allow a permanent invasion of the Rest-Day without invalidating its claim to be a God-Honoring people". God made it clear that He claims the thoughts and time of His people by a weekly pause.

Now think of Jesus who lived the perfect life, accomplished more than any human ever did, and yet Jesus was never in a HURRY! He was Purposed but never PUSHED. He was focused but never Frantic. He was Resolved but never rushed!

This morning we return to Mark 2:27-28 as we are look at the essential Biblical Teaching on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man and Jesus clearly sets the tone for the controversies of the day and speaks to us to this

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus, p. 404.

day on the Sabbath. **Please stand** with me as we hear the voice of Jesus speaking from God's Word.

1. First, SABBATH PURPOSES: what did **Jesus say about the Sabbath?** As Lord of Sabbath He said one thing, the Sabbath was made for man to worship God. It was not a prison, a straight jacket, a death squad to hunt Sabbath breakers, no; it was a delightful offer of spiritual communion with God.
2. Secondly, SABBATH PROMISES: **do we need rest and to cease from our wearying schedules?** Yes, and that is what this Old Testament picture teaches us New Testament saints! God offers rest!
3. Thirdly, SABBATH LAWS: **should we really meet on Sunday** or on the Sabbath Day, which is Saturday? We study that tonight!
4. Fourthly, SABBATH BLESSINGS **how do we apply all this to our lives?** How do we cultivate a rest, a cessation from weariness in our lives? How do we make worship of the Lord profitable on our Day of Gathering, the Lord's Day?
5. Fifthly, SABBATH THIEVES what **takes away the blessings** and promises of the rest God offers? Legalism, law keeping, distractions and lawmaking!
6. Finally, SABBATH PLANS what are **some simply wonderful plans** we can make to heighten our worship, our communion with God? Some real blessings can come with some small changes and some preparations. Sunday preparations, family Bible times, studying Biblical backgrounds and celebrating Biblical events all are wonderful plans we can make to sharpen our focus on our Great God.

So this morning, SABBATH BLESSINGS **how do we apply all this to our lives?** How do we cultivate a rest, a cessation from weariness in our lives? How do we make worship of the Lord special on our Day of Gathering, the Lord's Day? Not too long after Christ's teaching on the Sabbath rest He invited His disciples to enjoy the serenity, tranquility, and rest of solitude of rest. Look at Mark 6:31

And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

As Jesus and the disciples needed to cease from their labors and rest so should we regularly cease. Our spiritual lives also need a time of reflection, a time of rest, a time of renewal, and a time to refocus. Do you see rest, quietness, and confidence - or weariness, pandemonium, and upheaval in daily life?

God's Word describes salvation from front to back, cover to cover as a rest. When is the last time you characterized your life as simple, restful, tranquil, peaceful, and quiet?

Join me **again as we listen** to what God says in Isaiah 58:13-14. That is what Jesus meant when He said The Sabbath was made for man. So what does Isaiah 58 say? Delight in God through fasting (our previous study) and a cessation of endless activity for intimacy with God (our current study on the Sabbath) by setting aside my agenda on a regular basis → and God will fill your life with Delightful Spiritual Blessings!

Isaiah 58:13-14 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the Lord honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, 14 Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

### **A Personal Sabbath Rest is CHRIST'S PRESCRIPTION<sup>2</sup> FOR HEALING THE HURRY SICKNESS OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHURCH**

As the world around us accelerates, our energies wane. But we are not defenseless victims. The following suggestions will help replace frenzy with peace and rest.

#### **A Personal Sabbath Rest: *Helps us Find Stillness as we bow before God* -**

"Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10 NIV). Before hurrying past that profound command, let's turn it over in our minds several times.

*Case striving and know that I am God.*

*Stand silent! Know that I am God!* [TLB]

*Let be and be still, and know—recognize and understand—that I am God.* [AMP]

*"Give in", he cries, "admit that I am God."* [Moffat]

*"Stop fighting, " he says, "and know that I am God."* [TEV]

*Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at me, your High God, above everything.* [The Message]

However<sup>3</sup> we may prefer to read it, this is an emphatic imperative addressed to God's own people. People of every race, color, culture, and era...people of any level of maturity and age...people who are employed or unemployed, single or married, with or without children, all people whose God is the Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *The Overload Syndrome*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1998, p 123-33.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty*. Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 37-38.

We are commanded to stop (literally)...rest, relax, let go, and make time for Him.

The scene is one of stillness and quietness, listening and waiting before Him. Such foreign experiences in these busy times! Nevertheless, knowing God deeply and intimately requires such discipline. Silence is indispensable if we hope to add depth to our spiritual life. It "guards the fire within our souls."... "silence makes us pilgrims,"<sup>4</sup> writes one who advocates protracted, uninterrupted periods of quietness. It sharpens the keen edge of our souls, sensitizing us to those ever-so-slight nudgings from our heavenly Father. Noise and words and frenzied, hectic schedules dull our senses, closing our ears to his still, small voice and making us numb to His touch. One scholar and author does a splendid job of analyzing then illustrating the downside of what he calls "our wordy world."

There was a time not too long ago without radios and televisions, stop signs, yield signs, merge signs, bumper stickers, and the ever-present announcements indicating price increases or special sales. There was a time without the advertisements which now cover whole cities with words. In such a world who can maintain respect for words?<sup>5</sup>

**A Personal Sabbath Rest: *Helps us Cultivate Serenity the Discipline of Solitude*** – Solitude has been called "the furnace of transformation."<sup>6</sup> I don't have in mind mere personal privacy for a twelve-second pit stop where we get a quick fix to reenter the race. It is more than that. It is an oasis of the soul where we see ourselves, others, and especially our God in new ways. It is where much of the "clutter" I mentioned earlier is identified and exterminated, thanks to the merciless heat of the "furnace." Soul surgery transpires as serenity replaces anxiety. Another author describes solitude in practical, searching terms:

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing.<sup>7</sup>

And there is where the scalpel of God's Word cuts and removes what needs to be eliminated so that I may know God. Hebrews 4:12-13.

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<sup>4</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*. (N.Y.: The Seabury Press, 1981) 52, 50.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46

<sup>6</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 28

**A Personal Sabbath Rest: *Helps us in offering our selves in Surrender to God - Trusting the Lord Completely: The Discipline of Surrender.***

We have reared<sup>8</sup> a generation of strong-willed, belligerent, independent young men and women. Surrender is not a word in their vocabulary. Too bad, since it is the key that unlocks the vault of God's best and deepest treasures. He patiently waits for us to yield, to quit fighting Him, to allow His plan to run its course, to turn to Him for our security and significance. As He witnesses our doing that, he begins to reveal Himself and His will in greater depth.

God says to us: Surrender your rights.	"Are you kidding? I'll sue!"
God says to us: Surrender your future.	"No way. My mind's made up!"
God says to us: Surrender your will.	"Not me. I give in to no one!"
God says to us: Surrender your dreams.	"Never. I've worked too hard!"
God says to us: Surrender to your mate.	"Me? Get a life!"
God says to us: Surrender your finances.	"What? I'm planning to retire!"

There is a wonderfully challenging book by one of the early leaders at Wheaton College, Dr. Edman. You will probably shake your head with understanding when I read the following words. Nothing better describes the give-and-take struggle of our early years as a Christian. They are words from a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions.

*When thou wouldst guide me  
I control myself.  
When thou wouldst be sovereign  
I rule myself.  
When thou wouldst take care of me  
I suffice myself.  
When I should depend on thy providings  
I supply myself.  
When I should submit to thy providence  
I follow my will.  
When I should study, honor, trust thee,*

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty*. Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 66-71.

*I serve myself;  
I fault and correct thy laws  
to suit myself,  
Instead of thee I look to  
Man's approbation,  
And am by nature an idolater.  
Lord, it is my chief design to bring my  
heart back to Thee*<sup>9</sup>

**A Personal Sabbath Rest: *Helps us in True Preparation for worship - Preparation***<sup>10</sup> - The answer to the problem begins with Saturday preparation. (Any men who interpret the following as women's work are wrong. Both husband and wife should share responsibility for the practical and spiritual preparations for the Lord's Day.) It is advisable that young families have their clothing clean and laid out on Saturday night, and even that the breakfast be decided upon. The whereabouts of Bibles and lessons should be known, and even better, ought to be collected and ready. There should be an agreed-upon time to get up which leaves plenty of time to get ready for church. Going to bed at a reasonable hour is also a good idea. Spiritually, prayer about the Lord's Day is essential –prayer for the service, the music, the pastors, one's family, and oneself.<sup>11</sup>

The Puritans understood this well. As one of their great preachers, George Swinnock, quaintly expressed it:

Prepare to meet thy God, O Christian! Betake thyself to thy chamber on the Saturday night...The oven of thine heart thus baked, as it were, overnight, would be easily heated the next morning; the fire so well raked up when thou wentest to bed, would be the sooner kindled. when thou should rise. If thou wouldst thus leave thy heart with God on the Saturday night, thou shouldst find it with him in the Lord's Day morning.<sup>12</sup>

On Sunday everyone needs to get up on time, eat at a set hour, and leave plenty early, ideally after a short time of family prayer asking that God will be glorified and speak to each family member. If you do this, Sunday worship will ascend to new heights.

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<sup>9</sup> V. Raymond Edman, *The Disciplines of Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1948) 83.

<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991, p. 109-115.

<sup>11</sup> The following pamphlets are available from Chapel of the Air: #7245, *Getting Ready for Sunday* by David and Karen Mains; 7451, *Rules for the Sunday Search* by David R. Mains; #7454, *Preparation for Sunday*; #7462, *The Sunday Search: A Guide to Better Church Experiences* by Steve Bell.

<sup>12</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 257.

### *On Saturday*

I have asked Christ to make me sensitive tomorrow to needs of people in the body who are hurting.

I have solved the "Sunday clothes hassle" by making sure that what I will wear is ready today.

I have spent time in confession so all will be right between myself and my Lord when we meet tomorrow.

I have determined to get to bed early so I will be refreshed and ready for church tomorrow.

I have planned on sustaining the delight of this time with Christ and his people by guarding against Sunday afternoon infringements.

### *On Sunday*

I have gotten up in plenty of time so I will not feel rushed.

I have programmed my morning so I will not just arrive at church on time, but get there early.

I have eaten a good breakfast, so an empty stomach will not detract from my worship.

I have my bible in hand plus a pen and paper for taking notes.

I have left for church with a great sense of expectancy because I know Christ will be there.<sup>13</sup>

Finally we must also understand that the discipline of worship is the way to bounding *gladness* in worship. As Eugene Peterson has so well said: "Worship is an *act* which develops feelings for God, not a *feeling* for God which is expressed in an act of worship."<sup>14</sup> Let us plan a pattern of personal Sabbath rest for the purpose of worship!

### ***A Personal Sabbath Rest: Helps us Cultivate the Discipline of Simplicity in our Lives by Reordering<sup>15</sup> One's Private World.***

#### **The Decision**

to reorder one's private world  
to be still  
to cultivate serenity  
to trust the Lord completely

#### **The Discipline**

simplicity  
silence  
solitude  
surrender

**The Decision<sup>16</sup> to reorder one's private world, Is The Discipline of simplicity. The Decision to be still, Is The Discipline of silence. The**

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<sup>13</sup> *Preparation For Sunday*

<sup>14</sup> Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty*. Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy with the Almighty*. Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 28.

**Decision** to cultivate serenity, **Is The Discipline of** solitude. **The Decision** to trust the Lord completely, **Is The Discipline of** surrender.

**A Personal Sabbath Rest: *Helps us in Genuine Expectancy of God's Presence* -**

This knowledge of God through his Word ought to heighten our expectations and instill healthy fear and reverence. As Annie Dillard wrote:

On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the Catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?...It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.<sup>17</sup>

**A Personal Sabbath Rest: *Helps us preserve our experience the depths of God in our lives* -**

How can we preserve our hearts for the Lord's Day. Edith<sup>18</sup> Schaeffer tells how, when living in Villars, Switzerland, the church bells would toll every Saturday at 4:30 P.M. as a reminder to prepare for the Lord's Day. The bells were ignored by most but were a poignant reminder of a more enlightened day.

The point is, we need to begin thinking about the Lord's Day *before* Saturday night. Parents, and I mean both men and women:

- ✓ how much more meaningful the day would be if clothing were laid out and food decided upon and if everyone headed to bed at a reasonable time.
- ✓ How much better the Lord's Day would be if Christian families just took two minutes on Saturday evening to pray for God's blessing on the worshiped events of the day.
- ✓ How much better if we fasted from TV in preparation. And on Sunday morning,
- ✓ how far better it would be if a wife never heard, "Honey, you got the kids ready yet? I'm going to be late", but instead something like, "Dear, the boys are ready, and so am I."

The Sabbath:

- They had the temple

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<sup>17</sup> Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 40, 41.

<sup>18</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of Grace*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1993, p. 82-84.



- They had the sacrifices
- They had the Priesthood
- They had the Feasts and Holy Months
- They had the Scriptures
- They had the Sabbath

**For the 1<sup>st</sup> century Pharisee, God was lost in the ceremony. Could it be for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century He is obscured by the dust our hurried lives kick up?**