

Mark 2:23-3:6 (NLT)

The Gospel of Mark Jesus, Lord of Rest

Introduction: Last week we talked about Jesus as the Lord of sabbath and king of mercy - we observed how Jesus set sabbath observance aside in order to fulfill his mission to bring mercy and rest to suffering humanity. Mark clearly highlights this for Jesus' followers - it's an exhortation to the church to not put off mercy and justice in the name of religious observance or law, but to pursue it continually as a sign of the kingdom of God.

But I think that it would be amiss if we left the subject of sabbath there. To begin talking about Sabbath we need to talk about our Christian culture's rejection of it based on not understanding Jesus' teaching in Mark. Many Modern Christians have taken this passage as Jesus rejecting or opposing sabbath. Many well meaning Christians note, "Jesus didn't keep sabbath, and the NT never explicitly teaches sabbath observance." But as I pointed out last week, Jesus isn't anti-sabbath but is clearly showing the misinterpretation and abuses of it. Jesus' point is to correct Sabbath observance not to set it aside. As Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath."

Christians are clearly not obligated to keep Mosaic law - so does that mean that we are free from keeping the Sabbath? It depends on what we mean by free. First the Sabbath shows up long before Mosaic Law. Sabbath shows up in the creation account, before the fall, before sin, before the need for the law or law keeping. So the subject of Sabbath keeping must be more than a question of law keeping or breaking, and seems to speak more about human well being and a way of life rather than a religious observance, or day off for the Jews. What if, by Christians

rejecting sabbath keeping we are actually cutting ourselves off from part of what it means to be human, from what it means to be made in the image of the God who rests on the 7th day?

1. What is the Sabbath; what is its purpose?

- a. There are a handful of key passages on Sabbath for our study and consideration (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 16: 20:8-11; Deut 5:13-15; Matt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:1-16).
- b. The first mention of Sabbath is found in Genesis 2, **“So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.”**
 - i. *The ancient Rabbis taught that on the seventh day, God created Menuha (Rest, in Hebrew) - tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose - rest, in the deepest possible sense of fertile, healing stillness. Until the Sabbath, the creation was unfinished. Only after the birth of Menuha, only with tranquility and rest, was the circle of creation made full and complete.” - Wayne Muller*
 - ii. It would seem here that sabbath is about finding contentment in life and enjoying the work that we have cultivated and accomplished. God created the world and then sat back and took it all in - Like an artist stepping back from his canvas - to behold and delight in the work that was done.

- c. Last week I mentioned the sabbath command found in the ten commandments was a legislated merciful day of rest from Yahweh. It was given to Israel as an act of mercy - to give rest to all within Israel's society from the rich to the poor, the powerful to the weak, the insider and the outsider, all the way down to even your animals. Reading the commandment it seems that sabbath is just a day off, but it is much more than that. It seems to be more about following Yahweh's own pattern and rhythm - For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is within them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. Aligning our rhythm with God's, it's about observing his way and being like him.
- d. When Moses reintroduces sabbath to the next generation of Israelites in Deuteronomy 5:12–15, he ties the Sabbath directly to freedom from slavery. **“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.”**
 - i. Here, Sabbath observance is an act of resistance and a declaration of freedom. We are more than the products that we produce. This had a very practical observance for Israel - they were to remember their slavery and their salvation by resting on the sabbath.
- e. When we come to the NT we see that true Sabbath is found in finding rest, being with, and learning from the Lord of the Sabbath - Jesus Messiah. Jesus said, **“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will**

find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” - Matthew 11:28-30

- f. And finally the writer of Hebrews shows us that Sabbath is about kingdom anticipation. From the beginning sabbath was pointing to the rest of the New Creation, not just a day. It's about the kingdom of God - observing, anticipating and looking forward to the Rest that the people of God will enjoy for all eternity in the New Creation, through the finished work of Jesus our Messiah.
 - i. Sabbath is a sanctuary in time and a disposition of the heart when we set aside all of our weekday concerns and devote ourselves to rest and spiritual enrichment - an act of resistance against our consumeristic, product producing, discontented culture. It is to rest physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. To remember the things of God -his nature and his presence, his provision and blessings. It is a day to renew through feasting, resting and worship and play. It is a practiced anticipation of the new creation.And it's supposed to last a whole day. 24 hours - Begins at sunset goes into night and then the day.

2. Why we need Sabbath.

- a. **We need the healing rest of Sabbath:** So many Christians for too long have objected to Sabbath observance, but have you ever stopped to realize that God put this command into the bedrock of his society? It is part of the 10 commandments - Christians don't set those other commandments aside, why this one? Maybe because we don't see how it matters morally, how it fits with all the others? Just walk into Barnes and Noble

or browse Target's book section or search Amazon for health and wellness - you will find an endless amount of books written on the subject of rest, stress, anxiety, burnout, etc. To Rest is part of what it means to be human and God has been telling us from the beginning, and our human hearts just endlessly search for the rest that only Jesus can bring..

- i. It's fascinating to note that many of Jesus' healing miracles were performed on the sabbath. Maybe scripture is trying to communicate to us - that the sabbath is a time for healing - both physically and spiritually, as we commune with the Lord. A time to restore both body and soul - an observance of the day when God will make all things new and heal our broken and tattered bodies forever.

b. We need the Counterformation - to the image and purpose of God that sabbath produces.

- i. Many neglect to rest or do not have the opportunity to rest, given the patterns of their lives. With the advance of technology, people can work anywhere and anytime. In 2014 The Economist reported that 60% of people who use smartphones are connected to their offices for 13.5 or more hours a day.
- ii. I wonder what that percentage and number is currently in the midst of the stay at home/ shelter in place order? We are connected to technology now more than ever before, and there seem to be no healthy borders in place between work and personal life, because most people's work is taking place in the midst of their personal life. When was the last time you turned off your phone for a few hours, disconnected from technology for a day; spent time in the backyard to enjoy the sounds of nature,

went on a walk, just to process your life, to talk to your spouse, children, or friend, to talk with Jesus? When was the last time you sat down to read for the simple pleasure of it? When was the last time you intentionally even defiantly did some act, sat and relaxed, pondered, stopped to take in the view - to show that you are not a slave to your work or to our consumeristic, slavish culture?

iii. In a fast paced society like ours we don't often take the time to stop and consider how our rhythms and priorities are shaping our identities and values. (I would say that it is intentionally designed so that we won't stop and consider what is happening). A day off is usually a time to either wear ourselves out in pleasure or to catch up on errands, things around the house, yard work or binge watch on netflix. Where is time for reflection and contemplation, for focused gratitude, for true rest? When we set time aside to stop, to make time sacred, to consider God, his provision and blessings, who he has made us to be, to consider and enjoy the fruits of our labor it is transformative..

1. How we treat our bodies that have been made in the image of God matters, how we live within the creation matters, how we see ourselves matters - we are not created as slaves, made to do God's work, but image bearers of God, fellow laborers with him in his kingdom work, and that matters for what it means to be human. How we live out that message can make a huge difference in society.

iv. *"In our own contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative. It is resistance because it is a*

visible insistence that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of commodity goods. Such an act of resistance requires enormous intentionality and communal reinforcement amid the barrage of seductive pressures from the insatiable insistences of the market, with its intrusion into every part of our life from the family to the national budget. . . . But Sabbath is not only resistance. It is alternative. It is an alternative to the demanding, chattering, pervasive presence of advertising and its great liturgical claim of professional sports that devours all of our 'rest time.' The alternative on offer is the awareness and practice of the claim that we are situated on the receiving end of the gifts of God.” - Walter Brueggemann, Sabbath as Resistance

c. We need the reminder of God’s grace in physical ways:

- i. Sabbath observance forces us to remember that we are in every way recipients of God’s mercy and grace.
- ii. *The sabbath teaches us grace because it connects us experientially to the basic truth that nothing we do will earn God’s love. As long as we are working hard, using our gifts to serve others, experiencing joy in our work along with toil, we are always in danger of believing that our actions trigger God’s love for us. Only in stopping, really stopping, do we teach our hearts and souls that we are loved apart from what we do. - Lynn Baab, Sabbath Keeping*
- iii. Sabbath helps break the endless cycle of doing and finding our identity in our activity. Sabbath helps us to practice and prioritize being - being with God, being with others, being at home with ourselves.. Simply being human

d. Sabbath is a physical and practical way we say:

- 1. I am not a slave**
- 2. I am a recipient of Grace!**
- 3. My health and healing matters**
- 4. I was made to enjoy life**
- 5. I am more than the products I produce, my employee, my neighbor is more than the products that they produce..**

3. How we observe Sabbath well.

- a. I would encourage you as an individual or a member of your family to seek the leading of the Spirit in this regard - Begin with this question: where do I need to focus first? Where do I need rest? Take small steps, trying to do everything all at once rarely makes for healthy growth in the long run.
- b. Sabbath observance is about ceasing from our normal labors but be careful that it doesn't become a day that kills joy.
- c. *"The idea that by saying no to making some things happen, deep permission arises for other things to happen. When we cease our daily labor, other things - love, friendship, prayer, touch, singing, rest - can be born in the space created by our rest. Walking with a friend, reciting a prayer, caring for children, sharing bread and wine with family, friends and neighbors..." - Wayne Muller, Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in our Busy Lives*
 - i. Good questions: What refreshes me? What brings joy, gratitude, and worship?
 - ii. Talk to other Christians and members of our church and leadership to get ideas of how to observe Sabbath well.

d. Seek these 4 principles in observing sabbath:

- i. Take time captive - Cease from your normal day to day routine - make this time sacred, observe and practice unhurried rest
- ii. Remember who you are - created by God, made in his image, for fellowship with him, saved by Grace, loved supremely
- iii. Enjoy what you have - you have so much - be content, be thankful, rest and revel in God's provision with your friends, your family. Celebrate that together
- iv. Seek the presence of God - The Lord of the Sabbath. Cultivate unhurried intimacy with Jesus and with your Father, through the Holy Spirit

4. Prayer: Gracious God, in six days you created all things. On the seventh day you finished your work by resting. You also blessed and hallowed the seventh day, setting it aside as a day of rest. Teach us, Lord, what this means for us. May our lives not primarily be formed by the demands of our work, the expectations of our culture, or the compulsions of our feelings. Rather, may our lives be formed by you, by your example, by your truth. Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. *Amen.*