

Last week we talked about a man that Jesus encountered at a pool where people were healed on a regular basis. This man had been there for 38 years waiting to be healed. Jesus spoke to him and instructed him to stand up, take up his mat and walk.

Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath,¹⁰ so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! The law doesn’t allow you to carry that sleeping mat!”

¹¹ *But he replied, “The man who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”*

¹² *“Who said such a thing as that?” they demanded.*

¹³ *The man didn’t know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd.¹⁴ But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.”¹⁵ Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.*

¹⁶ *So the Jewish leaders began harassing^[c] Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules.¹⁷ But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.”¹⁸ So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God. John 5:9-18 NLT*

I will not take time to do it in this message but to understand the context better you need to understand just how many extra rules the Pharisees had added to the Ten Commandments and the other instructions God had given the Jewish people in the Old Testament.

Today we are going to try to just look at Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath and understand what it means in relation to how we live our lives.

When God gave the law to Moses He outlined 10 specific commandments but there was one that has more explanation than any of the others.

⁸ *“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work,¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you.¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. Exodus 20:8-11 NLT*

So in our fast-paced extremely busy lives, what role does this commandment play? Our families are stretched to the max with school and sports activities, commitments to our hobbies and trying to fulfill the American dream. Oh and then we have our daily responsibilities to worry about.

Many of us have come to believe that the person with the busiest calendar is really living. We are busy and somehow that makes us feel good about ourselves. Yet let me ask you some questions.

Do you observe the Sabbath and keep it holy?

Do you believe that God created the concept of a Sabbath for us because we needed it?

Do you give God one day out of six or do you give Him just the hours you are at church?

You see I think all of us struggle with this one. Actually I am not sure we struggle with it at all. We probably will struggle with it as we look at God's intent and try to figure out a way to follow His example.

Calvin Miller stresses that intimacy with God cannot be rushed, that we cannot enjoy the presence of God if we are always looking at our watches. The idea of observing a Sabbath day is about rhythm and finding a way to arrange our lives so that we are in the rhythm ordained by God our Creator.

It is not about legalism but about understanding God's plan for our lives.

Three movements of Sabbath-keeping

Ceasing Resting Feasting

If you are taking notes you can write down those three words.

1. Ceasing

The Lord's day or Sabbath comes from a Hebrew verb Shabbat, which means to "cease or desist."

The people of Israel must keep the Sabbath day by observing it from generation to generation. This is a covenant obligation for all time.¹⁷ It is a permanent sign of my covenant with the people of Israel. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day he stopped working and was refreshed. Exodus 31:16-17 NLT

In the story of Creation we read that, "God blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy, because on it He ceased from all the work of creating that He had done." Genesis 2:3

The notion of ceasing from some things one day out of seven encompasses the idea of ceasing to feel the need to be productive. It is ceasing from worry and tension and it is letting go of some things that threaten to distract us from connecting to God.

A. Ceasing from work

Most working Americans work five days a week and then spend the weekends chasing their tails trying to accomplish everything that needs to be done at home. The result of this is that the Sabbath day is not a day when we release ourselves from the pressure of the work that "needs to

be done.” To cease working means that we don’t labor at anything that is work. Activity that is enjoyable and freeing and that is not being done to accomplish something can be acceptable Sabbath observance.

According to the Ten Commandments we are to dedicate a day to the Lord. It doesn’t say an hour or a morning or a Saturday night it says a day!

Some of you will almost be able to grasp this concept but my prayer is that God will enable you to find a way to live counter to the culture of business and learn to cease from work.

B. Ceasing from productivity

For six days God labored and on the seventh He stopped and He rested. We are driven by being productive. For many of us the idea that we could possibly give up a day of productivity seems absolutely absurd. We barely have time to make room for church let alone giving a whole day. When we free ourselves from the tyranny of being productive it allows us to spend the day with people. I’m not talking about because you have to but being in genuine relationships with others and using a portion of the Lord’s Day to interact and share your lives with one another. It’s about slowing down, taking deep breaths, and celebrating the goodness of God.

C. Ceasing from Possessiveness

In Judaism the Jews are called to live more frugally during the week so that they can enjoy the special foods and candles of the Sabbath. On the other hand they were forbidden to buy or sell on that Sabbath.

The special utensils and candles used in Sabbath observance were not possessed by the people. They owned them but in reality they were consecrated or dedicated to God for special use only on that day. This corresponds with the New Testament teaching that we do not own our possessions, but that we are merely entrusted with them in order to serve God with them. (2 Corinthians 9:11)

The idea of refraining from buying and selling on the Sabbath is so foreign to most Christians today that it seems impossible to try to teach about it. Yet in our own Country it was not that long ago that Blue laws were still observed. I don’t have time to tell you about it but I would encourage you to look it up and study the demise of these laws in our post Christian nation.

Do you know what I find intensely interesting? Christians have compromised and gone right along with the culture on this one with very little hesitation. The two major religions that still practice Sabbath observance in this way are Judaism and Islam. A vast majority of serious minded Muslims and Jews practice the avoidance of buying and selling on their Sabbath days.

There was a time not very long ago when sporting events, yard sales, hunting, shopping and especially school sponsored events would never have happened on Sunday.

Refraining from trade on this day allows us to readjust our focus from material possessions and what we want to what God wants in our lives.

2. Resting

The second meaning of the word Shabbat is to rest. In the Bible you will see that God intended this rest for people, animals and even the land. The question is how anyone can possibly rest when there is so much to do. The irony of taking a day off is that you will have extra strength and zeal for the other six days. I saw a definition recently from someone addressing this very topic: “**Rest:** Figure out what’s work for you and don’t do it.”

By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing, so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. Genesis 2:3

There are several kinds of rest that we need to look at for a few moments. Again the idea is that this might stimulate your thinking to make some needed changes. Think back with me for a moment before television, computers, movie theaters, and when factories, stores and restaurants were not open on Sunday to a time when families would gather on Sunday to just be together.

Again as the culture changed so did the church. Instead of rooting our lives in the scripture we just followed right along with the cultural norms. Does anybody see this as a danger? I wonder sometimes!

A. Spiritual Rest

I am sure that many you would have put physical rest first but the fact is that you cannot truly rest physically if you are not rested spiritually. If your spirits are ill at ease you cannot truly rest. The idea and value of a day set apart for remembering God’s grace has always been a part of Judea/Christian teaching.

One Hebrew scholar insists that the basic meaning of a biblical Sabbath is an “acceptance of the Sovereignty of God.” We always try to maintain control of our lives but on the Sabbath day we are to recognize and be reminded that God is the master of our time. We set aside our day to immerse ourselves in God’s word. We set our minds at ease by focusing them on heavenly things and resting on the grace of God.

Let me suggest that the Sabbath should begin in the evening and lead into the morning. The Hebrew evening/ morning sequence conditions us to the rhythms of grace! We begin to prepare our hearts and minds for encountering God’s presence by starting on Saturday evening. Upon waking on a Sunday morning our hearts have had a night of rest and we enter in together to the house of God and encounter Him through our singing and fellowship and His word.

This gives us the peace of God that we all need. The greatest result of Sabbath resting is the opportunity to know and experience to presence of God.

B. Physical Rest

"The story is told of a wagon train on its way from St. Louis to Oregon. Its members were devout Christians, so the whole group observed the habit of stopping for the Sabbath day. Winter was approaching quickly, however, and some among the group began to panic in fear that they wouldn't reach their destination before the heavy snows. Consequently, several members proposed to the rest of the group that they should quit their practice of stopping for the Sabbath and drive seven days a week.

This proposal triggered a lot of contention in the community. Finally it was suggested that the wagon train should split into two groups - those who wanted to observe the Sabbath and those who preferred to travel on that day. The proposal was accepted, and both groups set out and traveled together until the next Sabbath day, when one group continued while the other remained at rest. Guess which group got to Oregon first? You're right. The ones who kept the Sabbath reached their destination first. Both the people and the horses were so rested by their Sabbath observance that they could travel much more vigorously and effectively the other six days of the week." (Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, p. 65)

Earlier I read the fourth commandment from the Exodus 20 passage but let me share it with you from the book of Deuteronomy:

¹² *“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³ You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do. ¹⁵ Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, but the LORD your God brought you out with his strong hand and powerful arm. That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to rest on the Sabbath day.* Deut. 5:12-15 NLT

You know I wish that I had some great ideas of how you need to live this out but you are going to have to figure it out on your own. Maybe you need to discover your front or back porch or deck. Put up a swing and use it. Take a nap. Take a walk. Slow down. Breathe deeply on this day. Refuse to succumb to all the “oughts’ ” that threaten your tranquility and worship.

C. Emotional Rest

The Sabbath day is set apart to deepen your spiritual relationship with God and when observed we receive emotional healing as well. A great part of our emotional healing comes from solitude and community. Both should be experienced on the Sabbath day. We come together and we spend time with God alone on this day. We worship together, we pray together, we may even be in a life group together but we also find time on this day to be alone with God.

Our ceasing and resting on this day will allow us to renew our spirits and our physical bodies. But there is one other movement that should take place on the Sabbath.

3. Feasting

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Philippians 4:4 NLT

The notion of observing a Sabbath has to include celebration. In case you hadn't noticed we refer to our Sunday services as Celebrations and we included the word as one of our four C's. (Celebration, Community, Call and Christ-Centered)

So what does it mean to feast on the Sabbath? In my years of growing up it meant a special meal. Fried chicken or roast beef and it usually meant friends around the table. But there are other kinds of feasting. Let's look at them briefly.

A. Feasting on the Eternal

In Christianity we celebrate Jesus first coming to earth but we are also taught to anticipate His second return. When we come together on a Sunday we are to have clear and open minds so that we can take in the words that we hear and sing. Attending church is not supposed to be a spectator sport where you watch the performers on the stage. It is to be an encounter with God. That's why having the best voices and the best musicians is not all that important to me. I don't need to be impressed by the music, the arrangement, the sermon or the delivery of it, I just need to celebrate Christ and be impressed by Him.

Feasting on the Eternal means that we acknowledge our inability to function on our own with God. It means that we celebrate His goodness in our lives. It means we cry out to Him in celebration not because everything is going great in our lives but because He is great!

B. Feasting with Music

I am going to keep this very short but let me ask a question. Does the music in your public and private worship elevate God alone or is it subjectively slanted to focus on you and your feelings?

You will feast on God's presence when you sing songs that are slanted vertically rather than horizontally. In other words you are singing to God and not about God. You are speaking to Him directly and not singing testimonial type songs about how you feel. Discover great music and let it change your soul.

C. Feasting with Joy and Affection

It is simple really. Let the joy of Christ and your affection for Him overflow your life on this day. Set it apart to really participate in God's story.

Suggestions for Sabbath Observance:

- See this day for what it is: An opportunity to worship God without interruptions!
- Start on Saturday evening
- Consider reinstating the family meal together on Saturday evening in preparation for the Sabbath
- Think about others and pray for Christfollowers around the world
- Learn to love and cherish this precious gift given us by God
- Create some personal and family rituals or habits that will allow you to train your children around the wonders of this day.

There is an old hymn that we don't sing anymore that calls us to experience the rest of God.

There is a place of quiet rest, Near to the heart of God.
A place where sin cannot molest, Near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet, Near to the heart of God.
A place where we our Savior meet, Near to the heart of God.

*O Jesus, blest Redeemer, Sent from the heart of God,
Hold us who wait before Thee Near to the heart of God.*

This is a message that I don't expect everyone to process the same way but I think there is something in it for all of us. Let's look at one more reminder scripture and then I am going to pray.

“Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don't pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the LORD's holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don't follow your own desires or talk idly. ¹⁴ Then the LORD will be your delight. Isaiah 58:13-14 NLT