

The Sabbath

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. We did indeed have a great basketball game yesterday. It's our EFCC denomination Church League, the Chinese Church League.

! But of course, we being an international congregation, it's amazing what bringing a few tall white guys does. I'm still awaiting a complaint at some point. We had a few tall white guys that got all the rebounds and that was it.

So it was a good fun. It's a miracle that I'm standing today. As we were worshipping, I was reminded of the song, What Was I Made For? by the contemporary theologian Billie Eilish.

And isn't that just the heart's cry of the generation or of every generation? What was I made for? And as we were saying it, we were made for his glory and my good.

It reminded me of actually the conversation I had with Jay this morning. What's the Westminster Catechism? What's the chief end of man? It's to glorify God and to what? Enjoy him forever.

[1:03] That's what we were made for, Billy. That's what we were made for, Tony. And so how better to find out what we were made for than to go all the way back to the beginning? And so last week, Gabriel took us through the book of Genesis. He introduced it and it was exciting. Of course, Gabe always preaches excited.

Every time you talk about the Bible, that's what gets him excited. He was talking about what it means for us as we read the creation account. And he talked a little bit about just this idea of work, you know, and it ended on this place where God was the first creator.

And what did he do? He took something that was formless and void and then he filled it and created something that was beautiful. He created something out of nothing. And then he gives us a cultural mandate and he says, hey, you go and do the same.

You also in your work. And I've talked a lot about this before, that your work is your worship. The words really, really mean the same thing. And I was so inspired by one friend that I had lunch with recently who said, oh, I go to work because that's where I worship.

I thought that isn't that just so cool that that's what you think your work is. How many of us feel the same about that? But that is exactly what we do. We are supposed to imitate our creator, take these raw elements and rearrange them so that there is order and there is beauty for purpose to point people to the glory of God.

[2:30] So if you're in education, you are taking the raw elements of knowledge and you are rearranging them in a way that helps people understand, helps people learn things. If you're an artist like Mo over here, you're taking the raw elements of paint and you're arranging them in a way that's beautiful.

If you're a doctor like Kalo, you're taking just the raw elements of human biology and you're rearranging them to help life kind of continue to grow and flourish in a healthy kind of way.

If you're in law like Queenie, you're taking the raw elements of what it means to be human and you're rearranging them. You're putting laws in place so that humans can flourish.

If you're in finance, I don't know how you're helping the world. Sorry, Weber. If you're in finance and real estate, you are taking something and you are growing it for your own good.

But you're investing, you're creating something. And so we're created by the creator to do these things. And isn't that exciting?

[3:46] As a Hong Konger, I'm like, yes, let's go. As a type A, I'm Hong Konger, let's go. What do I need to do? God, how do I serve you? How do I worship you? How do I love you? I just want to do something for you. Please help me do something.

And so when you look at the Genesis account, you're like, wow, that's so cool. Day six, let us create man in our image. Let them have this cultural mandate to be fruitful and to multiply and to have

dominion, to point people to God.

Isn't that beautiful? Let's go. Is that the climax of the Genesis account? And the answer is no. That is not the climax of the Genesis account. What comes, how this account finishes, is the second bit. And it's actually the first few verses of Genesis chapter two that I'm going to actually have. But Caleb, can you come up here and show off your new haircut and read us the word of God? Whole end day.

Really nice haircut. When are you going to get it finished? You going to go get it finished? We're just about to read the word of God. Let's keep it holy. Can I invite us to stand for the word of the Lord?

[4:52] From one to three. Today's passage is from Genesis chapter two, verse one to three. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them.

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. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Praise be to God. Thank you, Caleb. Please take a seat. Just in case you're worried that Caleb can't take it. He's a teacher at a school called CAIS.

He's very, very comfortable and very gifted at public speaking. I actually dragged him over to the Chinese side one time impromptu. He said, hey, can you give a Thanksgiving sharing? And he came out and he went onto the stage in the main hall.

And he said, I'm going to completely butcher this. But he's like, hi, everyone. I'm anxious, but you can call me Caleb. I was like, bro, this guy. So anyway, all that to say, he can take it.

[5:56] And I do love him. I roast those whom I love. So it's not the climax. The cultural mandate, making man, was not the end. It was the second part.

It was this part. There was one more day, guys. Day seven. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the hosts of them. And on the seventh day, God finished his work and that he had done and that he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

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. How's it going?

Hey, Gabs, how's it going? How's it? How you been? What's life been like? Good, good, good. Oh, yes. Cool. It's cool. Been busy. Been busy. How you doing, Anson? How's your studies going? How's your prep going? Oh, good, good, good. Been busy. Been busy. Luana, how's life? How's married life? Good, good. It's been good. It's been busy. Isn't that just the default answer that we give to everyone when we are asked, how are we doing?

[7:05] Good, good. How are you doing, Angel? What's life been like? Busy. And it really has been. Even when we're not busy, we feel as though we have to say that we've been busy.

And so today I'm going to preach and we're going to stop here because I was going to go into the rest of chapter two. And I was so deeply convicted by those first three verses because I was like, oh, we are the worst at this. Today, brace yourselves.

We're going to talk about the Sabbath. We're going to talk about what it means to actually rest because this is so countercultural to us. It is so foreign to us because we are always, always thinking about what it means to produce more, to be productive, to be consumers.

And never do we really truly stop and go, oh, what is this all about? What am I made for? What is God calling me to right here? Did it occur to you that so many of the problems that we have going on in life are because we have a refusal to sit still?

It wasn't me that just said that. The philosopher Pascal said a few hundred years ago, a few hundred years ago in France. And if you've been to France, they're pretty laid back already. He says, I'm paraphrasing, he says, all of humanity's problems come from man's inability to sit alone in a room.

[8:26] Just dwell on that for a second. All of humanity's problems come from man's inability to sit alone in a room, to quieten down, to stop. I remember a few years ago, we went to watch the film *Oppenheimer*.

And of course, it's just going from bad to worse. Things are just happening and it's just getting from bad to worse. And all I could think about when I was watching that movie was if someone would just stop and not react out of fear.

If someone would just stop and take account of what they're going through and acknowledging their own feelings and anxieties and just stop and go, why am I responding in this way? Maybe the atomic bomb won't be great.

I don't know. But you get my point. We all need to stop and actually think. Ruth Haley Barton writes a lot about this. And she said this, Sabbath is the one spiritual discipline that most directly addresses our drivenness and our desire to be in control of our lives and our worlds.

The Sabbath is an alternative to the endless cycle of more and more. Quick check here. Put your hand up if you feel as though you have been honoring the Sabbath well in this recent part of your life.

[9:31] Hands up. Good. Excellent. Hands going up all over the place. All four or five of us. Man, it is the hardest one. Right?

And yet it is a command. Just before do not murder, it says remember the Sabbath. And yet we struggle with this so, so much. It actually, the Sabbath is the only way to keep work from becoming our identity.

It's the only way that we can stop and say, I am not just a lawyer. I am not just a teacher. I am not just a banker. I am not just a doctor. I am more than what I do.

And how do you remind yourself of that? It is the Sabbath. And it's tucked away in there. And yet we ignore it completely. Forget the Sabbath. I think there are those of us here who don't even sleep enough. That podcast that you talked about a few weeks ago, I watched that.

And then he did another one where he was talking to this university professor from Berkeley about sleep. And the guy was saying, basically, you must sleep between seven to nine hours.

[10:31] It is a non-negotiable. Even if you're one of those people who insist and say, oh, I can get by with four hours of sleep, five hours of sleep. He said, that's just not how we were biologically made. We must sleep.

And so even if you think you are okay, it's just because you've gotten used to this suboptimal way of living. Who gets more than five hours sleep in this room? Go on. There we go.

Keep your hand up if it's six or more. Four, seven or more, eight or more. Albert, my man. We're going to keep going.

Nine, ten. Oh, he's just like, I just sleep all the time. I'm sleeping right now, James. But quick note here.

God rested. But he doesn't rest because he's tired. Why does he rest? He's rest because it's finished. Because the work is done.

[11:27] Christina and I have this, I'll call it a good habit, but you can tell me afterwards if you disagree. Is when we come home from a holiday, we basically leave our children just to do whatever they want to.

They're probably just outside the front door for all we care. Because we have one thing, we have one objective when we get home with all our suitcases. Tidy up everything. Put the things in the laundry. The whole suitcase has to be emptied.

And in my wife's case, the suitcase has to be wiped with dental wipes, sprayed, and then wiped again. Before it's put back in the cupboard that we don't really, well, yeah, it doesn't bother us anyway. But anyway, that must be done.

And then the toilets that we haven't used for two months, they need to be cleaned again. And everything has to be tidy. And once it's all done, we finally then sit on the couch. Well, me anyway. She actually keeps going.

Me. I say, oh, it is done. My chargers are back in the right place. My shoes are back in the right place in the cupboard. It is done. And I sit and I rest.

[12:25] God rests not because he's tired, but he rests because it is done. The world is now functional. He's used six days to create everything that's needed. The inaugural work.

Now, bear in mind, he's not done all work for all time. Because we know once he's set everything in place, then creation continues to take over. And he is working as well.

And Jesus, much later, thousands of years later, says, my father is still working. So it's not as though God stopped once and for all at that moment and stopped working. What he is saying is the inaugural work is done. Everything that is required for human flourishing is set and in place so I can sit on my throne and I can observe.

And I can say what? Not just that it is good, because now I've created man and woman. I can say that it is very good. And so then he stops and he rests.

But often we don't do that. There's a quote that I love about when it comes to the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not us having a reward for finished work. It is rescuing us from unfinished work.

[13:25] Because we're not God. If you ask me right now, if you forget everything else whilst you're still awake, if you ask me why the Sabbath is there, the Sabbath is there to remind me and remind you that you are not God. That's it.

How often, though, when we do work, when we keep going, we must keep doing this. I must keep doing this. Because what? Because I'm kind of trying to be God. When the Sabbath is put in place as a commandment to remind us, hey, you are not God.

This is rescuing you from the unfinished work that's happening. And yet how often do we just completely ignore that? One of my favorite basketball players growing up all the time is a guy called Kobe Bean Bryant.

And he, I must say, God rest his soul, did say something that was completely inaccurate, which was he keeps quoting his high school teacher who told him this, which is, hey, don't rest in the middle. Rest at the end. And so he had this driven kind of mentality that we now call the Mamba mentality that Josh Brown showed there last night on the court when he was bullying these small yellow people on the court.

[14:34] But rest not in the middle, but at the end. But Kobe was wrong. But here's the problem.

You may not have heard of Kobe Bryant because you're not a basketball fan and you're so tired of my basketball analogies. But I'll tell you this. I think Kobe Bryant is the high priest of this time.

Whether you know him or not, you have bought into that philosophy that we should rest at the end, not in the middle.

That you will only rest when you have completely finished everything that you need to do, accomplished everything that you need to do, gone to the highest place in the company that you can do, and only then will you rest. And that is what Kobe said, but that is not the right way from the very beginning.

Another thing. What day did God create Adam and Eve? Day six. What's the first day that they observe of God? A day of rest.

If God wanted to show them what it meant to work, what it meant to fulfill this cultural mandate as best as they could, wouldn't he have just created them on day one first and said, hey guys, look what I'm about to do in the next five days.

[15:40] You then replicate what I'm about to do. No. He creates them on the final day when all the work is done. And then he models to them what he wants them to do, which is you start with a day of rest.

You start with a day with me. Isn't that interesting? So often when we're working, if you ask yourself, why am I working so hard? Why am I working so hard? It's because I want to retire early so that I can travel and enjoy.

But we're working to rest. When the very first thing that the two first human beings experienced and saw was that they would work from rest.

That that first day would be of rest. Isn't that interesting? Isn't that mind-blowing? Doesn't that change the way you think or should change the way you think about how you approach work?

We are not God. So when we think about a Sunday, the goal or the weekend, the goal shouldn't be I'm going to try and crawl and get my way to Sunday to still survive.

[16:41] It is that the Sunday is the day that actually springboards you into the rest of the week. That's how we should look at it because we go to work from a place of rest when so often we are working for rest and we're chasing and chasing and chasing.

And what do we end up with? This low-grade hum of anxiety that I don't know if you experience but that I experience. Where I'm just always anxious. And it's because I've completely ignored what God says here.

Let's keep going back into this verse again. He's finished his work. His inaugural work is done. Everything that creation needs is there already. And so he rested on the seventh day. And what does he make that day?

He makes it holy. What does the word holy mean again? Set apart. Different. Actually, John Mark Comer talks a lot about this.

And if you're just kind of like wrestling with this topic a little bit, then of course he has a book that's very well known. It is called, Joe's read it, The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry. Great book.

[17:46] And actually he's inspired a lot by a Jewish writer who actually talks a lot about what this means. Isn't it interesting that the first, this is the very, very first time God calls anything holy.

Okay? Okay. Granted, we're not that far into the Bible. But this is the very, very first time he says something is holy. And it's not a place. It's time. And actually, there's this wonderful quote that I'll read to you just to help us understand this.

Abraham Joshua Heschel says this, the Sabbath is like a palace in time with a kingdom for all. As the Sabbath is like a palace in time. Now, another quick differentiation that we have to make.

When you have a Sabbath, and I hope, okay, full disclosure, by the end of this talk, I would love to feel that I've encouraged you and inspired you and educated you on what the Sabbath is. And that you rush out of here eager to Sabbath.

Okay? That's what I'm trying to do. Okay? Now, we have to quickly differentiate something else. A Sabbath is not a day off. Different things. A day off is a day that you have to go run your errands, do your shopping, do the things that you need to do.

[18:56] But that is not the Sabbath. That is not a set apart time for God. Because when a set, when a part is truly set apart for God, then it's about him. So you think about the last day off that you had.

Or you think about the imaginary day off that you're about to have, that you're dreaming for, that you're just working really hard for. What are you hoping to do? Well, if you're Jay, you're hoping to go surfing in the morning, which is a great thing, which he does involve God in. And then there's all these things I want to do.

Then I'll go to eat at this place. But then I've got to hit the post office. Then I've got to hit the bank. And then I've got to do this. I'm going to buy this, ready for this thing. And then that becomes a day off and it's no longer the Sabbath. You see, this is something else that we've done as mankind.

And we have an uncanny ability to do it with everything that we ever touch. Which is turn something good and then we twist it. Turn something like a holy day into a holiday.

Have you thought about that? Where that word even comes from? Holiday? Holiday comes from the holy day. Comes from a place where in the past people would be farming and working and cultivating and working the fields.

[20:00] And now they're hunting. But there would be one day that would be designated to be a holy day. And so we take that day. And what do we do in that holy day? We go to worship. But now what do we do on our holiday?

We go skiing. We go and do all these other things. Who's come back from a holiday completely exhausted?

If you've got kids, that's it. Like holidays with kids are just not holidays at all. So often we come back from holidays exhausted because that's not actually the thing that we needed.

What we needed was a holy day. What we needed was a day where we would... If your holiday, if your Sabbath doesn't start with worship, then I wonder whether it is actually a Sabbath.

Something to think about. But you're like, oh, but I thought we were made for work. We are. But as I just said at the beginning, work and worship are so intertwined.

[21:02] A.W. Tozer said this. Jesus did not redeem us to make us workers. He redeemed us to make us worshipers. And then out of the blazing worship of our hearts springs our work.

Let me read that again. Please hang on every word. It's not me. It's Tozer. Jesus did not redeem us to make us workers. He redeemed us to make us worshipers. And then out of the blazing worship of our hearts springs our work.

Your work is your worship. But first, you must work from rest and not for rest. I'm seeing nods.

So I hope you're tracking with me because I'm really, again, hoping that you leave here going, OK, man, I'm convicted because I have not been following the Ten Commandments. I've done pretty well with the murdering one. But the Sabbath one, tragic, shocking.

But it made it into the Ten. Because what we do instead is we strive and stress and strain for everything that we do. Because what are you actually doing when you're striving and stressing and straining and you're working more than you think, when you know you actually need?

[22:12] What you're saying is actually, I am God. I am in control of this. And what does the Sabbath do? The Sabbath helps remind us that we are not God. But just in case you get so sad,

you're like, oh, my goodness, I'm the only person that's struggling with this.

Let's go to the Old Testament where we find encouragement that the depravity of man has been with us since the very beginning. If we go, so they have this. God has modeled to Adam and Eve. The rest is important.

It's the first day. And why? Just because God wants to be with them. End of story. That's it. But then you see later in Exodus, the Israelites led out of Egypt, let my people go. And then they go out into the wilderness.

They're hungry. They're complaining. They have no food. And what happens in Exodus 19? God gives them food. And just imagine for me a second that you are so hungry and you are doubting and worrying. And you are dreaming about being under Pharaoh's authority again because you're that hungry.

And then suddenly you hear whispers coming down from the leadership, from Moses all the way down. There's going to be food. And it's going to be bread. And it's going to be nice. Oh, where's it coming from? Is someone going to supply it for us?

[23:12] Is food panda now finally here? No. It's just going to fall from this guy. Well, that would have been just a mind-blowing moment in itself. And then God says this, and you see him trying to teach them what it means to rest.

Because why? Remember, the Israelites were slaves. That means, did they have days off? No.

Side note, if you haven't had a day off for a long time, what are you a slave to?

Who are you a slave to? Anyway, back to being friendly. So, this food is going to drop from the sky. And he's saying, but he says this. He's like, I need to train you in something.

I need to train you to remind you that you are not God. So, this is what you're going to do. On the sixth day, I'm going to give you two helpings. What I want you to do is collect both. Because on the Sabbath, you won't do it.

So, even then, even in God's provision, he's trying to train them and teach them. And you know that the Israelites, very, very similar to the Chinese people. What happens, if you look at that, you'll just see Chinese people just written all over it.

[24:12] So, what they try and do is, they go and collect the food on one of the days. I forget which day. And then what happens, some of them, some of us, I identify deeply with this. I send my kids out, go and collect the food.

Go and collect the bread. And collect as much as you possibly can. Because we don't know whether it's going to fall from the sky again. And collect it and we'll eat it. But we won't eat all of it. Why? Just in case.

Just in case. I bought a little container. And we're going to save it for tomorrow. You laugh. But how many of us went to welcome to buy toilet roll? You laugh.

You judge. But how many of us scoffed when we saw the people on the TV looking for masks? And you're like, oh, I'm going to go out. I'm going to go out and get some masks. It's in all of us.

And so, what happens? They store it. And me as the dad, you know, it's like, I'm clever. My kids are going to be provided for. I wake up the next morning and what's happened to the manna? Worms have taken over.

[25:14] Exodus 19. This isn't a modern day story. This has happened. This has been with us since the ancient times. And so then God says, no. You cannot save for tomorrow. Why? Because each day I will give you just enough.

But on the sixth day, we're doing something special. Because I insist you have a Sabbath. Because I insist that you remember that you are not God. I am God. So on the seventh day, do not go out.

And what happens on the seventh day in the morning? James and his family sneak out again. Just to make sure that there's no bread falling from the sky. And that's when, okay, we have to read this.

If you're following me in the Bible, this is going to be a Bible study of sorts as well. Exodus chapter 16. Just a few verses just to highlight. So Exodus chapter 16.

So it's only the one after Genesis. So it shouldn't be too hard to find. Okay. Exodus chapter 16, verse 5. It says this. On the sixth day when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily. Excellent.

[26:14] Fun. Gather it all. Ready for tomorrow. Because tomorrow you're not allowed to work. But they save it. And then it doesn't go well. Verse 20. But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till morning. That I identify because that was me.

And it bred worms. And it stank. And Moses was angry with them. Okay. And then they carry on. And finally. Okay. So verse 23. This is what the Lord has commanded. Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest.

A holy Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil. And all there's left over lay aside to be kept until the morning. Moses verse 25 says. Eat it today. For today is a Sabbath to the Lord.

It's 26. Six days you shall gather it. But on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none. Israelites, there will be no more magic bread coming from the sky. Do not go out on Sunday to get this bread. It won't be there.

But what do they do? Verse 27. On the seventh day, some of the people went out together, but they found none. And the Lord said to Moses, how long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?

[27:10] See, the Lord has given you. The Lord has given you. The Lord has given us the Sabbath. A gift to us. To protect us mostly from ourselves.

That we would not stress, strain, and strive and plan for the future as though we are really in control of our future. Brothers and sisters, do you Sabbath?

See, what happened here in Exodus is he took the Israelites out of Egypt, but could he take the Egypt out of the Israelites? No, they were still slaves to the same thing. They were slaves to worry. They were slaves to the provision. And all this time, until now, you and I sat here, I think God's training us to do the same thing. Do you not know, can you not see that I've been providing for you all the way?

That it may not look like bread falling from the sky, but the fact that you are sat here is a miracle in itself. Sabbath. Sabbath.

[28:13] Dewey Sabbath. He goes on. Sorry, Exodus chapter 20. Of course, he has the whole list. If anyone wants someone to recite the whole Ten Commandments, Francis is very good at that.

He can do the whole thing. But verse 8. Exodus chapter 20, verse 8. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Sixth day you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the 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 livestock or the sojourner who is within your gates. 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 and made it holy. It's the one where he really elaborates on. And it's the one that he says remember to do it. Why? Because we keep forgetting. Remember to do the Sabbath.

And not just you, actually. You, your children, your male servants, your female servants, your guests, your animals. Don't even let your animals work. Why?

[29:10] Because none of you are God. And you all need to know that this time was set apart as holy for your sake. To show that you must work because you were created to work, but you do not work for rest.

You work from rest. Adam and Eve understood this because they experienced that first day with God. And that's essentially what we're trying to get back to.

Why is he doing this? He's trying to pull the Egypt out of the Israelites. We're going to keep going. Deuteronomy. So if you skip Leviticus and Numbers and you go to Deuteronomy, he talks about the Ten Commandments.

This is just a different version of the Ten Commandments here. Deuteronomy chapter five. If you haven't got time to follow me, you can just take notes and look at these afterwards. Deuteronomy chapter five. He's talking about the Ten Commandments.

And then he says this, verse 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 outstretched arm.

Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

[30:14] Can you see the relationship between the Sabbath and what their identity was before that is so key that they would have understood? That I think we struggle to understand. He's saying, hey, do you remember when you were under the control of Pharaoh and that you didn't get a day off and you were exhausted?

And yet here I'm trying to remind you, hey, remember where you came from because now I want to show you this is why you take the Sabbath. This is why you rest. It's tied in for us in a way that it's like, well, do you remember when you were a slave to sin?

Do you remember when you were caught up in things that you couldn't get out of? When you were so driven by the things of society that led you to all the challenges, all the mental health challenges, all the emotional challenges, all the financial, everything.

Do you remember when you were a slave to all of those things and now you've been freed? Now you've been freed. What's the first thing you should do? Sabbath. Sabbath. This is so, so countercultural to the Taipei, Hong Kong, go get it mentality.

You've been saved. I've been saved. I must go do this. I've been created. I must go do this. No, no, no. I don't believe created. Day two, hang out with God. Oh, I've been freed. I'm now no longer a slave to sin or slave to Pharaoh.

[31:27] Great. Hang out with God. Can you see how we've completely changed? That reminds me that we have twisted what we were supposed to be. And there's something in all of this is that when you Sabbath, let me give you another thing about Sabbath.

It's not a day off. It's not a day for you to do your errands, but it is a day for you to delight, to have fun. So when you're thinking about what you should do on your Sabbath, one thing you should think about is, well, what gives me joy?

What lifts my spirit to the point, not so that I would feel happy, but so that I would glorify God more and I would enjoy him more. Let's fast forward a little bit more and go to the prophet Isaiah.

Don't worry. We're going to get to the New Testament and we're going to get to Jesus very soon.

But Acts, sorry, Isaiah, I keep saying Acts because we've been there for the last six months. So it is not Acts. We're in Isaiah.

Chapter 58. Isaiah chapter 58. He's talking about fasting and he's talking about you guys are fasting, but you're kind of fasting in the wrong way. And he's saying that your kind of fasting is kind of a fake kind of fasting because you don't really understand what you're doing.

[32:27] But what I want you to do is when you're fasting, the true kind of fasting, the true kind of Sabbath is one where you are actually delighting. So you're not like tearing your face because you're so hungry and so devastated and you're just grumpy to everyone and you're just hangry, of course, because you're fasting.

No, he's saying when you fast or rather when you Sabbath here, chapter 58, verse 14, and then you shall take delight in the Lord and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth.

So when we fast or when we Sabbath, there is this idea of delight. We are just so excited. Why? Because of what God has done for us.

This leads me to something which I think we should do all the time and we should do every time we have a chance, which is to give thanks. To be people of gratitude. A few years ago during COVID, and I've shared this many times before, when I was getting grumpy and grumpy and grumbling during the COVID times, I was like, you know, I'm convicted.

What I need to do is I need to give thanks more. And so as a family, we started our gratitude books. We went to Muji, bought four books, and now we have five. But he doesn't really write in it. He just scribbles in it. But we give thanks every day.

[33:37] We write things that we are thankful for. And I got this idea from someone else, a friend whose kid is now mid-20s and who still does it. Why is it so good? Because it just turns our perspective.

And on the early days, I remember teaching my children, and I'm like, what are you thankful for? I don't know. I don't know what I'm thankful for. It's been a boring day. Well, let's just be thankful that we have two feet that work.

Let's just be thankful that we have two eyes and nose. Like limbs that work, that we can breathe. That we don't have an NG tube stuck down on our nose. There's always something to be thankful for.

What's the Sabbath for? It's to delight. To give thanks. Do we do those kinds of things? Let's fast forward now to Jesus. Jesus comes in.

And he, yes, there was a commandment. Remember the Sabbath. Jesus comes in with not a commandment. He comes in with an invitation. And this week as we've been praying, Alex Lee has been leading us in this prayer every morning.

[34:42] And it's honestly a delight to pray that prayer. And that's Matthew 11. Matthew 11. Jesus comes in. And he gives us the words that all of us find comfort in.

Especially those of us who live in a city, work in a city, socialize in a city. And we are just tired of the low-grade hum of anxiety, exhaustion that we have.

Jesus comes to us with this invitation. That is a different twist to the commandment. But here it is. Matthew 11, verse 28 to 30. How many of us just, we hear that invitation and we're like, yes, please. I've been laboring and I'm heavy laden. I am weary. And I need your rest. And we stop there. We turn it into an IG post. We put it on a fridge magnet. We put it as a sticker. We love it. Matthew 11, verse 28 to 30. And then we stop there.

[36:03] And remember when scripture was written, it wasn't in these clean chapters and verses. What are the next two things that Jesus talks about straight after the Matthew 11 verses? If you look, if you peek into your paper Bible from which you are being saved.

And chapter 12, he talks about the Sabbath twice. So he says, come to me if you are weary. And then pay attention to what I've got to say about the Sabbath.

And he talks about the Sabbath and he talks about how he is the Lord of the Sabbath. But there is a kicker here. It is slightly different here because actually the Israelites, they did observe the Sabbath very well.

They observed it to the point where it was like a rule. It was rigid and you're not allowed to. There are so many things that you weren't allowed to do. No fire can be involved during those days. And you can imagine how important fire was.

Fire from then would be like Wi-Fi now. So they would have nothing to be able to do. They couldn't even lift heavy things. But the problem with this is the Sabbath was meant for an experience to have been the presence of God.

[37:12] That was the original intent. As time went on, again, humans have this uncanny ability to do this. It eventually became a prison. It eventually became a set of rules that they had to follow.

So when Jesus shows up, it's not a commandment anymore that he's trying to do. He's trying to invite them into something else and recalibrate what they think the Sabbath is. Because they've turned into a prison when it was really all about presence.

And it was really all about being with God. So what happens is, actually, Jesus, if you watch his story, if you read his story, there's two things he gets in trouble with the most. One is who he has dinner with.

Like, people hate who Jesus hangs out with. That's number one. Which, actually, he should just pause us for a second and go, actually, who are the people that I'm hanging out with? Is it too easy? Is it too normal?

Is it too acceptable? Who should I go and spend time with? That was constantly they were giving him grief about who he would eat with. The second is what he would be doing on the Sabbath. Which is, isn't that just so ironic?

[38:10] He knew what the Sabbath was about. But they turned it into a prison. And they are completely ignoring the fact that, actually, really, it was about being in his presence. And so then, what you see here, Jesus constantly trying to challenge them, which is, hey, this is not a prison.

The Sabbath was made for man. To help man. Not the other way around. We're not here to serve the Sabbath. But the Sabbath was here as a gift to you.

To release you from the burdens of society. To release you from having your work tying down to your identity. The Sabbath was for you. And let me tell you something even more. Jesus says, I am the Lord of the Sabbath.

Which means what? Which means I am the one above all of it. I am the reason why the Sabbath was in place. The whole point of the Sabbath was that you would find me. Was what he was saying. And so that's why he would challenge them.

On what they thought the Sabbath meant. Because some of you are going to be like, okay. Got it, James. Registered. I am now going to tick off the next box, which is accomplish the Sabbath.

[39:13] And I'm going to put things in place where I accomplish the Sabbath with full marks. And I'm going to do all these things. My fear is that you would miss the point. When it's actually just about being with him.

Being in his presence. Last summer I started, actually two summers ago, I started something that I could do only in the summers. Which is waste time with God. I would set an alarm for one hour.

Throw my phone across the room to the other side. And I would sit and I would stare outside for an hour. And say, God, I'm just here. I'm not here to read your word. I'm not here to pray. I'm not here to intercede. I'm just here to sit. Why? Because I want to just be with you. The first time I did this, it was the most painful thing I could ever do. The second time, it got a little bit easier. And the third time I was like, oh, I need this so much. Jesus has come to me. All who are weary. All who are heavy laden.

[40:14] And I will give you rest. The Sabbath does something else. Abraham Joshua Heschel says this.

Six days a week, we seek to dominate the world. On the seventh day, we try to dominate the self. We take God's cultural mandate to us. Go work.

Be fruitful. Be multiply. Have dominion. But if we don't have a Sabbath, that dominion turns into domination. And who gets dominated? We do. How many of us have been dominated by work? The Sabbath is the day where you stop and you say, I am not God.

I will not be dominated by this. I have a cultural mandate to reassemble these raw elements, to worship him and to glorify him and to enjoy him. But I will also stop because the whole point of life is to also be with him.

I work from rest, not for rest. What does this mean? This means there will be times where you sit, where you have to make a decision with your work and you're like, should I do this or not? If I do this, this will help me continue to progress.

[41:17] If I don't, someone else is going to take my place and go up there. But it's in that moment you say, I am not God. I am not in control. I'm not going to be dominated by this.

And I may lose this promotion. And that is okay because I am not God. The Sabbath is us trusting our careers, trusting our family, trusting our social life, that if you miss that dinner, you'll still be okay with those friends.

They'll still like you. They'll still invite you next time. And if they don't invite you, then maybe they weren't supposed to be friends anyway. And so we go that way. But I am here to observe the Sabbath and stop, not as a day off, not as a holiday, but as a holy day where I focus on him.

And come what may from that. Because the job that I have is from God anyway. The course that I'm studying is from God anyway because I prayed for it and he gave it to me and I'm giving thanks to him as though it is.

But often it's just lip service. But in my heart, I'm thinking, actually, I worked very hard for this and I have to keep climbing up this. When in reality, it's not. That's where the Sabbath comes. It isn't interesting that the way, the antidote to that domination from the world is simply a Sabbath.

[42:27] Hidden in plain sight. As a command and as an invite. And yet we ignore it so often. How do we Sabbath? Walter Brueggemann says this.

Sabbath is an act of resistance because it is a visible, tactile, physical no to the system of production and consumption. It's not just rest.

It is resistance. It is not just rest. It is resistance to the ways of the world, to the production and consumption of the world. Are you willing to slam the brakes and saying, I'm going to stop and be still and know that you are God.

That word be still in Psalm 46 is freeze, stop, pause, drop your weapons. Why? Because it's not my battle to fight. I will work as hard as I possibly can in the six days that God has given me to work.

But that seventh day is untouchable. Because without that seventh day, everything else is meaningless. The Sabbath doesn't just affect your Sunday. The Sabbath affects your every day.

[43:30] That's why it's so important. Final passage that we'll go to, and we're getting towards the end of the Bible here, is Hebrews. Hebrews is towards the end.

If you can see one John and two John, it's too far. Hebrews chapter four. He talks about this. We talked about Exodus. We talked about Moses and the Israelites.

And Hebrews chapter three talks about how Jesus is greater than Moses. If our high priest was Kobe Bryant or your CEO or whoever it is that's basically dictating your rhythm of life, which, if we're honest, which boss is going to tell you, hey, stop working?

Which boss is going to tell you, hey, set limitations for yourself, for your boundaries? Hey, which boss is going to say, hey, when I text you at five, you know, actually, Hong Kong is not five o'clock. Well, when I text you at 7 p.m., hey, don't reply to me.

When I call you at 8 p.m., don't pick up my phone. Which boss is going to say that? Every boss is going to be like, hey, do whatever I need you to do yesterday. Right? So that is the high priest of our time.

[44 : 40] But yet in Hebrews, what he's talking about is we now have a new high priest. And it's not even just Moses. It's Jesus. And Jesus is greater than Moses is the title of chapter three. Chapter four is the passage that I want to quickly show you.

Chapter four, verse 11. Hebrews chapter four, verse 11. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Let us strive into that rest that we need. What does this tell me? This tells me when we do a Sabbath, it's actually really hard work. Christina and I actually, we learned this from my brother who, when he came to Hong Kong, really started to exercise this retreat day where he would go away and spend the day and the night with the Lord.

So we learned this since we got here because we realized how important it is to do this in Hong Kong. And what I realized the first few times, it is so much hard work. If you have family responsibilities, if you have work responsibilities, to even find a day where you go away to spend with the Lord is actually really hard work.

Why? Because you've got to do a lot of other stuff to prepare for it. It's like going out into the desert on day six and collecting two baskets of bread. Before you have your Sabbath, be prepared that the day before is a day of preparation and it is more work.

[45 : 52] And yet Hebrews here says we strive into that. This is the only effort that we should put in, which is the day before the Sabbath. Get everything else in order.

Send all the emails out. Make sure all the kids and your spouses are completely okay as much as is possible. And then you go into your Sabbath. It is okay. It is right to strive into that, to actually work, to prepare the way for that.

And you strive into that rest is what we're seeing here. But that rest that he's talking about isn't a list of things that you do. It isn't a schedule that you do. But side note, when you go away for a day and have a Sabbath or have a retreat, I actually highly recommend a schedule of sorts.

Our brains are so hard, we're hardwired to be doing things. And actually, it's a shock to the system. When I first went away, actually, the first physical experience I felt was, reminded me of driving in England in the snow, slamming the brakes, and I was just skidding.

That's literally how I felt. Because our brains are not wired for it. So actually, I found comfort in the first few times to actually come up with a schedule. From 9 to 10, I'm going to do this. From 10 to 10.30, I'm going to do this.

[46 : 58] From 11 to 2, I'm going to have a nap. That's okay. But do that. Make every effort to strive into that rest. And then you get to the point where you realize that this rest is not a to-do list.

It is not a schedule. But it's actually the person of Jesus himself. Interestingly, dotted around in this little chapter here, chapter 4, verse 6 says this, Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience.

Chapter 3, verse 19 says, So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. So one of the reasons why we struggle to enter that rest, the Sabbath rest, is because of disobedience, because of unbelief.

Because we're worried that if we don't do what we need to do, then we won't get what we need to get. It's basically what the Spirit is. I won't ask you to go there, but Isaiah chapter 58, talking about delight.

Just one chapter before there, Isaiah 57, it talks about this idea that there is a term that actually, I'll go there. It talks about this term that actually we'll have all heard before.

[48 : 05] And this is this. Isaiah chapter 57, verse 20, But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

Where do we get the modern term, no rest for the wicked? Right here, in Scripture. When was the last time you heard someone, there's no rest for the wicked? I've got to keep going. It's from, next time your colleague tells you this, you say, Brother, Isaiah 57, good on you.

You're quoting Scripture to me. God says no rest for the wicked. Why? Because the wicked think that they are in control. The wicked twist what was good and turned it away from God.

The wicked try to rely on themselves. The wicked don't rest because the wicked don't Sabbath. Because they don't remember that they are not God, but He is. No rest for the wicked. We don't want to be wicked. We want to be set apart. We want to be holy. We want to be different. So therefore, we Sabbath. And when we Sabbath, it is not just a to-do list. It is to be in the presence of the new high priest, which is Jesus.

[49:12] Genesis chapter 2, I'm finishing here. Well done for hanging with me. God stops and rests and says, it is done. It is finished. The reason we can still work from that rest is because we now have a new high priest who set us free from the slavery of society.

And on that cross, He says the same words, essentially. It is finished. There is no more work to be done for this group of people to have access to Him, to me.

No more work. There is nothing that needs to be done. No careers to be had. No accomplishments to be made. No fundraising to be done. No missions to be completed. Everything is done.

It is finished. Finished. He sits on the throne after being on the cross. And that's the place that we work from. So when we walk into work, when we walk into the friendship circles that we're trying to maintain, into the relationships that we're trying to sustain, we say it is finished.

Everything that needs to be done is already done by Jesus. He is God. We are not. So final little wordplay trivia here. When He creates days one to six in Genesis one, at the end of each day, He will say, and there was evening, and there was morning, and there was morning.

[50:34] The fourth day. The fifth day. There's like a chapter that kind of, there's a line that just keeps repeating. And there was evening, there was morning, and then it stops. The seventh day, He doesn't do it. He doesn't say it.

It's finished. The inaugural work is done. Everything is set in motion, in perpetual motion, this point of rest. Don't you want that? I want that.

This invitation to come to Him to rest. And it's once I've rested, then I go into work. Then I do the things that are required of me. But it's from that place of rest.

Look at the cross. It is finished. Look at Jesus. He is the rest. I'm finishing now.

But maybe a quick, a few practical things. How do I Sabbath? First of all, set aside time. And honestly, if it, traditionally, it was a whole 24-hour period.

[51:35] Traditionally, it was Friday evening to Saturday evening. You're like, okay, that's impossible. I'm not even sleeping six hours. How can I do 24 hours of Sabbath? Well, I would say, actually, John Markoma says this, just start where you are.

And if it's 30 minutes is all you can do for a Sabbath, then do that. Do that. Just start with wherever you're at. But set aside time. Because time is the holy thing. Not your task.

It's time. So set aside that time and say, this is holy. And this is how I'm going to worship God. And start your time with worship. Start your time with worship.

That's something else. The task. What do you do? This is where it gets a little bit interesting.

Because people rest in different ways. Okay? Case in point, my wife loves to work too much.

But the way she rests, I'm like, it's a bit of a loophole here. The way she rests is often through also doing something. Like, so she, like, so when I'm just kind of like getting my Jesus on and sitting on the couch, she's like, she can't do that.

[52:38] That's not restful for her in some way. She has to be doing something. And so it's different for every person. Actually, Marva Doran says this, which I think is quite insightful. It says this, she says this. If you work with your hands all week, you should Sabbath with your mind.

Reading, thinking, and praying. If you work with your mind all week, emails and strategy and study, you should Sabbath with your hands. Gardening, cooking, walking, creating. What they mean is, just do something that isn't tied to work.

Do something that's avocational, is how Tim Keller put it. Just do something different than what you're normally doing. So if you are, if you use your mind a lot, then do something that's actually physical. And if you actually are doing a lot of physical things, then do something with your mind.

And of course, I'm preaching to people who are working and who are working hard. If you're sat here and you struggle with work and you procrastinate for most of your life, this sermon was not for you. Okay? Get to work.

Okay? There are still six days. Remember those six days. I'm talking about those who are tired and weary because they're working eight day weeks.

[53:40] Okay? So just beware. Know who you are. Okay? But if you are thinking about Sabbath, then think, okay, what's the other thing that I need to be doing? What's something that's completely different?

And of course, you have to stop. You have to sleep. You have to sit. There's going to be moments in your Sabbath where you just sit and just be. Put that into your day.

The other thing is delight. You know, there are some ancient traditions where it's on the Sabbath. You're not allowed to do anything else. But husbands and wives, that day is the day that you make love. That is the day that you spend time together.

Can you imagine just husbands just poking at, ooh. Honey, it's Sabbath day today. Let's go. Let's worship God. So also do the things that you enjoy.

Do the things that actually give you life, that are actually fun and life-giving, and that cause you to delight. Not just in yourself, but in God. Reminded of the old, old movie that maybe some of you will remember, Chariots of Fire, right?

[54:43] When he runs and he just experiences the presence of God. Do whatever it is that causes you to delight, to worship him. Go into nature.

Even in the humidity and the mosquitoes. Find a way to be in air con, but also in nature. I don't know how you're going to do it, but apparently the Hong Kong Sevens and the Kai Tak Stadium has managed to do that.

Just have air con in an outdoor, indoor space. But be in nature. There's something about nature.

There's something about sitting on the sand, watching the waves go by, and realizing that you have done nothing to help it, stop it.

It just keeps going. And what it tells you is that actually, this world does not need you to exist.

Nature does that to you. A final thing that maybe the modern listener needs to know is about the digital age.

I'm not convinced that we can rest with our phones right next to us. The benefits are minimal. But my goodness, the distractions, the dangers are just insurmountable.

[55:51] When you Sabbath, put that phone away. Get yourself a paper Bible. Get yourself a notebook. Not to say that you have to do those things during a Sabbath, but get away from the digital.

We are the first generation where we can take work home and it can dominate our lives. We are the first generation where we can socialize without being with people next to us. Get rid of it for that time.

And if there's people that you need to tell, hey, you're not going to reach me for the next, then tell them. And the final thing on that one is accountability. Accountability. Some of you are like James. I love the Sabbath idea.

I love the sermon. But here's the thing. I've got an exam coming up. And I've got a project that I've got to do. Then I've got this I've got to do. And then I've got this. To which I say, I completely understand.

Start where you are. But accountability. Find some people who you can talk to and say, hey, I am so convicted and convinced about the Sabbath. And I've got three months of this crazy life that I have to go through.

[56:54] But can you make sure that my three months of crazy life does not end up being three years? You come to me in month four and say, hey, have you sorted that out? Like there's grace for all of this.

We even Sabbath from rest. Everything is from this state of just it is done. God has done it all. But accountability. Find people in your life who go, wait, why are you still WhatsApping?

Why are you still replying? Find people around you because we can't do it on our own. Strive into that rest together. With the same message, which is God. You are God in heaven. Here we are on earth. Let our words be for you.

Let our actions be for you. We need you every minute of every moment of every hour of every day. It is all about you. I remember that. I remember that. And I worship you and I glorify you and I enjoy you forevermore.

Just as you intended. Let us pray. and so we strive to enter that rest it's been described that the whole nature of the gospel is to ask is to ask for help and so here we are but first we say sorry we have completely completely ignored your commandment to remember the sabbath to remember

you so we remember that we were once slaves to sin but now we have been freed and in that we delight sorry that we have completely deprioritized your invitation to us to come to you where you will give us rest for our souls help us lord to sabbath help us to draw near to you draw near to us as we try lord we need you we need you we need you so we come and ask that you would fill every minute every hour of our days we let the sabbath we let today be our first day of the week that we let it be a day where we delight in you thank you lord yes lord we need you lord help us long for sabbath lord a glimpse of eternity lord if we can't enjoy sabbath now and delight in it how can we enjoy you in eternity so lord help us to be children that is free to rest lord we rest not because of our finished work but of your finished work set us free lord we are no longer enslaved in egypt we no longer need to work endlessly for pharaoh we are your children we are set free because of you we are free indeed and so lord we pray that as we start this week of rest in freedom as your children the chains are gone we thank you and pray this in jesus mighty name amen