

**ENTER GOD'S REST**  
**(SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2014)**

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**SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 2:1-3; HEBREWS 4**

**INTRODUCTION**

Consider again the beautiful picture of the world and God's creation at the end of Genesis 1.

**Gen. 1:31** Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Perfection of beauty and order and yet the not the end goal but only the beginning.

Animals were to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.

Man was to have dominion over the earth as well as be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.

The picture of Genesis 1 might seem simplistic, but it is important to know the original goal and purpose for the creation.

Today the world is populated by over 7 billion people, divided into 204 countries.

What is the ultimate goal that God has intended for all that He created?

You will never learn that goal from TV news, movies, or most books.

There is a direction to which all of history is heading. It is first discussed at the beginning of Genesis 2.

We see again how beautiful are the ways of God in creation and in salvation. And we see how important it is that we have the Word of God to direct us.

The rest of God that we see at the beginning of Genesis 2 is a very important theme found throughout Scripture.

It is not a rest of tiredness or simply not doing anything. God rests because what He accomplished to do in creation was completed.

The rest of God is the fullness of His rejoicing in Himself and His work.

The rest of God on the seventh day describes the goal of all history when God's works of Providence and salvation on the earth in this age will be completed.

The rest of God is a beautiful picture of the salvation that is found alone in Jesus Christ.

You need the rest that God alone can provide.

**Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest.** (Hebrews 4:11)

Goal for today is to look at 3 main points in Genesis 2:1-3 and then also consider the link between our text and the theme of rest in Hebrews 4.

### **GOD COMPLETES, RESTS, AND BLESSES, GENESIS 2:1-3**

**Gen. 2:1** Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. **2** And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. **3** Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Last week I again emphasized the patterns that you can see throughout Genesis 1.

There is a change now at the beginning of Genesis 2.

There are also clear connections, not surprisingly, with Genesis 1.

There are three main points and actions of God that we see in the opening verses.

God completed all His work of creation

God rested on the seventh from all His work of creation.

God blessed and sanctified the seventh day.

Let us consider each of these three points from our text.

The verb finished in verse 1 is the same verb ended in verse 2.

In the Hebrew text, both verses begin with this verb, stressing the completion of God's work of creation.

Verse 1 is connected clearly with what verse in Genesis 1?

Genesis 1:1

Heaven or heavens – 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven, the expansive space of the universe, the sky above.

Host – A word often translated as armies, Lord Sabaoth (A Mighty Fortress). Here it refers to all that fills God's creation.

Verse 2 stresses the same point now using God as the subject.

On the seventh day, God ended His work which He had done.

You have to be careful to understand the language.

If I said, I finished my sermon on Sunday. You might think I didn't get it completed on Saturday, but had to finish it sometime on Sunday morning.

I think our translation for that reason has the word **ended instead of finished**.

From the context we can clearly see that the work of creation was finished in six days. It did not spill over into the seventh.

The work of creation, which God did on the first six days, is not something that continues.

He continues to sustain and rule over all His creation.

God is not just restricted to “natural processes,” but the work of creation was completed.

This is another important argument against evolutionary thought and any attempt to merge Scripture and the myth of evolution.

If God “created” through evolution, then this work would still be continuing, because evolutionists say that evolution is a never-ending process.

If you try to merge the two, you have to somehow say that the work of creation never was finished – the direct opposite of what we see here.

We stress the work of creation has been completed. God continues His works of providence and salvation.

John 5:5, 15-18.

Let's consider now the second main point of these verses – **God rested on the seventh day**.

It is interesting that in the Hebrew text, the two sentences of verse 2 and the first sentence of verse 3 are each composed of **seven** words.<sup>1</sup>

I doubt this is accidental but part of the beauty of the original text.

The verb **rested** is related to the word Sabbath, *shabbat*. But we do note that the word Sabbath is not used, but simply the word seventh day.

Some commentators suggest the word Sabbath is not used here for similar reasons that the word sun and moon are not used in Genesis 1 – these words had other meanings in the pagan cultures of the time Genesis was written. This might be possible but not something we can definitely prove.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I noted this first in the book, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 29. I confirmed this interesting observation.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1 of Word Biblical Commentary. Accordance/Thomas Nelson electronic ed. (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 35.

I have mentioned before how the 7-day week comes definitely from God's creation of the world in six days and then resting on the seventh day.

Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy in his book, *Out of Revolution*, records how the Soviets for several years tried to recreate the idea of a week – five-day week and then a six-day workweek with a common day of rest.<sup>3</sup>

After the French Revolution, the calendar was also changed, and for a time the week was defined as lasting 10 days.<sup>4</sup>

Some commentators suggest that the seven-day week began only after Israel was called out of Egypt, but I think we must find the 7-day week first in Genesis 2.<sup>5</sup>

Israel is brought back to the proper understanding of time after her deliverance from Egypt.

Let us consider the rest of God in verse 2, which is emphasized again in verse 3.

We rest from our work often because we are tired and physically need rest. Such is obviously not the case for God.

**Psalm 121:4** Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The rest of God is a ceasing from the work of creation as the text makes clear.

The rest of God directs us to consider the great goal for creation which is to enjoy the rest that is found in God alone and His salvation.

Joseph Pipa in his book *The Lord's Day* points out that God's rest also expresses His delight in His creation.<sup>6</sup>

**Ex. 31:17** It [the Sabbath] is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.' ”

In thinking about Genesis 1 and the first six days of creation, what stands out about the seventh day in Genesis 2?

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<sup>3</sup> Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Out of Revolution*, 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>5</sup> Harold Dressler in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 23. He states in his chapter, "...is it too daring and provocative to suggest that Israel herself might have been responsible for the creation of the seven-day week and a Sabbath?" It is not provocative; it is just incorrect based on what we see in Genesis 2.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Pipa, *The Lord's Day*, 30.

You don't see the phrase, the evening and the morning were the seventh day.

Some try to argue this to say, well this might mean the first six days were then not regular days, because the seventh day goes on and on.

This is a poor argument though it does encourage us to ask the question, why isn't the seventh day described as the other days?

First, the verse I just read from Exodus 31:17 and the fourth commandment show the seventh day was a normal day like the other days.

However, the seventh day does have an important theological significance that is different from the other six days.

So why is the seventh day described differently and in Genesis 2 without seemingly ending?

Dr. Pipa has written, "The record of the day is left open-ended to picture the eternal rest that He would provide for His people."<sup>7</sup>

I believe this explanation is confirmed by Hebrews 4 and other passages.

God's rest on the seventh day is a picture of our eternal salvation that is found in Jesus Christ alone.

Consider the role of man in God's work of creation. Man – male and female – is created as the climax of God's creation on the sixth day.

And yet the seventh day shows that man is not the goal of creation. God's rest is the goal for creation.

Harold Dressler writes,

"Thus, the creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3 proclaims *God's* activity, *His* majesty, and *His* power. Man takes his place within creation at his allotted position. God's last creative act is not the making of man, but the creation of rest for mankind. This creative act of God does not take the usual form of decree or fashioning but is simply an act of ceasing, resting, and being refreshed."<sup>8</sup>

The **third** major point of these verses is found at the beginning of verse 3.

God blessed the seventh day and sanctified/hallowed it.

God blessed the seventh day and set it apart from the other six days.

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<sup>7</sup> Pipa, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Dressler in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 30. Emphasis in the original.

The verb sanctified is a common verb in the OT but this is its only use in Genesis. It is the same verb that is used in the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, “Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and **hallowed** it.”

Here we see another connection with Genesis 1 and the first six days and the theme of separation found in Genesis 1.

God divided light from darkness.

God divided the waters from the waters in creating the firmament.

God gathered the waters in one place and called for the dry land to appear.

Here God blessed the seventh day and set it apart from the other six days.

Some want to argue that Genesis 2 does not teach what is called a “creation ordinance” concerning the seventh day.<sup>9</sup>

The wording of the fourth commandment as found in Exodus 20, however, shows that the Sabbath Day instruction given to Israel is based on God’s rest on the seventh day.

The idea of a Sabbath day certainly appears to be a creation ordinance and not just something that is found later in the history of Israel.

God’s rest on the seventh day most importantly teaches us that we must seek the salvation found in Him alone.

This is one of the reasons why the death penalty was prescribed for those who violated the law of the Sabbath.

Listen to Exodus 31:15-16.

**Ex. 31:15** Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. **Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.** **16** Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.

Those who violated the Sabbath Law were denying God’s covenant and provision of salvation. The only appropriate penalty was death.

In a similar way, those who deny the only salvation and rest found in Jesus Christ also will find death – not simply physical death but the much greater horror of spiritual death.

This is very clearly the connection that we find in Hebrews 4.

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<sup>9</sup> Harold Dressler for example. See *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 30.

The context of Hebrews is not identical to our own context. However, there are similarities.

The readers of the sermon found in the book of Hebrews were called to faith in Jesus Christ rather than trusting in the external splendors and rituals of Judaism.

What unites us today with those who were first given the NT Scriptures is the need for true faith, repentance, and conversion.

Turn to Hebrews 4. Consider again some of the main points made in this chapter.

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.

The word rest speaks of salvation found in Jesus Christ alone, it speaks of truly entering into the New Covenant.

There is the reminder in these opening verses that many know the truth but do not respond with faith to what they hear.

Salvation is not a work you do. It is not being good enough. It is, however, a true conviction that as a sinner you deserve nothing less than God's full wrath, but you plead for His mercy.

The truth also is that you cannot change your own heart. This must be a work that God does for you.

One of the means that God uses is the preaching of His Word through the working of the Holy Spirit. God uses His Written Word as we read in verse 12 which is living, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.

Is there truly in your life the evidence of God's gracious work – convicting you of sin but also assuring you of God's gracious work of salvation.

As the sermon writer of Hebrews continues in chapter 4, he makes mention of how important it is to respond to the call of the gospel Today. Today, if you will hear His voice.

Further there is the partial explanation of how the theme of rest is used in Scripture beginning with Genesis 2:2 and also in the book of Joshua.

The OT Joshua did not give the ultimate rest. The entrance into Canaan was only a shadow of the ultimate rest found in the NT Joshua.

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

I also love the end of Hebrews 4.

**Heb. 4:14** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. **15** For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. **16** Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let me leave a final challenge concerning our weaknesses and the blessing of the Lord's Day that is given to us.

John Calvin in 1559 preached a sermon on Tuesday, September 19 from our passage in Genesis 2. One of the points he stressed is the reality of our weaknesses, similar to verse 15. He spoke in one place:

“Otherwise our senses are fickle and wavering and there is no constancy or steadfastness in us, and we also imagine a thousand fantasies which are as many distractions to alienate us from God. Therefore, one particular day has been established to encourage us to reflect on him.”<sup>10</sup>

These words could have been written yesterday.

The issue of how we properly celebrate the Lord's Day, Sunday, has been a challenge for the church of Christ since His ascension and will remain such.

Do you realize your great weaknesses?

Your comfort can never be what you will do to improve or become a better person. No, your comfort must be you have a High Priest who can sympathize with your weakness.

The challenge is: do you acknowledge that one of the means of grace is the Lord's Day? Do you seek to use the day as best you can because you need to grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Let us be diligent in entering His rest and seek to use also this day of true rest.

**Prayer**

**Hymn 111**

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<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis 1-11*, 129.



**BENEDICTION – 1 PETER 5:8-11**

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.