

# EXODUS

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Exodus 20:8-11

The Fourth Commandment

Sabbath Rest

We are going back to Exodus 20 today.

When we greet each other and catch up with each other and ask each other how our weeks have been, the most common response seems to be “busy.” And when we ask how someone is doing, the most common response seems to be “tired.” There’s a good chance that has been your response to someone here this morning already. “How are you? Busy and tired.” My week was busy and I’m tired. I think I’ve been saying that for 20 years.

And now that most of us have smart-phones, laptops, and social media, our busy-ness has been caffeinated. We are always connected to people to keep us plenty busy, and we can work almost anywhere, so we are always working. Which makes us extra busy and tired. We live in a state of frenzied weariness.

And this can grow and get deeper. Our souls are not disconnected from our bodies. We can become so worn down by the busyness and so tired and frazzled and freyed, that our lives feel exhausted at a soul level. And we wonder why God seems so distant. We’re exhausted to the core, grumpy, and our faith feels like its barely hanging on.

We are rarely refreshed and rested physically, and rarely rejuvenated spiritually.

And we can wonder about God - why did He even make us for this? It seems like God has given us a life of work and busyness and frenzied activity, and we can look at our lives and think what He must want most from us is to produce and to do and to earn and achieve and get stuff done, knock out to-do lists, and then die.

We think that God made us to produce. You hear it in our Christian cliches. “Why hasn’t God taken me home to heaven yet? Because I still have work to do.” - The only purpose I could have must be found in the work I have to do.

God made us, we think, to work non-stop and when we have crossed the last item off of His to-do list, then we will have no more worth here and we'll die. We are valuable because we work and are busy.

But think of what that says about God.

That says that God is essentially to His people what Pharaoh was to the slaves in Egypt. God is a big taskmaster in the sky who gives burdens, commands us to fulfill never-ending tasks, and allows us to live if we do them.

We can make God out to be a slave-driver and think that our worth and value and security come from our activity.

But one of the many reasons the ten commandments are so good is that they tell us what God is like. God's law tells us so much about the lawgiver.

And it might come as a surprise that the command that He expounds upon the most in the Old Testament, a commandment that is given and unpacked more than 100 times is the fourth commandment:

**Exodus 20:8-11 "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. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**

So the fourth commandment from God is to remember the sabbath day. It was the seventh day of the week, and on it, three major things happened:

**1) God was worshipped (verse 10 - it was a sabbath to the Lord.)**

**Leviticus 23:3 Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places.**

There was a holy convocation, a large, formal assembly of people for worship. A holy, God-centered gathering. And when the Jews were scattered, they set up synagogues to gather with the faithful and have someone teach God's word, a practice Jesus endorsed by going to synagogue on Saturday, listening to a rabbi teach the Bible, and often teaching it Himself. Luke 4:16 says this was a custom for Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

## **2) God was served in caring for the poor**

In any society, it is easier for rich people who own the farm or own the company to take a day off. They'd just have their employees do the work and they'd come back refreshed, having obeyed God. But God says, "No - your servants get this day too." The rich don't have preference in the worship of the Lord or in resting. Everybody gets this day. So the poor were served with the Sabbath.

## **3) God's people rested from their labors.**

God gave the Jews a day to have a holy gathering, to worship, and to rest from all of their work. And if they had a family, their whole family rested. If they had a farm, the whole staff rested. Even the livestock got a break. If they were in control of a city, the whole city rested. They had six long days of very hard work to do, and one day to enjoy God and all of His works in creation.

It was a day to remember whose image they were made in. God created in six days, and on the seventh day He ceased from His labors and came in and inhabited the creation He made and walked in the garden. And He says that people, in His image, are to work for six, and enjoy Him and His work for one.

And, done rightly, it was a delight. In **Isaiah 58:13**, God commanded them to call the Sabbath a delight.

They were not only allowed to stop, but commanded to stop. They were commanded to get refreshed, to ignore the to-do list for a day, and to enjoy God and all He had done. Their entire week was built around the Sabbath. It was a day to remember that God is the creator and sustainer, not them. It was a chance to hit CTRL-ALT-DELETE on all of the processes running through their brains and re-orient their lives around God. The whole week was founded on God and His work, God and His rhythms.

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 4:23, 9:25, 12:9, 13:54; Mark 1:21, 1:39, 3:1, 6:2; Luke 4:15, Luke 4:16 - this was his custom to go to synagogues, Luke 6:6, Luke 13:10, John 6:59

When God repeats this command in Deuteronomy 5, He says this:

**Deuteronomy 5:12-15 “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. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 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.”**

Not only did the sabbath help them live out the image of God in his creational rhythms, but it is a chance to remember that they were slaves, but God had liberated them, and they aren't slaves anymore. Slaves work all the time, but sons enjoy the fruit of the labor. They had been slaves, oppressed by cruel masters, but God is not a cruel master. He is a liberating master, a freeing master, who gave them all good things to enjoy.

You please a slave-master only by hard work, but God built the whole week around reminding His people that it isn't their work, first and foremost that He's after. That He loves them not because of what they can produce, but because they are made in His image. That he relates to his people not as slaves but as sons and daughters. That we are His children, not his employees.

This tells us that God is not a ruler who oppresses but a ruler who frees.

There are two kinds of law-givers. Those that liberate a people and those that burden a people.

We would look at our Bill of Rights and see them as liberating laws, they spell out and protect our freedoms of speech and religion and assembly.

But then we have other laws that are burdens - taxes upon taxes, and restrictions, and regulations, bought and paid for by so many special interests, laws that only burden and take and restrict, and we groan under them. They take, they oppress, they demand.

Good lawgivers gave us the first set, laws that free us. Corrupt lawgivers gave us the second set, laws that burden.

This sabbath command said something huge about who God is. God is a good law-giver who gives. God is a generous God who delights in the delight of his people. Who wants them to enjoy the world He made for His glory. He's a Father, not a Pharaoh. A giving God, not a robbing God. A God who wants his peoples joy not just their sacrifices. This is our God!

And this law tells us what it means to be a faithful follower of God - it tells us what it means that we are His people:

God's people don't get their identity from their work, but from God who rescued us, from His work on our behalf.

God's people don't get our value from their work and achievements but from God who cherished us.

God's people don't get our security from our work, but from God who keeps us.

God's people don't get our future from our work, but from God who promises a future rest with Him.

God's people don't get our salvation by our work, but from God who rescued us.

**He built the entire week around the reminder that it is not our work that saves us, that makes us OK, or that gives us peace, but it is God who saves us.**

And when we get to the New Testament, we see that the sabbath rhythms were given for one main purpose:

**Hebrews 4 "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. 11 Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.**

The new testament says, "God made the whole sabbath system, the whole structure of time, the whole command that his people rest to point to the ultimate and final rest that is ours in Jesus."

The command to rest weekly drove home the point that our rest is in Christ and we don't work for God's approval.

The command to rest like we're free and not slaves is a reminder that God is a rescuing God who liberates us from sin and death, not by our work but by His.

And we will miss out completely on a relationship with God if we don't partake of that ultimate rest. And He says it ironically: strive to enter into that rest. Exert massive effort to make sure that you rest. If you're going to wear yourself out for anything, wear yourself out making sure you rest in Christ.

Religion always points us to hard work - work hard to obey so you can have God.

But not Christianity - it says that Christ has done the work, rest in Him. Don't work!

Our doing can get us a lot - but it can't get us God. So the most important thing is not that we work, it is that we rest in Christ. And if we think our doing gets us to God, we miss God.

God built the entire week around rest, he build the entire structure of our time-keeping and our calendars around rest. So that when Jesus came and called us to receive this relationship with God, we would have a category for a good thing that is ours not by doing but receiving.

**Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast."**

There is not one work we do that gets us forgiveness, salvation, acceptance with God, heaven, or a relationship with God. It is only the work of Jesus.

And the invitation to all of us, built into the fabric of our lives, is to come to God and rest. And if you're here and not a Christian, you may have wrongly had it communicated to you that to come to God and to become a Christian is to work hard at obeying to make God accept you.

But the way we become Christians is by accepting the finished work of Jesus on the cross - for free.

**Titus 3:3-7 “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

God doesn't save us because of our works. Now he goes on to say that we devote ourselves to good works in response to this grace. Christians work - there are another 6 days in the Christian's life. But they are the response to salvation, not the earning of it.

Christianity is unique: every god out there demands your service so you can have his blessing. Every god loads you with work to do and demands that you perform, and carry a heavier load, and keep going, they command that you make more bricks, do more, try harder.

But not this lawgiver. He commands you to lay your doing down and rest in Christ.<sup>2</sup> He's a God who gives rest, commands rest, and offers rest to everyone who comes to Him:

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<sup>2</sup> James Proctor wrote a hymn called “It is Finished” in the late 1800s.

Nothing, either great or small—Nothing, sinner, no;  
Jesus died and paid it all, Long, long ago.

“It is finished!” yes, indeed, Finished, ev'ry jot;  
Sinner, this is all you need, Tell me, is it not?

When He, from His lofty throne, Stooped to do and die,  
Ev'rything was fully done; Hearken to His cry!

Weary, working, burdened one, Wherefore toil you so?  
Cease your doing; all was done Long, long ago.

Till to Jesus' work you cling By a simple faith,  
“Doing” is a deadly thing—“Doing” ends in death.

Cast your deadly “doing” down—Down at Jesus' feet;  
Stand in Him, in Him alone, Gloriously complete.

**Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."**

The deep soul rest that is ours in Christ is the thing that God gave this sabbath command to teach us. The week was invented to tell us God wants us to rest in Him. That's the sabbath, our rest in Jesus. So the author of Hebrews says, "Strive to enter that."

Jesus is our sabbath.

And so a question we need to ask is what does obedience to this command to worship and rest one day a week look like for us today? If the ultimate fulfillment of this command happened when Christ did the work for us on the cross, is there still a day?

Because there's no doubt that a bunch of ceremonial aspects of sabbath observance became obsolete when Jesus came, just like the sacrifices did. We don't offer sacrifices because Christ was the ultimate sacrifice. So it could be expected that Christ being our sabbath would radically change the details about what obeying this looks like.

Also, there was a civil element to the sabbath laws - they were to be the law of the land when the Jews possessed the land, a mandatory national day of rest in the theocracy God was setting up.

And it says something that all of the other commandments are repeated in the New Testament but sabbath is never commanded again.

Jesus changed and enhanced all of the commandments when he came, and this one was changed more than the others. In Kevin DeYoung's Book on the Ten Commandments, he says, "Every one of the Ten Commandments is still binding, and every one has been deepened and transformed by the coming of Christ, this commandment more notably than the others"<sup>3</sup>

And the New Testament certainly downplays sabbath observation in any ceremonial sense:

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin DeYoung, The Ten Commandments, 63.



**Romans 14:1-6 “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.**

So Paul is talking about things we don't divide over. Some people eat certain foods, some don't, don't let that divide. And he also lists observing one day over another as one of those things. In the Old Testament, the sabbath had lots of requirements and details attached to it, it had death penalty for breaking it attached to it, but Romans says the observance of one day over another is not something we should divide over. Because Christ came and fulfilled it, the details not longer carry the same weight.

**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.**

So Paul says here we don't judge or allow ourselves to be judged over the Jewish holy days and celebration days - he mentions the festivals which were annual, the new moon, which was monthly, and the sabbath which was weekly. He says the sabbath was a shadow of Jesus. And now that Jesus is here we don't pay attention to the long shadow that He was casting.

So there's no more ceremonial law, we aren't in a theocracy where God's law is the law of the land, and the New Testament lists the sabbath with things we don't judge each other over.

So there has certainly been a serious modification to this command.

But at the same time there are other passages. For example, Matthew, Mark, and Luke seem to use the word sabbath to refer to the day Jesus resurrected. Which was Sunday:

**Matthew 28:1** Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.<sup>4</sup>

The language literally reads, “after the sabbath, toward the dawn of the sabbaths.” It does the same thing with the language in Luke’s account and Mark’s account.

It calls the first day of the week the sabbath. Or at least it could.

**Acts 20:7** says the church gathered to break bread on the first day of the week.

**1 Corinthians 16:2** says they took an offering on the first day of the week (or set it aside in worship.) And historically there’s no doubt that God’s people gathered for worship on Sunday - they had their convocation that day.

They saw the resurrection of Jesus as so significant as to shape time around it.

The old Saturday sabbath remembered God’s work in creation, but observing the Lord’s day on Sunday commemorated the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, the new life we have in Christ. So early Sunday mornings or late Sunday nights, they gathered to celebrate that.

And honestly Christians through history have differed on how to handle this day.

*Westminster Catechism- How is the sabbath to be sanctified?*

*A: The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.*

So they said it is a day for worship, for strict rest (even from amusements and recreation), and for doing mercy.

*Heidelberg Catechism Q. 103:*

*‘What doth God require in the Fourth Commandment? First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained [you give an offering]; and that I, especially on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the Church of God, to hear His*

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<sup>4</sup> Also Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1

*Word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.'*

No command about amusement and recreation, just a command to worship with the church, hear his word, take the Lord's supper, give an offering and care for the poor. So you notice the difference - Westminster is more strict, Heidelberg is more lenient. Christians have disagreed historically on various points: Do we still call it the sabbath or not. Do we keep it with stringent requirements around work and rest or have they been loosened?

Well, to obey Colossians and Romans we don't divide over that.

But at the same time, almost nobody in history has said that the coming of Christ did away with the weekly rhythm of working 6 and resting 1. Some have said to rest Saturday, some Sunday, some have said the churches in region can pick any day<sup>5</sup> (as long as its the same so we know what day not to employ people on.) But almost everybody has agreed that a weekly focus on worship and rest is good, and biblical, and a gift from God, and still to be observed in a faithful life.

Ignatius, who wrote in the first century, wrote, "Christians no longer observe the Sabbath, but direct their lives toward the Lord's Day, on which our life is refreshed by Him and by His death."<sup>6</sup> So there was still a weekly observance.

The seven day week is the rhythm God established at creation, and we're still part of that creation, so the rhythm continues.

And we have to remember that we're often tempted to take the good gift of the day God has given and make it restrictive. This is what the Pharisees did with the sabbath in Jesus's day.

Let me show you this in Mark chapter 2:

**Mark 2: 23 One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 And the Pharisees were saying to**

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<sup>5</sup>The Prelatic party saw the sabbath as a temporary Jewish custom only. See <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/the-perpetuity-and-change-of-the-sabbath/>

<sup>6</sup> Ignatius, *Letters to the Magnesians*, quoted in Douma, 139.

him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

So Jesus and his disciples are walking through the grainfield. And they were hungry, so they plucked some of the heads of grain to eat. Now this wasn't all-out working - they weren't getting sickles and harvesting all day long to make money, they were snacking on some grain. It was the equivalent of opening the fridge and pulling out a snack.

But the Pharisees, the religious leaders, had taken the sabbath law that God had given and added to it a bunch of their own rules - things you weren't allowed to do on the sabbath to make sure you didn't come anywhere near working.

And then they bound their law on everybody else. They wanted everyone to take their rules as serious as the scriptures. And according to their laws, the disciples of Jesus were breaking the sabbath.

So they think, "Aha, we got em!" And this is some of the fodder for the smear campaign they are about to launch against Jesus.

And you see in the story that these Pharisees who are looking to discredit and criticize Jesus are always lurking around looking to nail him for something.

By the way, a characteristic of dead religion is that religious people love to LURK.

They don't do the work of God, they just lurk around it, to weigh the people down, find fault, criticize.

The followers of Jesus are care-free, while the religious are overscrupulous and are always there to criticize anyone who is having a good time. And for every bit of authentic christian liberty and joy, there are always the lurkers frowning upon it. Concerned.

So the call to sabbath rest is not the grounds for us to become lurkers. It is a call for us to become care-free and rejuvenated.

So Jesus replies:

**Mark 2: 25 And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: 26 how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence,**

**which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?"**

So Jesus' response is, "Have you never read this passage?"

This is a sarcastic question to ask the Pharisees. They had devoted their lives to reading and even memorizing much of the Bible. They had little boxes strapped to their foreheads and wrists with Bible verses written on them.

So Jesus says, "So guys, have you ever read the Bible?"

And he referred to the exact place in their scrolls they could find it - in the part right around the time of **Abiathar - which was probably similar to us using a verse reference.**

And you see this with Jesus - he is incredibly gracious with broken sinners who go to him for forgiveness - Jesus is the lone voice saying not to stone the woman in caught in adultery, Jesus goes out of his way to meet the promiscuous woman at the well. And you hear nothing but mercy in those conversations.

But Jesus reserves his harshest, most biting, sometimes even sarcastic words for the Pharisees. For the religious crowd. And we as churches often do the opposite - we go hard after the sexual sinners alone but give the religious sinners a free pass.

But Jesus wasn't calling sexual sinners to become religious like the Pharisees. He was calling sexual sinners and the religious to all turn from their sin and worship Jesus. And that should be our call too: turn from sin and trust Jesus. Turn from religious substitutes for Jesus and trust in Jesus.

So Jesus says, "Have you read the Bible?" And then quotes from the section when David and his men were hungry. They approached the priest asking for food, and he has no bread except the bread of the presence - which was not to be eaten by David and his men, it was only for the priests. The ceremonial law, given by God, said don't eat that bread.

But in this case, because there was no other food, they set aside the ceremonial law and allowed David and his men to eat the bread. They were allowed to set aside the details of the ceremonial law when they had to in order to meet some other need.

And David was never condemned for eating the bread. God never said it was sin. It was

fine.

But they would never do this with the other laws, with the moral law. God never said it was OK to commit adultery if you really needed to, or to lie in wait and murder someone. You couldn't just set aside the universal moral law under any circumstances.

So why could they set aside the ceremonial rules about the bread?

Because those laws were temporary and pointed to a greater reality - the rule wasn't made for the sake of the bread, but to point the way to a greater reality - namely, Jesus, who was the bread of life.

And when you start using the bread rule to starve people, that bread no longer looks like Jesus.

So just like there were rules about special bread in place to symbolize Jesus, the sabbath law is also in place to symbolize Jesus. And when you make it look like a burden and a bunch of rules to follow, it no longer looks like Jesus.

So he doesn't follow their rules, and when they ask him about it he says two things:

**27 And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."**

So Jesus didn't strip that command to rest one day a week away here. He restored it to its original purpose: to restore people and to point the way to Jesus.

**He says the sabbath was made for man:**

When he says the sabbath was made for man, he is saying that this is supposed to be a day that benefits people. If you were a hard working farmer, with work that was never done, working from dawn til dusk, and then God said, "One day out of 7 you don't do any work - just trust me that I'll provide for you and rest," that command would have been a welcome thing!

Thank you God for making the work week to have a day off in it, that will refresh me and rejuvenate me. That day was made for man!

But the way the Pharisees interpreted that law and wrapped it in other rules made it a

burden, they made it exhausting instead of refreshing. People heard God's law and thought, "That's a blessing." They heard the law of the Pharisees and said, "They just made the sabbath sound like more work!"

These guys had laws that you couldn't drag a stick because that looked like plowing, a girl couldn't have a ribbon in her hair on the sabbath because that was just like carrying a burden. And you'd look at this mountain of rules and say, "I could never do this! **All this sabbath stuff is stressing me out! It sounds like a ton of work!**"

Which started to make the sabbath not symbolize what it was supposed to symbolize.

The sabbath, ultimately, was supposed to be all about Jesus.

That's what he meant when he said

**The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath**

**Which means that this day is all about JESUS!**

And the big purpose of that day was to point to Jesus: to be a reminder that Jesus is our rest. And to remind us that our work doesn't get us anywhere ultimate.

The way we get connected to God is not by doing good works, but by resting in Jesus.

**Mark 3 1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand.**

So there's a guy whose hand doesn't work right - it is shriveled up. Which means, in an agrarian culture, that he is not able to provide for his family as well as he could and struggles with life. Nobody wants to hire someone with one hand to help on the farm, so this guy has it rough.

**2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." 4 And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.**

Notice the contrast here. Jesus is healing on the sabbath.

And the Pharisees think, "What Jesus just did is really bad." They had a rule that you could only do essential healing on the sabbath - you could put a tourniquet on and stop bleeding, but this guy was not essential. His hand had been shriveled for a long time, he'd be fine to wait until tomorrow.

But what couldn't wait until tomorrow was the meeting they had where they plotted how they could kill Jesus. Which apparently was OK to do on the sabbath.

The contrast couldn't be more clear:

The Pharisees said the sabbath was a day for being hungry, and shriveled, and even for plotting death.

Jesus said it was a day for healing, being full, and rejuvenation. You can have your shriveled hungry dead sabbath, Jesus said, but this is what sabbath is supposed to be.

That the sabbath was not about working to keep rules, but about Jesus, and about restoration.

I believe there is significance to Sunday as a New Testament sabbath. But sabbath is not about restriction, but about blessing.

So what could this day be if we'd observe it?

**1) A Day for Worship** - The first church didn't get Sundays off work. They were work days. But it was the day Jesus rose. So every Sunday morning or Sunday night they would gather with the others who came to believe and worship in church.

And that became the first priority in the week. So, knowing that unless you're listening online, you're here and I'm preaching to the choir. But keep this day by worshipping Christ with his people as the first part of every week that you possibly can. Allow the teaching of God's word, the singing of God's word, the taking of communion, the gathering with the people to be the first part of a day of rejuvenation and the first part of a week.



For parents, this will form our kids, too. I have never met a kid who didn't have regular church attendance as the cornerstone of his weeks growing up that became an adult that went on to follow Jesus.

Build your week around worshipping God, hearing God in the preached word.

And one reason I've been learning for our gatherings is that they are an act of loyalty to God's people. A depressing influence can be going into life, humbly professing faith in Jesus, living accordingly, and then being beat down for it by the world. You can feel like you're the last one standing.

But then we get together on Sundays and we see all these people. And if we obediently sing along, contributing our voice to the mix, we are saying, "We're all in this!" So how powerful is even showing up - seeing the people, singing the songs, hearing the gospel, striving to rest in Christ together.

It's a weekly time to set our hearts at rest on Jesus. We won't get any other kind of rest until we have that heart rest.

Because a day of doing nothing can be worrying and exhausting. And when I've attempted sabbath days without a sabbath heart, I find myself so knotted up and anxious at the end of the day that it's worse than if I had just worked that day.

We need a sabbath heart: a heart that truly believes that who you are is defined by Jesus, your provider is Jesus, your sufficiency is Jesus, and the one who holds all things together is Jesus. So we start with worship.

So we have to start there: recognize and believe in the purpose of sabbath, trust in Jesus.

**A Day for Works of Mercy and Service and Giving** - Jesus did this - he healed on the sabbath. 1 Corinthians commands giving on the first day of the week. It's a good day to do the restful spiritual work you wish you could do - read the Christian book, host a grace group Sunday nights, serve the poor, invite neighbors to dinner to reach out, invite church people over to make the connections that they need and you need. Do the joy-filled, Jesus-centered things you might not have time for all week long.

**A Day to Rest.** - A day to do no to-do list work. A day for refreshing play. A day to take nap in the hammock (soon). A day to only work in the lawn if it's refreshing. A day to

break the diet. To not work out, unless that's refreshing. A day to eat the good food. To uncork the best pepsi. To pray. Read a christian book. To unplug. To leave the phone in a drawer. To not know what's going on anywhere in the world but right there in your hammock. To not check email. To not get anything done.

Now I know there's necessary work that has to happen. Some need to find another day during the week. And I'm with you - I gotta work Sundays - it's usually a 5 to 2 shift. ER doctors have to work. Lots of nurses have to work. RG&E workers are working right now so our lights are on (most of them.)

But we need this day, and in the cases where our work is necessary and we can't do this in the ideal way, some other day to allow Jesus to speak to our withered hearts and remind us that He loves us, not because of our works but because we're made in His image. To remind us that He did the necessary work for us, that we're sons or daughters, to speak His gospel to us, to refresh our faith, to feed us.

God has given us a day for that. It's a delight.

It reminds us we are not God, and we will disintegrate physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually without it.

And maybe obedience to the fourth commandment would go a long way in reducing the "always busy" and "always tired."<sup>7</sup> The sabbath was made for us, it was a day Jesus rejuvenated people on, and maybe our failure to rest is the reason He feels so far.

And for those of you, like me, who struggle to rest, let's allow our failure to keep God's law to expose some things we should repent of:

- It exposes that God isn't the priority.
- It exposes that I don't trust God to provide and protect.
- It exposes that I think I'm in some ways better than Jesus - I don't need to gather to hear the word, I don't need to rest.
- It exposes my self-centeredness - my week is all about me.
- It exposes the way joy and rest make me feel guilty, as if I was made only for work.
- It exposes my pride - I don't need rest, I'm too important not to work.

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<sup>7</sup> It's probably also true that resting one day in six makes our work more efficient. However, there's a danger in saying, "I rest so I can work better." The point of sabbath rest is to take our focus off of our work. Jesus worked so we can rest!

And then we can confess those things and go to Jesus, this morning, on the first day of the week.

Our frenzied living is not what God is after.

And this is so important for us: That we see our relationship with Jesus as life-giving and refreshing, that it makes us people of peace and joy, so when people see us, they see something different.

One of the ways the church stands in defiance of a frenzied, overburdened, burning-out, mentally fried culture is by having faith enough to rest.

*In the third century, St. Cyprian wrote to a friend named Donatus: "This seems a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden under the shadow of these vines. But if I climbed some great mountain and looked out over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see; brigands on the high road, pirates on the seas, in the amphitheaters men murdered to please the applauding crowds, under all roofs misery and selfishness. It really is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. Yet, in the midst of it, I have found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians...and I am one of them."*

This is what's at stake here - some of the evidence to the world around us that our faith is real is that we have the ability to be quiet and holy and joyful, and to rest.

But when we can't, it may be an indicator that we have adopted all of the same values and ambitions and measures of success that the world around us has. And if we won't stop working, if we keep feeding it, if we can't rest one day out of 7, we need to confess our lack of faith in Jesus who is our ultimate provider, protector, and identity.

**So we still need this discipline of sabbath rest.**

**When we rest, we are saying that we believe that it is not our work that sustains us. That it is not we who hold our world together. We're saying it is not our work that gives us significance. We are saying that we have faith in One who will provide for us even while we rest. We believe in one whose death gave us our worth and value and significance, it is not our work that does that.**

So we need to repent, look at our lives through the lens of Jesus making us complete, and say, "It's done. It's enough. It's satisfying. And I'm taking a nap."

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#### Scriptures Referenced:

Call to Worship: Psalm 92:1-4

Exodus 20:8-11

Leviticus 23:3

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Hebrews 4:8-11

Ephesians 2:8-9

Titus 3:3-7

Matthew 11:28-30

Romans 14:1-6

Colossians 2:16-17

Matthew 28:1

Mark 2:23-24

Mark 2:25-26

Mark 2:27-28

Mark 3:1

Mark 3:2-6

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For discussion in small groups:

- 1) Do you obey the fourth commandment?
- 2) What would obedience to this command look like in our tech-centered era?
- 3) How does this law expose our lack of faith? What idols and false beliefs are exposed by our failure to rest?
- 4) In what ways is Jesus the fulfillment of this law?
- 5) Why do you think the sabbath command is the one that the new testament does not repeat?
- 6) How do you think this command has changed since Old Testament days? How has it stayed the same?