

*Learning to Rest*  
Exodus 20:1-2, Exodus 20:8-11  
2/7/2021  
Randy Lovelace

Good morning, CPC. I hope you're all able to enjoy this beautiful snowy Sunday morning. It was not our hope, of course. We desired that we would be able to gather again in person on this Sunday morning, but the Lord reminded us again that we, of course, are not in control of all things. And it is a great opportunity for us to remember, particularly on this Sabbath day and on the day of rest, as we look at this commandment of the Sabbath that it is a good reminder that the Lord is the Lord and in control of all things. And He has given us the beauty of this day, the beauty of this snow, and it is an invitation for us to come into rest.

Thank you for joining us this morning. Thank you for joining me. This is something I've had to create here at home and not something I ever expected to have to do, but there we are. But I'm grateful for the technology, and I'm glad you're able to join us this morning.

As we continue in this series on the Ten Commandments and how we are to live and how the commandments form the understanding of how we ought to live as those who trust in the Lord, ways in which we understand the law of God and the light of who Christ is, it is an opportunity for us to gather again. This morning, we do so by remembering that we are now in the fourth commandment. And on this Lord's day, it does regard the Sabbath.

Hear now God's word to us taken from Exodus 20:1-2 and then verses 8-11. Hear now God's word.

And God spoke all these words, saying,

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

"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." [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Will you join me in prayer as we begin to look at God's word this morning?

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can gather together in the name of Christ. Thank you, Father, that we bear the name that you have given us. You have given to us as your children. You have called us into relationship with you. And all those who profess faith in you are all called your dearly loved children. We thank you, Father, that you have called us into your delight, into your salvation and redemption. Now, Lord, we ask that you would take the word, and by the power of your Holy Spirit that you would teach us your ways and lead us into rest, remind us of the importance of rest, and help us, O Lord, particularly in this time, to learn how to rest. In Jesus's name. Amen.

I've titled this sermon Learning to Rest because I want us to consider, particularly as people who are living in the 21st century, why rest and learning to sabbath is not a burden, is not a heavy load, but rather is a place where we can finally take a deep breath and rest in the relationship that we have with God. If you do not have a relationship with the Lord, He invites you into that relationship. If you don't know the Lord, this is just a picture today of what He intends for you, what He desires for you, and how our lives are to be transformed because of His redemption and salvation.

But before we go there, I want you to consider these words by author A. J. Swoboda when he wrote this.

"Our time saving devices, technological conveniences, and cheap mobility have seemingly made life much easier and interconnected. As a result, we have more information at our fingertips than anyone in history. Yet, with all this progress, we are ominously dissatisfied and bowing at the sacred alters of hyperactivity, progress, and technological compulsivity. Our souls increasingly pant for something more, and for meaning and value and truth as they wither away, exhausted, frazzled, displeased, ever on edge. Our bodies wear ragged. Our spirits thirst. We have an inability to simply sit and be still. As we drown ourselves in a 24/7 living, we seem to be able to do anything but quench our true thirst for the life of God. The result is that we have become perhaps the most emotionally exhausted, psychologically overworked, spiritually malnourished people in history."

Indeed, I think Swoboda is on to something.

I think it is a perfect time for us to consider what does the Lord have to say to us in this fourth commandment? How are we to understand it? This morning, you'll see, if you are able to download the worship guide that is offered in the email that came out this week, I'll be covering three points: the rhythm of rest, the purpose of rest, and finally the witness of rest.

First, the rhythm of rest. Of course, we hear this in the word that God gives to Moses and then to His people. He says simply, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Six days you work, and one day you rest. What we find in this interesting call and commandment is the rhythm that God put into the world that did not begin simply with Exodus 20. In fact, it is baked into the entire creation. We understand and hear the words of God in Genesis 2:1-3,

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.

So God has even set into the creation of all things the rhythm of six to one, the rhythm of rest and work.

As we consider this rhythm of rest, two things are very clear from the immediate text given to us in Exodus 20 and even in Genesis 2, and that is cessation and separation. The rhythm of rest involves cessation but also separation. The whole idea in terms of the word "sabbath" is the cessation of work or from work, to stop actually working. It is to take that which we do all the other days, set them aside, and then on this day we cease from that which we do the other six. This is the rhythm that God intended. This is the rhythm that we understand, that in fact this cessation from work is not necessarily what man was made for, but rather the Sabbath day was made for man.

We understand this from the words of Jesus in Mark 2:27-28. "And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

What we learn in all of that is that God intended for the Sabbath, this day of rest, as a gift to His creation. But then we learn in Exodus that it is also a gift to His people. So there is both a creation element to cessation, but also a redemptive element to cessation.

What do I mean? That is that, yes, God baked into all creation a day of rest not because God was exhausted or needed the rest. No. He was simply pointing out that on this day, we can take a break from the work we have been given to do and to rest in Him. But because of the fall, as Swoboda points out, we continue to want to work, to strive to a 24/7 life that leads us into greater and greater experiences of

anxiety, worry, and ambition which does not bring us rest but brings us great stress. From that, we then learn that as a part of the restorative redemptive work of God as He called a people to Himself and now says through Moses, "You are my people," the Sabbath in Exodus doesn't become a burden. No. It becomes an element of God's redemption. What man refused to receive is a gift and turned it yet into more work. God restores His people and says, no, I'm bringing you out from the rest of the world to call you to cease. Cease from the work and trust in my provision, that on this day I will provide for you because it is a day for your rest.

This is the rhythm that God has given, but not just for cessation but also separation. He tells us here that God made it holy, meaning it is to be treated differently than all the other days, meaning there's something more that is happening on this day than merely the cessation from work. We'll get to that in a few moments. But it is impossible to escape the fact that God didn't just say that one of these days is the day of rest. No. He rested, and He called it holy. It is separate. There is something intertwined in this rest that has to do with our redemptive relationship with Him, something that should be celebrated, sought after, and rested in.

In fact, what we understand is this was precisely the point that those who tried to trap Jesus tried to make. They tried to say, hey, look what you're doing on the Sabbath. You are breaking the fourth commandment. But what Jesus was pointing out in Mark 2 is the only thing He was breaking were all the things that they had added to the Sabbath that God had not. You see, by the time that Jesus came, the Sabbath had become an incredible weight on the people for all of these things had to be done and not done because if they did, they would break the law. Well, this is not law that God had given but that man had added on to the Sabbath. And so He reminds them that the Sabbath was made for man. You've made the Sabbath a work to prove your righteousness and not holiness in God. You've tried to make it how you're holy, not to focus the attention on the holiness of our God. And so Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man," not the other way around.

B. B. Warfield, the great reformed theologian, said this. "Christ took the Sabbath into the grave with him and brought the Lord's day out of the grave with him on the resurrection morning." You see, this is why we consider Sunday the Sabbath day, not as the last day of the week but as the first day of the week. Since Christ's resurrection, He took that Sabbath day on, and He obeyed it completely. But when He was raised on the third day, all things new were being made through the power of His resurrection, victorious over sin and death. And God is showing us something about this Sabbath, that He is restoring things. It is Jesus who exemplifies why this day has been made holy, for God's victory over sin and death, God's victory over our brokenness and provision of our restoration is on display.

This rhythm of rest brings about cessation from our normal work that we do the other six days, but it also calls us into separation of remembering this is what God has done for us. Intricately woven into the redemptive relationship with Him is a place where we can be separated in time and space to find the rhythm of rest, of enjoying Him. We can rejoice that Jesus Christ took all of the Sabbath on Himself, and He rested. But He rested victorious, and then He was raised victorious on the first day of the week. This is why we gather on the first day of the week, and we begin with rest. We begin with cessation. We begin with separation. And that enlivens us and restores us for the work ahead.

Not only do we learn from these verses about the rhythm of rest, but we also understand the purpose of rest. We understand from the commandment that there is a purpose to the rest for it says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." There is not just stuff that we don't do, but there are things that we are called to do. Remember, we are whole-bodied humans, and it involves our complete self. As we understand the purpose of rest, I want you to consider these two things. The purpose of rest is restoration and remembering.

What do I mean by restoration? I don't think it takes very much research at all to understand that over the years, many studies and research have that failing to rest after work of any length leads to insomnia, sleepiness, hormonal imbalances, fatigue, irritability, organ stress, and every other increasingly

serious physical and mental symptom. It affects us physically, spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. Restoration isn't merely spiritual where we take this time to remember what God has done and what He has provided, although it most certainly is that. But the purpose of rest goes beyond just the spiritual. It is also physical where our bodies are able to literally find rest. Our bodies were made for work but also rest.

It is also emotional. To find that place and to find that groove, which the church of Jesus Christ is intended to be, and in our own families, the purpose of rest is emotional where we let our guard down, and we're able to be who God has created us to be. We're not first and foremost workers. We're first and foremost children, brother or sister, son or child, father or mother, husband or wife, friend. We need the emotional rest.

There is also a place for social rest. When we gather together as God's people, it's not meant to be a time of performance where we're trying to be on for other people. It's a place where we know, although we might be very different, think differently, look differently, live differently, that in this place we come together in a union of understanding that our hope is bound up not in ourselves, but in the Lord alone. And there we can find even social rest.

I want to say please understand that this purpose of rest, while it is meant to be restorative, we must be careful, as one writer has pointed out, of the trap of not exchanging restorative rest for relaxation. What do I mean? And what do I think they mean? Restoration can involve relaxation, but we can't take the whole bodied restoration and simply exchange it for relaxation. You see, we're very good at relaxing. But oftentimes our relaxing just means we're filling ourselves with other things, our devices, our screens, our entertainment.

But I believe, as many writers and researchers have found, that there is not much restoration in entertainment. Our minds are still busy and frenzied. They've even done tests that whether it's exciting like a sporting event or it's a movie, it doesn't always bring restorative rest. It can bring stress, anxiety, even excitement. But even excitement is not the same as rest. Restoration can involve relaxation, but our restoration physically, socially, emotionally, spiritually cannot be exchanged for mere relaxation. May we not fall into that trap.

The purpose of rest isn't just restoration. It is also remembering, as the text tells us. What do I think is baked into this idea of remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy? I believe it is this. We remember who we are. We were created as human beings. And even before the fall of man into sin and rebellion against God, we had limitations because we are humans. After the fall, we feel our limitations very acutely and chronically. But we remember who we are. We are humans with limitation which in itself is an invitation into rest.

Not only do we remember who we are, but we remember what we are. We are humans and not gods. We've done a good job with our technology of being able to control our space and how we experience it, but we've not been able to control time. We are not God. We do not know the future. We so easily forget the past, and we have a hard time just being in the present. We remember that we are humans. From the dust we have come, and to dust we will return. We are not God, but we remember who we are. We remember what we are.

But the most important part of our rest and the purpose of our rest is to remember whose we are. We are called beloved children, redeemed. Again, as God spoke these words, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery," if you believe in the Lord God, if you confess Jesus Christ as your redeemer, on this day above all others, we remember we are His. And He calls us out of our slavery to ambition and drive and the 24/7 work to find a place where our souls can find rest completely restored because we remember we are His.

Marva Dawn, theologian and author, wrote in her book in 2002,

"On the Sabbath day, we deliberately remember that we have ceased trying to be God and instead have put our lives back into his control. Concentrating on God's lordship in our lives enables us to return to his sovereign hands all the things that are beyond our control and that terrify us. Once these things are safely there, and as long as we don't stupidly take them back up again, our emotions can truly find comfort and healing rest."

I love that. "Once those things are safely there, as long as we don't stupidly take them back up again, our emotions can truly find comfort and healing rest." We bring all that we have to Him.

Let me share with you one of the things that I do each week and each day. Each day, I begin my day with these words. As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still, to breathe slowly, to recenter my scattered senses upon the presence of God. God, every blessing in this new day, I invite you to shape my soul with your words and inspire my life through your works. Teach me to walk in the way of blessing. I find that I need this space. I need this day and as I begin each day, Lord, take all that I have because I belong to you. And I find when I do that, I can breathe. I can rest.

I am first and foremost not a pastor. I am first and foremost not a husband and a father. I am first and foremost a son of God. And His words, His truth, His grace, His mercy, His invitation to rest can then begin to reshape my soul, my words, my emotions, my body so that when I enter into the engagement of the day as husband, father, as pastor, I do so because I began from a place of rest.

This is really hard. This is hard for me. As a pastor, I don't find Sabbath days always very restful, and it's hard. Please pray for pastors. Please pray for those who work in ministry because oftentimes on your day of rest where we encourage you to find rest, it's hard for us to find rest. So I invite you to please pray for me, but please pray for all pastors and those who work in ministry.

We see here in these words not just the rhythm of rest and the purpose of rest, but also the witness of rest. What's interesting is that we find that when God called His people into rest, He intended it was to be distinct from the rest of the world, not in self-righteousness, but as a witness that they belonged to someone different, and they had a different liturgy and how they understand they live their life and the order of their time.

What's interesting is that God would say this as He reminded them in Exodus 31:17, "It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed." Again, not because God was exhausted, but He showed us that He rested from His work, and it was all very good. Therefore, He invites His people as an everlasting sign of His redemptive purposes, He calls a people to Himself to rest in a world that is frenzied, working, and anxious.

Jon Tyson, pastor in New York City, wrote these words.

"God laid out a vision of a 24-hour period that is kept differently from the other days and is remembered as holy. It is the day that is blessed and given to an exhausted human race as a gift. Sabbath is given to us by God as a form of his grace and blessing, and our practice of Sabbath is a gift to God of our trust, worship, loyalty to his lordship in a culture of counterfeits."

Therefore, our practice of Sabbath becomes a form of witness to the world that we do not belong to its liturgies, but we order our lives from a God of grace and mercy.

Therefore, it is a great reminder that in this 24-hour period, we step out of the way of the world, as Tyson writes, and into the way of eternity. We step into space of the Spirit, of life, and of God, and we step out of the space of that which denies God. Sabbath is a portal to participate in God's presence. Therefore, as we finish today, I want you to remember that our witness to rest in the Sabbath means we do one thing above all else. We revel, we celebrate, we enjoy God.

I was reminded as one writer said, "They treat Sabbath day as pleasure stacking day" where they take all the things which God has given, and they revel in it. They enjoy it. Think about these verses given to us in Psalm 34. "O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him." We revel and taste and see that God is good.

How can we do that? We do that because of what we hear in Isaiah 25. "On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine." So on this day, have you ever considered saving a special food or drink just for the Sabbath and enjoying it and giving thanks to God?

But we revel also in worship. When we gather together as God's people corporately and privately, we do that which we hear in Revelation 21. "And he who is seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'" He also said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true, of rich food full of marrow, and of aged wine well-refined." You see, on this day, we sing, we pray, we listen, and we rest. Why? Because God had made all things new.

The Sabbath, whether it was in the Old Testament with God's people or in its beautiful fulfilled form in life in Christ in the New Testament, the Sabbath was never meant to be a dour day, a day of don'ts. No. It was meant to be a day of celebration, a day of reveling, a day of joy, a festival, and a day of wonder. This is what we get to do. This is what we were given as a gift to be able to do.

Think about this for just a moment. For the Christian, the Lord's day can become a festival day of good gifts that God has given. Read your favorite novels and see it as a gift from God, your favorite poet, your favorite art, your favorite food. These things can be used as a gift and said, Lord, here, we can gather together with friends, albeit not in a pandemic but in a safe way, of course. But whether it's with masks or six feet of separation, or whether it's on Zoom, or whether it's calling up a friend, these things are a place where we can rejoice that the Lord is good.

You see, each week, it is to be the foundation for God's people. For those who belong to Christ, it is to be a day grounded as a foundation of celebration of resisting the liturgy of the world. Paraphrasing a writer when they said the liturgy of the world says I spend my first half of my life working like a dog so I can spend the second half of my life trying to make amends. God's word says no. Each week, young, middle, and old are called not into the liturgy of working like a dog and hopefully finding some space in life to make amends, but we can find rest for our souls, our bodies, our emotions, and our relationships right smack dab in the middle of the world that God is making new.

So I invite you as I hear God inviting me. "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." What an invitation. And in Christ, all things are new. Come. Learn to rest. Find rest for your souls. Pray with me.

Heavenly Father, we thank you this morning for your word. I pray that you would continue to help me to find rest and restoration, to revel, to remember. Lord, I pray for your people, that they would be called into a new time of rest and restoration, that you are God, that you are good, and that your grace is sufficient. Lord Jesus, help us to hear your invitation. Thank you that it is not, as the Father said, just merely for our physical rest or even merely for our spiritual rest or emotional rest, but it is a sign of your redemption, for you have paid the price for our sin and given us salvation. And you have been revealed as the victorious one over sin and death. And on this day, the first day of the week, you said for us to rest. Help us to do that, O Lord. We are weary, and we need your restoring power. Do this, we pray. In Jesus's name. Amen.