# Sabbath Rest

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[0:00] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the book of Exodus, chapter 20, and we're going to read the first 11 verses of Exodus. It's the famous Ten Commandments passage the Lord delivers to His people at Mount Sinai.

Verse 1 of Exodus, chapter 20. And God spoke all these words. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping 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, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.
[1:37] For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray for God's help as we study the Bible this morning. Gracious God, be merciful to us and feed us, feed us truth from Your Word.
Lord, we live in a culture where we are bombarded by information all day, every single day, and we struggle to navigate all of that information, and so we pray that Your Word would cut through all of that noise and deliver truth to us and truth to our hearts that we might know You and love You and serve You.
And so won't You do that for us this morning by the power of Your Spirit, and for Christ's sake we pray. Amen. So we're in the fourth week in our series on work, thinking about how to integrate faith and work.
And throughout this series, one of the things we've hinted at is, one of the problems really that we've hinted at, is that we can very easily turn our work into our very identity, our salvation, the place from which you draw your deepest sense of meaning and purpose in life.
[2:56] And you're going, like, what I do gives me that. No one's going to say that out loud because it just sounds weird and creepy. But we behave that way and we think that way, and we feel that way often around work.

And so what I want to do this morning is talk about perhaps the most important tool that the Bible gives us to keep us from falling into that trap, and that is the Sabbath.
And so I want to talk about Sabbath rest. Timothy Keller, in his really important little book on work, which I commend to all of you to read if you get the chance, a book called Every Good Endeavor, he writes this.
He says, It is meaningful that God Himself rested after work. Many people make the mistake of thinking that work is a curse and that something else, whether that's leisure or family or even spiritual pursuits, but something else is the only way to find meaning in life.
The Bible exposes the lie of this idea, but it also keeps us from falling into the opposite mistake, namely that work is the only important human activity and that rest is a necessary evil, something we do strictly to recharge our batteries in order to continue to work.
[4:09] We look to what we know about God to make this case. He did not need any restoration of strength, and yet He rested on the seventh day.

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As beings made in His image then, we can assume that rest is good in and of itself. Work is not all there is to this life. You will not have a meaningful life without work, but you cannot say that your work is the meaning of your life.
We just read there from the Ten Commandments, Exodus chapter 20, where the Sabbath commandment there, the fourth commandment is explicitly articulated to God's people.
You can find another version of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy chapter 5. What I want us to do is I want us to look at the commandment and see how it helps us to dethrone work as an idol and how it helps us to truly rest from our work the way that God's actually designed us to rest.
Now, as we go into this subject on the Sabbath, I know that there's debate amongst Protestants exactly on how to obey the Old Testament Sabbath commandment for Christians today in the New Testament. I don't want to get too hung up on that this morning.
[5:26] I've spoken about that in other sermons. I will make some comments along the way. What I do want you to primarily see this morning is that Sabbath is a gift. It's a gift.

Thinking of Sabbath as a gift, something to delight in, something to treasure, something that I think that if we can really come to grips with, if we can get our heads and our hearts around what it is exactly that God is doing for us in the Sabbath, it will have a dramatically positive effect, not just on our work lives, sort of in a pragmatic way, but even upon our spiritual, our overall spiritual lives.
So let me start off by giving you a little bit of context for that fourth commandment. So God rescues the Israelites from slavery. You actually see that in the little preface to the Ten Commandments.
He takes them out of Egypt. He takes them to Mount Sinai in the wilderness. And in this mountain, he makes a covenant with them. That is an agreement, a promise to be their God and that they will be his people.
And then he gives them the law, which really, if you're thinking about a covenant agreement, these are the stipulations of this covenant agreement. And the summary of the law, well, it comes right up front.
[6:40] Before you go and read all the complicated laws that come afterwards, you actually get the summary up front. And the summary comes in the form of the Ten Commandments. Now, really, really important is whenever we speak about law in the Old Testament, these are not ways to earn God's favor when you read these Ten Commandments.

He explicitly tells them, that's why the preface might be the most important part of the Ten Commandments, before you even get to Commandment 1. But he explicitly tells them that he's already rescued them. And so his grace and his favor, it's already on them before he gives them the law.
And so instead, the way I think we ought to think about law is, law is the way to life. Law is the way to the good life for the people who have been saved by God.
You might actually even say that in some sense, the law is the way to enjoy true rest. That's already been one for you in Christ's saving work on your behalf.
He's done the work. Now, how do you rest in the work that he's done? Well, you obey the law. You enjoy true rest through that. So here's the fourth commandment again. I just want to read it again. It says, Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
[7:55] Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but on the seventh day, well, the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. There are actually two components to Sabbath observance for the Old Testament Israelite.
Rest and worship. And you see this if you go to Leviticus. Leviticus chapter 23 verse 3 makes this clear. It says, There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly.
You are not to do any work wherever you live. It is a Sabbath to the Lord. So there's a cessation of work on the one hand, stop working. And then there's the sacred assembling, on the other hand, of God's people.
So rest, worship. To keep the Sabbath is sort of to give yourself to those two things. So that's the context. Now here are three things I want you to see about Sabbath rest this morning.

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[9:10] Number one, the timing of the Sabbath. Number two, the morality of the Sabbath. And then number three, the salvation of the Sabbath. So the timing, the morality, and the salvation of the Sabbath.

Here's the first one, the timing of the Sabbath. A really, really important point to note from the outset is that the Sabbath begins at the very beginning.
It doesn't begin at Sinai when you get to the mountain. A couple of chapters into your Bible. Look at verse 11. What's the reason for keeping the Sabbath holy?
For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Holy. So God basically in the Ten Commandments says to us, he says, keep the Sabbath holy.
That is, set aside a sacred day of rest one day in seven. And why? Well, well, because I created the world in six days, and then I rested on the seventh day.
[10:17] So God has a Sabbath rest, so we should have a Sabbath rest. That's the logic there in the text. But that means that the concept of Sabbath then comes long before, Israel gets to Mount Sinai.

And that's really, really important as New Testament Christians, because it means that the Sabbath observance is not intrinsically tied to the sort of temporal mosaic covenant, this national covenant that God is making with the people of Israel there at Sinai.
Now, certainly as you read on, if you go and you read Exodus now and you read Leviticus, you'll see that all sorts of sort of what we might call ceremonial and civil aspects, get added to this initial Sabbath command.
But the core idea of one day in seven, set aside for rest, for Sabbath, well, that predates the law of Moses.
which means, I don't think you can say, well, you know what, as New Testament believers, we're not under the law of Moses anymore, and therefore the Sabbath really has no bearing upon us, which is what you sometimes hear in certain Christian circles.
[11:27] But I'm not sure you can actually say that, because the Sabbath comes long before the law of Moses. The Sabbath is what we might call a creation ordinance. God's design for rest, that that ceasing of work is built into the fabric of creation itself.

The fabric of who we are as human beings. In the same way that we said in the first sermon of this series, that us being workers is built into the fabric of creation itself. Douglas Rishkov, I don't know if I'm saying his surname right there, but he's a prominent media theorist at the University of, City University of New York, and something of a critic of traditional religion.
So, I know this because in one of his books, he makes the case that traditional religions like Judaism and Christianity don't actually, in his view, provide the sort of true connectivity and transformative experience that humans really need to flourish.
So, not really a friend of the Christian faith, not a guy you're expecting to turn up at church on a Sunday morning. And yet, interestingly, he writes a lot about the quest for human flourishing.
And in his quest for human flourishing, he writes sometimes about the institution of the Sabbath.
So, he says this, he says, today it seems that no place, and more importantly, no time is truly sacred.
[12:49] Our mediating technologies render us available to our business associates at any hour, day or night. Any moment, thinking instead of spending, or laughing instead of working is an opportunity missed.

And the more time we sacrifice to production and consumption, the less alternatives, the less any alternative seems available to us. One radical proposal to combat the contraction of sacred time was suggested in the book of Exodus.
And it's called the Sabbath. What if we all decided that for one day each week, we would refrain from buying or selling anything? Would it throw America into a recession?
Maybe the ancients didn't pick the number seven out of a hat. Perhaps they understood that human beings can only immerse themselves in commerce for six days at a stretch, before losing touch with anything approaching the civil, social, or sacred.
Now that's a pretty fascinating concession, by a fairly irreligious person, who's looking at the Sabbath and saying, hey, maybe we missed something here as a culture.

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[14:02] Maybe we missed something with the Sabbath, something of immense value. Maybe the ancients were actually onto something. It's almost like they realized, shock and horror, that we were built and designed to observe the Sabbath.

You see, at one level, we as Christians, we can debate until the cows come home about what you can and you can't do on the Sabbath or on the Sunday. But at a very, at a very, very fundamental level, I think we need to agree that disregarding the fourth commandment might have very, very dire consequences for our well-being.
Even secular people seem to see that. God has made us this way. And so we go against our design then at our own peril. So maybe you come in here this morning and you are tired.
Not just because you watch the rugby. But just shattered. Shattered emotionally, psychologically, physically, because your work is killing you.
It might be because you're not observing the Sabbath. And listen, this is going to sound really counterintuitive, but it actually takes a level of effort to do this well. To observe the Sabbath well.
[15:21] You can't just sort of casually downshift to proper Sabbath observance. You actually have to plan and prepare to do it well. You'll see this if you read a lot of the Puritan writing on the issue of the Sabbath.

You'll actually see it in the Westminster Larger Catechism when it looks at the fourth commandment and the questions around that. It takes a level of effort to do it well.
And what I mean by that, well, it means working wise and working smart over six days so that you can rest properly on the seventh day.
It means getting your work life and your home life in order Monday through Saturday so Sunday can be actually fully devoted to worship and rest. It means guarding your calendar so that your Sabbaths aren't regularly getting disrupted by work trips or events or other things.
If you don't order those things, you're always going to come into Sunday with the weight of the world on your shoulders. If you're never giving any attention to that end, then don't be surprised you're getting like, why am I so tired?
[16:31] I'm not even doing anything this Sunday but why am I still so tired? It's because you didn't. You didn't order that. You're always going to have the unfinished business of Friday sitting on you or the looming expectation the anxieties of what's coming on Monday plaguing you.

Robbing you of actual rest then on the Lord's day. And so friends, I want to say don't be surprised if you constantly go against God's good design for you by diligently building Sabbath observance routines into your life.
Don't be surprised if you don't do that, that things start coming apart in your life. That you find yourself all over the place. And exhausted. Even though you're not physically in the office or actually physically working all the time.
Sabbath is a creation ordinance. It is fundamental to who we are. So that's the first thing. The timing of the Sabbath. The Sabbath begins before Sinai. Here's the second one. The morality of the Sabbath.
Now here we come to a factor that is often neglected. I think it's often neglected by people who want to say that we shouldn't observe any sort of Sabbath as New Testament Christians.
[17:48] And that is that the command is given as part of the Ten Commandments. As part of what theologians have historically called the moral, the eternal moral law of God. Now there certainly might, as you look forward, there might be ceremonial and civil aspects to Sabbath observance.

But the basic command is given in one of the Ten Commandments and not later on in the case law or the ceremonial law that follows in Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers, Deuteronomy.
And so that's got to give you pause even if you're one of the most ardent anti-Sabbatarians. You're going to say, well why is it there? Why not later? I need to confess, I was actually an ardent anti-Sabbatarian when I first started out in ministry, the church that I was in.
This is now like 25 years ago. But I was an anti-Sabbatarian. Now how much of that had to do with my actual study of Scripture or how much of it had to do with the fact that the elders and the deacons at my church didn't want me to play soccer in the Durban Sunday League.
I'm not sure which one. But either way, the one thing when I was thinking about this that I didn't wrestle with at all was the Fourth Commandments placement within the Ten Commandments. Because let's be honest, we are never going to debate the ongoing applicability, the ongoing moral applicability of the other Nine Commandments, right?

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[19:10] There's no debate about murder or theft or lying. There are no serious Christians going around sleeping with other people's spouses and going, well you know, I'm not under Moses, I'm under grace now.

And if you are doing that, then stop doing that. Repent and read your Bible properly. But if the other Nine Commandments have such abiding moral force, why not the Fourth?
Now I know that some anti-Sabbatarians, because I used to say this myself, protest, and they say, well if you look at the other Nine Commandments, Jesus explicitly reiterates those other Nine Commandments in the New Testament, but not the Fourth.
I want to say, friends, I think that's a very poor argument from silence and a very bad way to interpret the Bible. And I'm also not exactly sure that it's true either.
Just because Jesus doesn't explicitly reiterate an Old Testament command doesn't mean you're just sort of free to ignore that Old Testament command. I mean, Jesus never says anything about inappropriate relationships with animals.
[20:18] The Old Testament does. So does that mean you can now marry your dog in the New Testament? I think a much better way to understand the Scripture as you move from Old Testament to New Testament is that the moral force of the Old Testament, particularly the Ten Commandments, only really ever changes if we have clear and explicit direction from the New Testament to change it.

So for example, we have clear statements from Jesus and the apostles about the food laws of the Old Testament, that they no longer apply to us. You can have crayfish for dinner tonight and the elders are not going to discipline you for that.
You don't have to feel guilty about it. We don't have any clear or explicit statement in the New Testament calling for an end to Sabbath observance.
In fact, to the very contrary, we have Jesus talking about the good of the Sabbath for God's people in Mark chapter 2. We have Him talking about how to use the Sabbath for deeds of mercy and compassion in Mark chapter 3.
I mean, if you think about the stories of Jesus and the times that He fights with all the religious leaders, with the Pharisees, a large amount of His run-ins that He has with the Pharisees are around the issue of lawful Sabbath observance.
[21:43] In all of those situations, He could have just diffused it and just gone, you know what guys, we really don't need to fight about this, about what is lawful or isn't lawful on the Sabbath because I'm just going to take the Sabbath away.

Like all the food laws and all the sacrificial laws, I'm going to take the Sabbath away. Jesus never says that. Paul never says that. Peter never says that. The author of the book of Hebrews never says that.
The New Testament just doesn't say that. And so because the fourth commandment is embedded in God's eternal moral law, we need to have a very, very, very good reason to not observe it in some form today as New Testament believers.
We neglect Sabbath rest and worship not just to the detriment of our own emotional and psychological, physical well-being. We neglect it to the detriment of our own moral and spiritual well-being.
Now this means, all of this means that I think we need to think of the Sabbath as not just sort of like a nice benefit that God gives us to tap into when we're tired, like an optional add-on to the salvation and grace package that you get when you become a Christian.
[22:57] I think we actually need to see it as something of a moral obligation. Rest is a moral obligation. That's why workaholism is not just bad because it can affect you negatively, psychologically or emotionally or it can stunt your social life or it can destroy your home life.

Workaholism is bad because it offends God because it says no to God's command to rest. And I think that's something we need to say in an urban culture like this where we all just work and don't actually think about the moral obligation.
It offends God. And I want to say that God's commands are never arbitrary. They're never just like let me just give this command and it'll be a hoot to see how these people try and work this one out. Let me just give them this command. They're not arbitrary like that. Besides that fact that regular resting has numerous benefits for you which I think we talked about in the first point, regular resting and obedience to God reorders your entire life orientation and your ultimate allegiance.

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That's what it does. You see because in the Sabbath what God is doing is He's coming to you and He's saying to you down tools. Put them down. Don't touch them. Put them down there. I know you're looking at them. I know you're thinking about Monday but just put them down.
[24:17] Don't touch them. Put them on the floor and what does that do for us? Well it forces us if we can't touch them it forces us then to place our trust in the providential care of our Creator.

I can't trust those things because I can't touch them so now I have to trust you Lord. that you've got this. That you've got my life. Downing tools is an act of trust that says I am not ultimately the one who sustains my own life or the life of my family.
God is. Think back to the agrarian society in which this command was originally given. I mean life was so incredibly volatile back then.
Like we're worrying right now whether there's the AI bubble that's going to mess up the stock market and we're going to go back to 2008. The level of volatility around that is nowhere near as bad as the level of volatility around the economy back in the time that the Ten Commandments are given.
One bad harvest and you starve to death. You fail to protect your flock from the lions and the bears and your kids don't eat. You watch them starve and die in front of you.
[25:30] It is a brutal society. And in that kind of world there is incredible incredible pressure to feel like it is all on me.

It's all on me. I have to keep working. I have to keep harvesting. I have to keep tending the flock because if I don't do that we're dead. We're literally dead. It's all on me. And so to down tools one day in seven is an act of incredible trust in God.
In fact it is to put the lie to death. It's not all on you.
And that's the lie you're feeding yourself but it's not all on you. This world and the people in this world are ultimately sustained by the God who created it. And so there's a moral obligation to Sabbath rest.
We break this command and we deny that fact. We deny God's providential care over us and over this world. Keep the command and we celebrate that care.
[26:34] We celebrate his providential care over us and over this world. We say you're truly in control. Third point. Salvation of the Sabbath.

As I said earlier the Ten Commandments appear in two places in the Bible so they're in Exodus 20 and then they come up again in Deuteronomy 5. Exodus 20 is the initial giving of the Ten Commandments.
Deuteronomy 5 is Moses reminding the people of the law that they got 40 years later now as they're about to go into the promised land. And the commandments are exactly the same in both places but Moses does slightly change some of the details when it comes to the reasons given for the commandments.
So in Exodus 20 Sabbath keeping is rooted in creation. That's the foundation. This is why you should do it because of creation. But in Deuteronomy 5 Moses says this.
He says So basically that's the same as Exodus.
[28:02] But then he says this. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath. So instead of rooting the command in creation he roots the command in Israel's redemption.
Moses is in effect saying the reason the reason we obey this command is not just because God rested in creation and gave us a pattern for us to follow.
The reason we obey this command to rest is because God rescued us. He rescued us from an oppressive enslavement in Egypt. We were being worked to death.
Literally worked to death by a tyrant and so God rescued us to rest. And so the Sabbath then is a visible marker of that rest.
[29:02] That salvation. I mean think about it this way. God creates the world and then he rests. But what happens after that beautiful rest?

You know because we talked about this last week. Adam and Eve they destroy it through their sin and they plunge the world into a state of unrest. And it's that unrest that you and I experience every single day.

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At the heart it's the unrest of our guilt, our sin, our shame. it's that unrest then that creates and every single one of us are yearning for a deeper rest.
A deeper rest that even the very, very best physical rest can't provide. And in Christ we have that deeper rest.
In Jesus Christ our great salvation, our exodus moment, we have that deeper rest. Christ who describes himself as the Lord of the Sabbath in Mark's gospel, he enters into our sinful unrest.
[30:08] I mean his experience here on earth is anything but peaceful and restful. He's crucified by sinful men. And yet through that crucifixion he atones for our sin.

He brings peace between us and God. and then he turns to us and he says come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.
So we place our trust in him and we receive rest. The rest that comes from forgiveness. The rest from striving.
The rest from striving to be free of our debilitating sin. A rest from trying to justify our lives through our work. I think it's pretty clear you can hear from this and if you've heard me speak on the subject of the Sabbath before in other contexts you know that I think Christians are morally bound to keep the Sabbath commandment by observing the Lord's day.
What is nowadays Sunday not Sabbath like in the Old Testament in the old Saturday. That Sunday being a site for rest and worship I think is a non-negotiable for Christians and will in fact be a wonderful tool for leading you into deeper deeper rest.
[31:23] But this Lord's day will be of no eternal benefit to you if you do not cease from doing the work beneath the work. The work of trying to justify yourself before God or before your peers or before your own heart even.

The work of trying to find acceptance in this life. The work of trying to create meaning, ultimate meaning for your life. The work of trying to stone for your sin. You have to cease from that work and place your trust in the one who's already done all of that work for you.
You have to trust in Jesus your Savior and His work on the cross because it's His work on the cross that justifies us. It's His work on the cross that gives us God's acceptance.
It's His work on the cross that gives our lives unshakable meaning and it's His work on the cross that covers over our every sin and failure. And the Sabbath, well the Sabbath is a sign of that work that Jesus has done for us, that great salvation.
Do you know the number one reason why we don't observe the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day, why we find it so very hard to put down our tools and rest in worship on this day? It's not primarily a workaholism problem.
[32:46] It's not primarily that there isn't enough time in each week to do everything we need to do in advance. It's not primarily overbearing bosses or a toxic work culture that is demanding so much from us.

It is primarily a trust problem. We don't trust Christ enough to put our tools down and gather for worship and rest.
trust. We don't trust that he's actually got this world and our lives in his hand. We don't trust that our boss is not king but Christ is king.
We don't trust that he truly gives us the status, the acceptance, the justification that we're so desperately trying to build through our careers. we're still doing that work beneath the work all the time.
It's exhausting. We're doing the work beneath the work when Christ has already done that work for us. And so my friends if you want to find rest this morning, if you are tired and you want to find rest, obey the fourth commandment.
[34:01] Keep the Sabbath holy by placing your complete trust in the Lord of the Sabbath, the Lord who has labored for you at the cross, the Lord who says to you those beautiful words, come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.

Let's pray together. Our merciful Father we want to know this rest because I think all of us know the experience of physically resting without really resting.
Taking down time and yet not feeling at ease or at peace. And so we want to know this rest that comes from trusting in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath.
We want to know what it means to have him take our burdens. We want to know how we can trust in him so that we put down our tools and we entrust our lives to him. Help us Lord to experience

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this.
Help us to repent of a sin of ignoring you, ignoring your ways. And to turn towards Jesus Christ and to lay ourselves at his feet and say Lord do with me as you will. Save me, rescue me, give me rest. [35:18] Father I pray for any person who is here this morning who doesn't know that rest, who has never known Christ as their saviour, who lead them into rest. I pray that they would repent of a life lived ignoring him and come to him in faith this morning and find that rest.

rest. For all of us Lord, may we be examples of rest here at this church Lord. May we show a weary world what real rest looks like.
Not in an overly prescriptive legalistic way, but in a way that is trusting in the salvation won for us by the work of your son. Help us to do that better together.
Help us to order our lives better in the Monday through Saturday so that we can really truly set aside this day to glorify you and to be at rest in our souls. We ask for this blessing for Christ's sake. Amen.

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