

## The Sabbath in the Tomb<sup>1</sup>

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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March 24, 2024

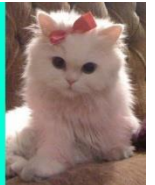
Text: Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 20:8-11, Luke 23:50-56

Purpose: From the very beginning of time, God instituted a time of rest and Sabbath for creation. God worked for six days creating the world, and then on the seventh day, He rested. This cycle of rest was codified in the Ten Commandments. At the end of the week, Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Jesus down off the cross and laid it in a new tomb he had prepared for himself. The last words Jesus said on the cross were, "*It is Finished!*" Just as God said that in the Garden in Genesis, Jesus said it at the cross. Now it was time to rest.

A cat died and went to heaven.

God met her at the gates and said, "You have been a good cat all these years. Anything you want is yours for the asking."

A cat died and went to Heaven. God met the animal at the Pearly Gates and said, "You have been a good cat all of these years. Anything you want is yours for the asking." The cat thought for



The cat thought for a minute and then said, "All my life I lived on a farm and slept on hard wooden floors. I would like a real fluffy pillow to sleep on."

God replied, "Say no more." Instantly the cat had a huge fluffy pillow.



A few days later, six mice were killed in an accident and they all went to heaven together. God met the mice at the gates with the same offer that He made to the cat.

The mice said, "Well, we have had to run all of our lives: from cats, dogs, and even people with brooms! If we could just have some little roller skates, we would not have to run again."

God answered, "It is done." All the mice had beautiful little roller skates.

About a week later, God decided to check on the cat. He found her sound asleep on her fluffy pillow. God gently awakened the cat and asked, "Is everything okay? How have you been doing? Are you happy?"

The cat replied, "Oh, it is WONDERFUL! The Meals on Wheels you have been sending over are delicious!"<sup>2</sup>

From the very beginning of time, God instituted a time of rest and Sabbath for His creation. Earlier we read that familiar passage of scripture in Genesis 2 about how God worked for six days creating the world, and then on the seventh day, the Sabbath, He rested. He was finished with His creation and He called it good.

This cycle of rest was codified in the Ten Commandments. If you turn over to Exodus you will find the fourth commandment in the Ten Commandments is the one related to the Sabbath. This commandment has the most number of words expanding on this idea of setting aside a day of rest.



This idea of rest even extended to use of the land. Every seven years, they were to leave the land untended so it too could rest. Every seven periods of seven they celebrated what they called the "Year of Jubilee." All debts were forgiven, all slaves were set free, all land was returned to the original family, and of course, the land observed a double rest, the 49<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> year.



Jesus Is Lord - Leviticus 25:4  
But let the seventh year be a Sabbath of rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord; do not put seed into your land or have your vines cut.

By the time Jesus arrives on the scene several thousands of years later, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes of the law had expanded the rules related to the Sabbath to such an extent, that you could not walk a certain distance, cook a morsel of food, or even do a good deed for someone without violating this commandment. When Jesus came to earth, he honored the Sabbath and took time to rest. In every area of Jesus' life, no one could find where He broke any of the commandments, including the Sabbath.



Rest is a part of God's intentional plan for us and His creation.

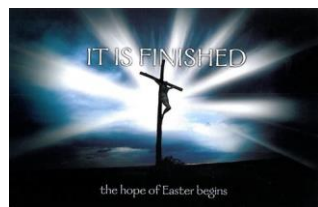
Over the past few weeks, we have been examining the Greatest Week in History – the final week of Jesus' life.



- During Jesus' final week He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, thereby fulfilling prophecy. We call that day, Palm Sunday.

- He cleansed the temple; pointing to the fact that the Lord's house should be a house of prayer – a place of prayer for all the nations.
- Jesus preached to the Nation of Israel and the leaders openly rejected Jesus. This stone became a rock of offense instead of their Rock of Salvation.
- On Friday of the Greatest Week in History, Jesus willingly went to the cross, like an innocent lamb, silent before his accusers, to be our Passover Lamb. All that are under the blood were saved. All that rejected the blood are under condemnation.
- Jesus willingly endured the agony of the cross for our sins. There were dozens of prophecies fulfilled by Jesus as He hung on the cross between two thieves. Not a bone was broken. He forgave His accusers. His followers scattered. He quoted from Psalm 22, *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me."* Even after His death, He was buried in a borrowed rich man's tomb, once again, fulfilling prophecy.
- At the end of the week, on Friday afternoon, just before twilight, just as the Passover Lambs were being killed across Jerusalem, Joseph of Arimathea was given permission to take the body of Jesus and lay Him in a tomb Joseph had prepared for himself.

The last words Jesus said on the cross were, ***"It is Finished!"*** Just as God said that in the Garden in Genesis, Jesus said it at the cross. Now it was time for Jesus to rest. His work was completed.



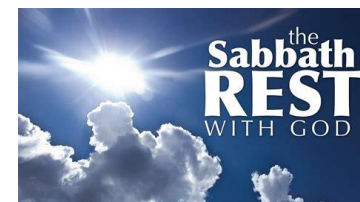
Today we can rest knowing that in Jesus had the power to lay His life down and utilize that same power to take up His

life again. Next week we will focus on the Resurrection of Jesus and the ongoing work of Jesus even today.

But for now, I do not want us to grieve over the cross (which is often the focus of this season of the year), nor do I want us to skip forward too quickly to the resurrection (which is cause for great celebration). I want us to simply stop and consider the day in between Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

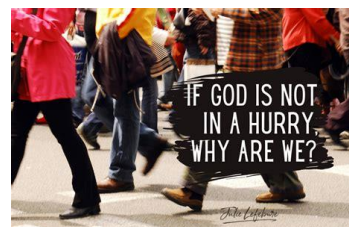
I want us to look at Jesus taking His Sabbath's rest.

How good are you at resting when your work is completed?



Warren Wiersbe once said, "The ability to calm your soul and wait before God is one of the most difficult things in the Christian life. Our old nature is restless...the world around us is frantically in a hurry. But a restless heart usually leads to a reckless life."

I know I have a restless spirit that avoids unproductive moments of time. I like to be busy doing something or else I feel as if I have squandered something very valuable. But God wants us to set aside time to simply rest, wait, and pray.



**Rest.** It's a word we hear often enough, but do we really understand how important it is in our lives? When I read through the Gospels I am impressed at the calm pace Jesus kept each day.

You don't see Jesus in a hurry. Even when one of his closest friends was sick, Jesus did not rush over there to

heal him. He even waited four days before arriving. When he arrived, Lazarus was already dead and buried. Can there be a lesson for us concerning our need for a Sabbath rest?

The story is told of two woodsmen. One day one woodsman challenged another to an all-day tree chopping contest. The challenger worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. The other man had a leisurely lunch and took several breaks during the day. At the end of the day, the challenger was surprised and annoyed to find that the other fellow had chopped substantially more wood than he had.



“I don’t get it,” he said. “Every time I checked, you were taking a rest, yet you chopped more wood than I did.”

“What you didn’t notice,” said the winning woodsman, “was that every time I sat down to rest, I was sharpening my ax.”

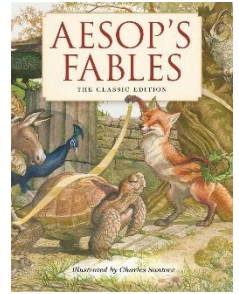


Throughout Jesus’ ministry, He took time away from the press of the crowds. Sometimes it was simply spent with the disciples and other times it was a time to be alone.

Jesus used these times to rest and pray. This was Jesus’ way of “recharging” His spiritual, physical and emotional batteries. In doing so, He set an example for you and me to follow.

We are a people too busy for our own good, too busy to stop and realize that in our frantic business we are actually accomplishing less and aging more.

According to a Greek legend, in ancient Athens a man noticed the great storyteller Aesop playing childish games with some little boys. He laughed and jeered at Aesop, asking him why he wasted his time in such frivolous activity.



Aesop responded by picking up a bow, loosening its string, and placing it on the ground. Then he said to the critical Athenian, “Now, answer the riddle, if you can. Tell us what the unstrung bow implies?” The man looked at it for several moments but had no idea what point Aesop was trying to make. Aesop explained, “If you keep a bow always bent, it will break eventually; but if you let it go slack, it will be fit for use when you want it.” People are also like that. That’s why we all need to take time to rest.

Shouldn’t we take Jesus’ example seriously? Start by setting aside a special time to relax physically and renew yourself emotionally and spiritually. You will be at your best for the Lord if you have taken time to loosen the bow.



Interesting, isn’t it? Not only did Jesus give us an example of Sabbath’s rest, but as I said earlier, God did as well. In Exodus 31:13-14 we read of the Lord telling Moses to say this: *“Tell the people of Israel to keep my Sabbath day, for the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant between me and you forever. It helps you to remember that I am the Lord, who makes you holy. Yes, keep the Sabbath day, for it is holy. Anyone who desecrates it must die; anyone who works on that day will be cut off from the community.”*

Observance of the Sabbath day was a top priority from God's perspective. In fact, obedience to this commandment was so important that the death penalty was prescribed for any who disobeyed. The question is, why was the Sabbath given such significance?

I believe by keeping the Sabbath, we honor God and place God at the top of our priorities. You could say a clear understanding of the Sabbath is directly related to our worshipping of God. When we don't slow down and take our Sabbath's rest, we rob time away from prayer and fellowship with God through worship. Our failure to rest actually keeps us from worship.

I believe one of the greatest strategies of Satan is to get us so busy that we do not have time to rest and prepare our hearts to listen to God. Here in America we are workaholics. We are worn out by the demands of our day. We need to intentionally plan our week so we can have time to come and worship God. It takes time to be holy and we need to be intentional in planning our times of rest.



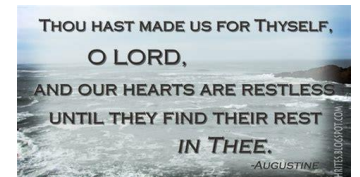
We live in a world that strives to make every area of our life as efficient as possible. We want and pay for convenience. We want our microwave meals quick. We want our drive-throughs speedy. We want every area of our life quick and easy. We want our coffee instant, our rice done in a minute, and our mashed potatoes done in an instant. ... Sadly, we also want our relationship with God to be the same. We say our prayers in a hurry, we want our

worship service to start promptly and end promptly. Our minds are restless and we are ready to rush forward with the rest of the day.

I am sure someone is sitting here thinking about what you will be doing after church today. Another may be thinking about a project at work, or an assignment due for school, or what they are going to do next week. Our minds are restless and we cannot focus on God and how He died for our sins to save our soul because we do not know how to simply "rest."



I know this is true because when I have sat where you are sitting, I do the same thing! My mind is captivated by all the distractions of life that drive me away from God's presence because I cannot rest and be still before Him. I need to spend more time in solitude so I can keep my mind focused upon Jesus Christ. It takes time to be holy, it takes time to be able to worship God.



There are benefits that only come when we take time to be with the Lord. As someone once said, "Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in God."

There is a rest for you if you will only take time and listen to God. Zephaniah 3:17 says, "*The Lord your God in your midst. The Mighty One, will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.*"



There is a **Redemption rest** for us when we come and abide in His presence. God wants to meet you there in that quiet place. He will rejoice over you, he will quiet your restless heart with His love, and what I love about this passage of scripture is that it says that “God even delights in you with singing.” God is waiting to spend time with you. What an amazing promise for those that believe and rest.

Another benefit of rest can be what is called a **sinner’s rest**. When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, He comes alongside us to help carry our load.

Matthew 11:28 gives us an invitation to this rest, “*Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*” If you are weighed down by the events of life, the complexities of our world, the financial pressures of our modern world, come back to God and He will give you the promised rest for your soul.



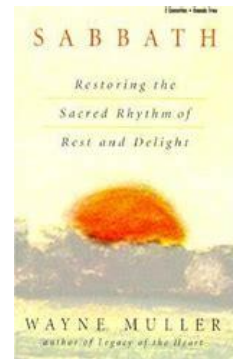
A third rest we can find is a **Saints Rest**. Mark 6:30 says, “*Then the Apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what*

*they had taught. And Jesus 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.*” Even those that serve the Lord have struggles finding time to rest and pray.

As many of you know, I meet with a Peer Learning group each month. Five in our group are pastors, one is a college administrator, two are hospital chaplains, three are now retired, and one is a stay-at-home mom. Often during our meetings, our phones will chime with text messages, and urgent emails. This has got to be one of the areas we all struggle with – balancing the demands of ministry and family. What gets shortchanged is rest and the result of a lack of rest is a lack of worship.

In his book, *SABBATH: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*, Wayne Mueller writes:

Sabbath is more than just a day to “catch up on television and errands.” Rather it is “time when we take our hand from the plow and let God and the earth care for things, while we drink, if only for a few moments, from the fountain of rest and delight.”



It seems like such an obvious thing and yet we constantly underestimate our need for rest. The truth is, no one is capable of experiencing the most important and necessary kind of rest there is: **Soul Rest** apart from the saving grace of Jesus Christ. It is true we can slow down, calm down and even shut down. But, apart from the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, no one can experience Soul Rest, that rest that we receive when we are finally able to lay our very lives down along with all the stress, worry, fear, terror, misery and pain.

George MacDonald in *Discovering the Character of God* wrote:

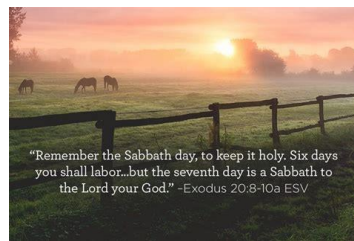
When, with all thy loved around thee,  
Still, thy heart says, "I am lonely."  
It is well; the truth has found thee:  
Rest is with the Father only.

We need rest just as we need air, water and food to survive. The fact is when we fail to rest fully and deeply, we not only hurt ourselves, we run the risk of hurting others. Physical rest is every bit as important as emotional and spiritual – we do not need to underplay its importance.

In *The Twenty-Four-Hour Society*, Martin Moore-Ede says:

“Our most notorious industrial accidents in recent years—Exxon Valdez, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, the fatal navigational error of Korean Air Liner 007—all occurred in the middle of the night. In the Challenger space shuttle disaster, key NASA officials made the ill-fated decision to go ahead with the launch after working twenty hours straight and getting only two to three hours of sleep the night before. Their error in judgment cost the lives of seven astronauts and nearly killed the U.S. space program. We ignore our need for rest and renewal at the peril of others and ourselves.”

As we close this morning, I want to encourage each person here to make a commitment to obey the commandment God gave us – Remember the Sabbath and make it Holy. God designed us to need rest at every level of life, from physical to emotional to spiritual. We all need to seek



solitude and peace on a regular basis. And may we, in our times of rest and solitude, open our hearts to the ministry of the Holy Spirit as God tills the soil of our souls in order to make us better able to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

I know this was not your typical Palm Sunday sermon. Most of the time on Palm Sunday, I preach about Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. We examined that a few weeks ago. I wanted to focus on making Sabbath Rest a priority in our lives once again. We need to re-engage the rhythm of God’s creation and work six days, and rest one. Working seven days a week only dulls our ax, dulls our mind to making good decisions, dulls our spirit to hear the voice of God leading and guiding us.



**Rest in the assurance** of your salvation found in Jesus Christ. He has finished it and we can claim it.

**Rest in the assurance** that our sins were taken care of at Calvary. Our sins are now separated from God as far as the East is from the West. God has cast them away and forgiven us. We do not need to live under condemnation anymore.

**Rest in the assurance** that the Lord will meet us there in those times we come aside and rest and worship Him. He will provide the rest for our desperately tired souls.

## LET US PRAY

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Outline from sermon by Darron Khan, “Just Rest”

<sup>2</sup> Mikey’s Funnies – March 21, 2013 – A Cat Funny