

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11)

We See Jesus Giving Us Rest

Are you tired of hearing about Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton? What about the Flint water crisis? Now, don't get me wrong, those are important stories and the issues need to be addressed. But do you find yourself tempted to just mute the TV when the news gets to them? I do. Do you remember the Kwame Kilpatrick saga and the way it dragged on for what seemed like years? What about the Detroit bankruptcy? News programs tend to hammer away at the same stories over and over again. Most people reach a saturation point. But the sad reality is, even if they stop talking about the election or the water crisis or whatever the latest political scandal is, there will always be more to talk about. Sometimes, we just need a break from it all.

This morning we're looking at one of the five places in the Law of Moses where God commanded the Sabbath. Every seven days God's people were supposed to take a day of rest. During Lent this year, we looked at many different laws that God commanded his Old Testament people to observe. Again and again we saw that those laws were shadows that looked forward to a deeper and higher fulfillment. Those practices and ceremonies were really living prophecies. Every time the people obeyed them, they were acting out God's promises that only came true in Jesus. Today we're looking at one more shadow. The Sabbath is a prophecy that gives meaning to all the rest of the Old Covenant. What do we see in this shadow? **We see Jesus giving us rest.**

I. We will rest in holiness.

II. We will rest in eternal life.

I.

It's easy to misunderstand this command. It really isn't about physical rest from the stress of work. That was the outward part, but there was an inner meaning that God always wanted his people to understand. In the ancient world, this practice was so unique that Roman writers condemned it as laziness. Until a hundred years ago, even in the United States workers didn't get a day off every week. God specifically applied this law even to slaves. Again that was unheard of in the ancient world. Slaves worked every day of their lives. But God didn't command this to inspire fair labor practices. This law is not about the inherent value of a human being. And it's not about hairsplitting over what constitutes work and what doesn't. This law is about spiritual rest. It was a law for God's Old Testament people, which always had a gospel promise tucked inside it. The book of Hebrews says, **"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."** The meaning of the Sabbath was spiritual. True Sabbath rest is ours only because of the resurrection of Jesus. The Sabbath is God's picture of what Jesus' resurrection guarantees us.

Moses said, **"For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."** God made the Sabbath holy because the Sabbath is a picture of what he is going to do for us. He is going to make us holy. God used the sweat and the stress and the heartache that you and I feel in our jobs to represent all the stress and pain and difficulty that we experience in our lives. What's going on at work right now? What in your life ties your stomach up in knots? What do you want to get away from? Whatever it is, it comes from sin. All our pains and sorrows come from sin.

But Jesus conquered sin for us. That's why we're here this morning. We've come to look back into the tomb where Jesus was buried and to see that it's empty. We've come to hear the angel announce to us again: **"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay."** In Jesus' resurrection, we come to receive again the gift of spiritual rest. We will rest from all those hardships because Jesus defeated them all. The greatest hardships that sin piles on us are not the stresses and difficulties of work, or even the hurts and sorrows of life. The greatest hardships are death and hell. Jesus suffered both; then he rose! He freed

us from hurt and sorrow and death and hell. From now until we enter eternal life, the resurrection gives us rest. It comforts us with God's promise that Jesus is greater than our sorrow. Jesus is greater than our pain and our difficulties. Jesus is greater than the worst stress we suffer here. He will give us the strength to overcome. He will guide our lives and use even our pain to bring us closer to him. And he will put an end to all our suffering—maybe already here, but certainly in heaven.

The Sabbath is about trust. It took trust for farmers to take a whole day off each week. And it takes trust for us to look at all those things we wrestle with and know that Jesus is going to take care of them. That trust is born from the simple reality of what Jesus did: he freed us from sin. The Friday before Easter, Jesus died because we deserved to. But early Easter morning he broke free of death. He rose because he had been perfect in our place. He rose because he had paid for our sins completely. He rose, and God forgives us, even for the sins that lay hidden in our hearts.

In Baptism, in the spoken and written Word, and in the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit comes to us and proclaims Jesus. God reaches into our hearts and performs an act of creation that is every bit as dramatic as the day he said, **"Let there be light!"** God comes into hearts that are spiritually dead, and he says, "Let there be a Christian here!" The gospel creates new spiritual life in us. When we were born, we were completely sinful, spiritually dead in unbelief. When we were baptized or converted, God created belief – trust – in our hearts. For as long as we live here, our believing new nature and our unbelieving old, sinful nature are at war within us. But when we die or when Jesus returns, the sinful nature in us will be completely gone. The new Christian nature will take full possession of our minds and hearts and bodies. We will be like Jesus, and we will live with Jesus forever. For the rest of eternity, we will be holy. That's the gift of Easter. Jesus promises a day when we won't feel tempted, a day when we won't struggle with guilt, a day when we won't agonize over doing the right thing. We will be completely holy when we reach eternal life.

It's no accident that God pictured all that in terms of rest. Not working, not earning, not striving to be holy, but resting in the holiness God gives us. The Sabbath points to Jesus' holiness. God set this day aside to focus his people on the gospel, on the day Jesus would come to make them holy. He wanted to teach them and us that there is no way we can ever earn eternal life. God has to give it to us. He wanted us to rest from our ceaseless and fruitless effort to somehow make ourselves right in his eyes. Every time an Israelite family rested on the Sabbath and gave thanks to the God who made them, God pointed them past the original creation that was mutilated by sin. He pointed them past their own efforts and their own righteousness. He pointed them to heaven, to Jesus and his resurrection and to the gift that it gives us. In this shadow **we see Jesus giving us rest. We will rest in holiness.**

II.

The Sabbath is one of the most prominent laws of the Old Testament. Jeremiah specifically warned the people that if they didn't stop breaking the Sabbath, Jerusalem would be destroyed, and he lived to see his prophecy fulfilled. Why was this law so important? Because the Sabbath holds out the promise of eternal life. In the very last verses of his book, Isaiah writes about the world after Jesus returns. He says, **"From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me."** God pictures eternity as a succession of Sabbaths. On those endless, repeating Sabbath celebrations, the entire human race is worshipping God—or maybe it would be better to say the entire Old and New Testament church, because Isaiah continues by saying that those who worship him will go out and look on those in hell.

The New Testament book of Hebrews says, **"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God."** That rest isn't anything in this life. It's eternal life. Easter is the only way to get to that Sabbath rest. Jesus rose from the dead to open the door of eternal life to us. Because he rose, we who believe in him will rise. Because he rose, already at the moment we die we will be with him in heaven, which is better than anything we can ever experience here.

Sometimes we say that the church in this world is the church militant. That means it's the church at war. That's one of the hardest lessons we Christians have to learn. We're at war with the devil and all the forces of sin and unbelief he can command. We're at war with our own sinful natures. Those forces want us to lose our faith. We are even at war with our own society. We're at war with all the natural instincts and opinions that any human culture thinks of. For that reason many of the opinions we hold dear don't jibe with what God's Word says.

If you came to our Lenten services this year, you heard again and again how God used the rituals of the Old Covenant to force his people to wrestle with who and what they really were. God does the same with us. God challenges the influence of sin, exercised by TV and music and the opinions of people we respect. God tells us to insist on the truth of his Word, even when our society calls that intolerance. God tells us to uphold marriage and family and to condemn sexual immorality and homosexuality, even when our society calls that bigotry. God tells us to raise our children to understand and believe the truths that we have received from him, even when our society calls that brainwashing. I don't have to tell you how much grief our friends and coworkers can give us over those issues. It hurts. And sometimes we just long for relief. Sometimes we cave in because it's just easier. Sometimes we discover that we've been going in the wrong direction all along and that breaks our hearts. What can we do?

Easter promises relief. The Sabbath pictures that relief. Because Jesus rose, God says to us, "I forgive you for being confused by your godless society." "I forgive you for not hearing my Word because you were listening to them." "I forgive you for your weakness and sin and hopelessness." Being forgiven lifts us up to fight the good fight, to change our attitudes, and to live like God's children. And because we're forgiven, we're looking forward to real rest and relief. We're looking forward to endless centuries of living with God in heaven, with no enemies to attack us or disturb us. Jesus died and paid for our sin. Jesus rose and wiped away our sin. Jesus will bring us home to rest in heaven forever. That eternal rest begins as soon as we die. It reaches its greatest fulfillment when Jesus returns and raises our bodies and we live with him forever. In this shadow of the Old Testament Sabbath, **we see Jesus giving us rest. We will rest in eternal life.**

Do you need a break from all the stress and frustration of life? Of course, you do. We all need to get away from the sin and opposition of the world around us. Coming to worship gives us temporary relief. Our church is a shelter against the attacks of the devil and of our own sinful flesh. But it's only temporary. Our permanent rest is still coming. We will rest from our sin. We will rest from our warfare. We will rest in holiness in eternal life. We will rest because Jesus rose from the dead. Amen.