

Biblical Anthropology

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion"
(Genesis 1:26 ESV)*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in
place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
(Psalm 8:3-4 ESV)*

Rest

April 14th, 2024

Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Genesis 2:1-3; that's on page 2 in your church Bibles. We'll also be looking at Exodus 20:8-11; that's on page 61 in your church Bibles. This morning we are going to be talking about REST. Last week we talked about the fact that human beings were created to WORK. Work is an important PART of who we are – but it is not the whole. We are not robots. We are not worker bees – we are human beings, made in the image and likeness of God – so WORK MATTERS, but so also does REST. REST is not A BUG or a VIRUS introduced into the human experience by the FALL; NO, REST is A FEATURE. REST is part of our design as human beings; and that is what we'll be talking about today, so hopefully you have your Bibles open by now to Genesis 2:1-3. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 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. 3 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.” (Genesis 2:1-3 ESV)

Now, as I said last week, God didn't rest on the seventh day because HE WAS TIRED; God worked for 6 days and then rested on the 7th day to set us an example. We know that because the

Bible says that in Exodus 20:8-11. Flip forward about 59 pages now in your Bibles in order to locate that passage. While giving the 10 Commandments Moses says:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 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. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.” (Exodus 20:8-11 ESV)

Now, if you grew up in the church then you probably know that there has been some CONTROVERSY around the issue of how we should understand and apply the biblical teaching about REST or SABBATH. My goal for this morning is to outline the controversy fairly briefly, but then to spend the bulk of our time explaining, applying and appreciating the life-giving principle. So buckle up, because we’re going to be moving quickly for the next several minutes. There are 4 competing perspectives operating within the broad boundaries of the Christian church with respect to this issue of SABBATH. Let me walk you through them.

4 Positions On The Sabbath:

The first one is held to by groups like the Seventh Day Adventists and the Seventh Day Baptists.

1. The Seventh Day Sabbatarians

These folks believe that the Old Testament Sabbath is still in effect. They think you all are a day late for church because you should have been here on Saturday. Saturday is the SEVENTH DAY – that’s when the real believers gather for rest and worship! In general, folks in this group fail to understand the NEWNESS of the New Covenant. They forget that Jeremiah said that the NEW COVENANT would be DIFFERENT in several key respects. They forget or they ignore the fact that the Apostle Paul said in Colossians 2:16-17:

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17 ESV)

That seems pretty clear to me as indeed, it has seemed pretty clear to most Christians over the years and as such, groups that hold to this view have traditionally been categorized as CULTS – meaning that they exist outside the outer boundary of what constitutes authentic or orthodox Christianity. They are missing key elements of what it means to believe in the gospel. So that one, I think we can consider a BRIDGE TOO FAR.

The second major interpretation would be the one commonly associated with the Puritans and with several branches of the reformed Protestant tree. These are folks who understand:

2. Sunday As The Christian Sabbath

In essence, these folks take everything the Jews believed about the Sabbath and they transfer that more or less wholesale to SUNDAY – the Lord’s Day. To be clear, I think these people are our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is a legitimately Christian perspective. I don’t happen to agree with it– but I love and respect many people who do. These folks would say that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, represented a major transition and therefore it is now appropriate for us to worship on the first day of the week – but they want to do guided and constrained by Old Testament Law.

This was a pretty common perspective within American evangelicalism in the mid-20th century. I remember as a kid that you wouldn’t dare fuss about in the garden on the Lord’s Day. You wouldn’t dare throw the baseball around on the Lord’s Day – or if you did, you wouldn’t do it in the front yard, that’s for sure. You might get a visit from the elders! Most of us today would think of this position as a bit legalistic – but as I said it has been a very common perspective within a certain slice of North American fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism.

The third position, which was originally a Lutheran perspective, but that has also become fairly common within certain evangelical churches in North America, would be called the “Sabbath as Ceremonial Law” perspective.

3. Sabbath As Ceremonial Law

In this view, the Sabbath laws applied only to Israel and never to the church. They were part of the ceremonial law that was fulfilled and done away with by Jesus – just like eating kosher. So in the New Testament you can rest and worship on any day you like. You can go to church on Wednesday or Saturday night, if you like, because there is nothing particularly special about Sunday. These folks aren't opposed to gathering on Sunday, by any stretch, but they also don't see anything particularly significant about that day.

The fourth view, is the one that is fairly characteristic of most major Baptist denominations in North America today – and many if not most evangelical denominations in North America today. It is generally referred to as “the fulfillment view”.

4. The Fulfillment View

Under this view we understand that Christ FULFILLED the Sabbath LAW for us. Having done so, he offers us TRUE and everlasting REST for our souls – we talked about that last week.

Under this view there would be no biblical basis for the absolute prohibition of certain activities on Sunday - though it is viewed as a particularly appropriate day for corporate rest and worship, because of the Lord's resurrection from the dead. Rest and worship on SUNDAY is considered PARTICULARLY FITTING as opposed to morally or legally required.

This the view held by our denomination.

As some of you will know, I sit on the Affirmation of Faith Committee for our denomination and we are in the process right now of updating and expanding our Statement of Faith – not to change any of our core beliefs but to update some of the language and to strengthen some of the sections to address more contemporary challenges. Here is the proposed wording for the section on the Lord's Day – which hasn't been approved yet, but that will be presented for affirmation shortly. It reads as follows:

“We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day in honour of his glorious resurrection and is a **particularly appropriate day** for corporate worship.”

That's it. We don't outlaw any particular activities on Sunday, but we do think it wise for congregations to identify a common day for rest and worship and we think it particularly fitting for that day to be on the Lord's Day.

I agree with that position 100%.

I think we should get together – to the extent that we are able - not because we HAVE TO – not because the Mosaic Law requires us to – but because we WANT TO; we NEED TO and we LOVE TO. We take the same basic approach in our Statement of Faith here. We don't outlaw particular activities on the Lord's Day, rather we say that:

“Activities on the Lord's Day should be thoughtfully considered and commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”

So that's where we land as a congregation.

We maintain the principle of Sabbath, not as a LAW, but as a guide. And we receive the principle of the Sabbath the way New Testament people should: AS A GIFT TO ENJOY – not a burden to bear – which prepares well for the main portion of our conversation this morning. Understanding the controversy around the principle is important – it is helpful to know what other Christians think about this – and it is important to know where we have landed as a group, but FAR MORE IMPORTANT than understanding the controversy, is the need for us to DELIGHT in the principle itself. Human beings need REST. Human beings BENEFIT from rest. Human beings are healed and restored by the regular and corporate practice of Sabbath – so let's spend a few minutes now talking about why that is.

Why Do We Rest?

First of all, human beings need rest and Sabbath because REST protects us from the idolatry of work.

1. To protect us from the idolatry of work

Remember, most IDOLS are GOOD THINGS that we begin to treat like GOD THINGS; we've talked about this before. Our children can become idols, our spouse can become an idol, our reputation can become an idol – and of course, our work can become an idol and the principle of SABBATH is the Bible's way of keeping this GOOD THING in proper perspective.

Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 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. (Exodus 20:9-10 ESV)

There's the rhythm: six days of work and one day of rest.

Now even though this is a sermon on REST, we should probably stop and be impressed by that ratio. The Bible does not commend 1 day of LABOUR followed by 1 day of REST. It is not even close to being an even ratio. It is 6 days of labour FOLLOWED BY 1 day of rest. So, LAZINESS is not the goal here. If your definition of "work/life balance" is 3 days of work followed by 4 days of rest, and you're hoping for AI to make that possible in the near future, you need to make an adjustment.

You were made to WORK!

You will not FEEL fully human until you are doing something with a great deal of your time that glorifies God and blesses other people. You were made for that – but not only that. You also need to REST and WORSHIP.

6 days – 1 day, and that ONE DAY should enhance and enable the other 6. Tim Keller says here:

"Resting, or practicing Sabbath, is also a way to help us get perspective on our work and put it in its proper place. Often we can't see our work properly until we get some distance from it and reimmerse ourselves other activities. Then we see that there is more to life than work. With that perspective and rested bodies and minds, we return and do more and better work."¹

¹ Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 242.

Yes! That's it exactly! REST allows us to step back from our work and to see the bigger picture. When we step back, we see how what we do fits into what God is doing. That's helpful. That's humanizing. That's WISE.

Secondly, we rest so as:

2. To remember the grace and goodness of God

You probably know that the 10 Commandments are actually given TWICE in the Bible; once in Exodus 20 and once in Deuteronomy 5. The Book of Deuteronomy is largely a collection of sermons that Moses gave, and so it appears that at some point he was PREACHING on the LAW and he expands a little bit, which is really helpful. In Deuteronomy 5:12-15 he says:

“ ‘Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.... 15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. **Therefore** the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:12-15 ESV)

So here in this EXPANDED VERSION of the 10 Commandments we learn that one of the reasons God gave us the principle of Sabbath was SO THAT we would remember that we were not created to be SLAVES. Human beings were created to be FREE.

Isn't that good?

Tim Keller again is helpful here, he says:

“Anyone who cannot obey God's command to observe the Sabbath is a slave, even a self-imposed one.”²

And that's why we think that Sunday is a particularly appropriate day for us to take our day of REST, because on Sunday JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD. On Sunday, God declared that our

² Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 244.

debt was paid. On SUNDAY the chains fell off and we were free! So Sunday is the perfect day to remember and celebrate the grace and goodness of God to us – can you say amen to that?

Amen.

That's why every Sunday is supposed to be a day of joy, and Christians have tried different ways of expressing that over the years. Maybe you know that back in the old days Christians used to FAST on Wednesdays and Fridays – usually in the sense of not eating meat or other delicacies. And some Christians still practice that tradition – the Eastern Orthodox Christians still do that. BUT – you were not allowed to fast on Sunday. Sunday was for FEASTING not for FASTING. Sunday was for JOY. Sunday was for GRATITUDE!!! Every Sunday is resurrection Sunday!! Every Sunday is EASTER, in that sense. It is a day for remembering that our slate has been wiped clean, our sins have been cast into the depths of the sea, our debts have been paid, our ransom has been offered – and we are FREE!

“Free at last, Free at last, thank God Almighty we are free at last!”³

That's what every Lord's Day gathering is about. The devil will whisper in your ear that you are a slave. He will tell you that you are shackled to a millstone of sin and shame. He will tell you are just a cog in the big bad machine.

Don't you believe it.

You are not a slave.

You were never meant to be a slave – and if you have been born again through the person and work of Christ then you are not a slave. Say it with me if you know it, brothers and sisters:

“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36 KJV)

³ Martin Luther King Jr.

That's the gospel! And we gather every single Lord's Day to remember and celebrate it together – thanks be to God!

Thirdly, it is WISE and helpful to rest and practice Sabbath because REST refreshes our bodies and our minds.

3. To refresh our bodies (and minds)

Human beings are not solar powered robots. We do not have an infinite supply of energy. When I turned 45 something weird happened to me. I actually went to the doctor to figure out what was going on. Dr. Ho came in and he was kind of surprised to see me – because I don't normally go to the doctor and so he asked me what was going on and I said: "Grant, I think there is something wrong with me. Lately, if I go two or three weeks without a day off, I have been feeling bad. Sometimes I get headaches. Sometimes I get a rash on my face. Something's up man, I think I might have cancer or something."

And he looked at me and said: "You don't have cancer. You're getting old."

Which I thought was a little rude, actually.

But it was TRUE!

When I turned 45 all the sudden, I started getting tired. I discovered that I don't have infinite supplies of energy. And the prescription, literally, was REST. Grant told me that I couldn't wake up as early as I was doing and that I had to take days off and go on vacation – and the Board started enforcing all these restrictions on me. 2019 was the first year the Board made me to take all my vacation time – and wouldn't you know, it turns out I needed all that rest because 2020 and 2021 probably would have KILLED ME if they hadn't done that.

Our bodies need rest – some of us figure that intuitively, some of us need to have that beaten into our thick skulls by our friends and physicians – but however you get there – get there – because if you don't rest, eventually your work – in the home and in the field – will suffer.

Now, I put the words (and minds) in brackets there for a reason, because I think we have underestimated our need for MENTAL rest and renewal as modern-day people, and the need for us to adjust here is urgent because of the STRAIN that the new digital realities are placing upon us. Life in the digital age is MENTALLY EXHAUSTING – did you know that?

So much of our work now happens remotely and via screens such that our brains are depleted and our attention diffused to an unprecedented degree. It is a major contributor to the epidemic of anxiety and depression that we are experiencing as a society. Jonathan Haidt – who is an atheist – recently came out prescribing religious rituals as the antidote to digitally induced depression. True story. In his book *The Anxious Generation* he diagnoses the problem and then he suggests a solution; he says:

“In the virtual world there is no daily, weekly, or annual calendar that structures when people can and cannot do things. Nothing ever closes, so everyone acts on their own schedule. In short, there is no consensual structuring of time, space or objects around which people can use their ancient programming for sacredness to create religious or quasi-religious communities. Everything is available to every individual, all the time, with little or no effort. There is no Sabbath and there are no holy days. Everything is profane.”⁴

The human mind is WIRED for rhythms of work and rest. It is programmed for cycles of PROFANE and SACRED activity – Haidt says. Now by PROFANE, he doesn’t mean sinful, he just means PRACTICAL and EARTHY. Human beings need to spend time thinking about how to EAT, where to SLEEP, how to keep WARM, how to have babies and feed babies – that’s what he means by profane. You MIND is wired to think about those things MOST OF THE TIME. But not all the time. You need BREAKS when you are focusing upon THE SPIRITUAL, the ULTIMATE, the REAL. If you don’t have that rhythm, your mind will begin to breakdown, so even as an atheist, Haidt goes on to say:

“A healthier way to live would be to seek out more in-person communal events, especially those that feel as though there is an elevated or moral purpose and that involve some synchronous movement, such as religious services”⁵

⁴ Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024), 204.

⁵ Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024), 206.

So what does the good doctor prescribe to all these anxious, depressed kids whose minds have been ruined by the internet? “Go to church once a week. Sit when they sit. Kneel when they kneel. Stand when they stand. Sing when they sing. Think about that which is true, beautiful and ultimate.”

Even the atheists know that we need this!

SABBATH is necessary for your body and SABBATH is necessary for your MIND – even more so in the digital age.

Now, there are other reasons why we rest that I could have mentioned – we didn’t talk for example about the need to strengthen our connection to community – but I’m going to save that one for two messages from now – so I’ll leave you with this: We also need to rest because REST is a way of exercising TRUST.

4. To exercise trust in God

We see that in the first mention of the Sabbath principle in action, back in Exodus 16. This is BEFORE the giving of the law, by the way, in Exodus 20 – so the PRINCIPLE of Sabbath actually PREDATES the LAW of the Sabbath. The law was temporary and provisional – it was given to RESTRAIN sinful people. It was given to KEEP THEM in the place God wanted them to be – but the goal of course is for us to WANT TO BE in the place that we should be, that’s why we’re talking about a principle of Sabbath that we DELIGHT IN as opposed to a LAW OF SABBATH that we are beholden to. Alright – so there is a principle even before the law, and in the first mention of that, God devises something of a test. He says that he will send MANNA 6 days out of 7. For 6 days they are to go out and gather manna, but they are NOT to do that on the 7th day. The 7th day is going to be a day for rest and so they should gather up TWICE as much on the 6th day in order to prepare; but as I said, it was all a test. It wasn’t as though God forgot how to send MANNA on the 7th day – no – he knew how to do that WORK, but he was checking to see if we would obey his command to REST. Exodus 16:

“Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, **that I may test them**, whether they will walk

in my law or not. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” (Exodus 16:4-5 ESV)

The Sabbath was designed as a giant TEST. It takes FAITH to rest from your labours. It takes FAITH to lay your work aside. It takes FAITH to TRUST that God will provide enough for you and your family in 6 days of work – so that you can REST and REMEMBER and REJOICE on the 7th day. Every time you lay your work aside after 6 days, to rest and worship on the 7th day, you are EXERCISING your faith in God.

And what happens when you exercise?

You get stronger.

Every time you take a leap of faith and come to church and you sit and you sing and you remember and you rejoice – instead of slaving away at your work – every time you do that and you DON'T STARVE TO DEATH – you get a little stronger. Your faith in God INCREASES. You become that much more confident in the fact that the Lord is good and his ways lead to life and happiness.

The SABBATH is a gift.

It heals you, strengthens you, reorients and restores you - by one degree of glory to the next – thanks be to God. Let's pray together.