

REST THAT WORSHIPS
A Sermon by Brett Sisley
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How are you feeling this morning? Are you ready to swing into fall? It's hard to believe that summer is nearly gone... I trust that each of you, along with your families and friends have had a wonderful summer. If not, you've got one week left! And after all, fall isn't that bad, right? The colors of fall are a beautiful thing, leaves beginning to tinge red, yellow and orange... The days grow shorter as well—making fall and winter to come, a great time to get some much needed rest. For many, at least 'round here, I know the fall means one thing more than anything else: football! Whatever the coming of fall means to you, for the next few minutes, I want us to think about rest. Rest is operative word this morning.

A study released by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) says that adults are not getting enough rest (surprise, surprise). Of those questioned, 70 percent said they had not gotten enough rest or sleep every day of the past month.

The study, which surveyed adults in Delaware, Hawaii, New York and Rhode Island, found that a lack of sleep is a particular problem for younger adults. Of those between 18 and 34, 13.3 percent lacked enough sleep every day, compared to 7.3 percent of adults over 55.

Interestingly, the study did not find significant differences between races or genders.

The National Sleep Foundation says that most adults need 7-9 hours of sleep each night. This study shows that many are not getting it.

Nationwide, adults that averaged six hours or less of sleep a night increased in all age in groups from 1985 to 2006, according to a National Health Interview Study. In 1985, about 20 percent of men and women ages 45-64 reported sleeping an average of six hours or less. By 2006 that number had jumped to 30 percent. Today, an estimated 50-70 million people suffer from constant sleep loss or sleep disorders.

Sleep deprivation can lead to a myriad of health problems, industrial and traffic accidents, road rage, and even instances of domestic violence.

Rest is important. We need to rest. But we also need to work. Work is (of course) a common reason for lack of sleep. Whether it be career work, school work, parenting, general business, etc., this life runs you ragged, and often leaves you gasping for breath—physically, emotionally, and even spiritually.

You may be intrigued to know that the idea of rest is a prominent one in Scripture. Following the six days of creation, Genesis tells us that God rested on the seventh day. *God rested*. Now I

am the only one, or does it strike you as odd that *God* rested? Take a few seconds, and think about it: of all the things that could be said of the God we meet in the Bible (all-powerful, all-knowing...), why does the Genesis account emphasize the fact that He rested after working? Even if the Bible were nothing more than a collection of myths, it's still telling that human writers would chose to introduce Jehovah God as one who rests. Hmm.

For me, as one who believes the Bible, and accepts it as the inspired word of the Living God, there is one simple reason why: *God is our manufacturer*. God made humankind in His image. Our need to rest stems from His practice of rest. Not that He was all tuckered out after six days of hard work—but that *since He chose to, we need to*. We are image bearers—reflectors of who He is. There's nothing we can do to change this. We are happy, satisfied, and balanced the more we acknowledge this truth with the way we live.

(Brief Pause)

Of course, the Bible's persistence about rest doesn't stop with creation. *Because* God rested, His people are *commanded* to rest. Number 4 of the 10 Commandments orders God's people to "remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy" (Ex. 19:8). Wow. That should kind of blow you away: in God's mind, us obediently reflecting His rest is on par with: not committing adultery, not murdering your brother or sister, honoring your father and mother...

(Brief Pause)

To keep holy means to set the seventh day apart for dedicated observance. We do this with Christmas. We do this with birthdays. But we're *ordered* to set apart and to diligently observe the Sabbath day. And Scripture is clear as to why:

"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" (Ex. 20:11).

And so there we have it: We, God's people, are to rest because he rested.

(Brief Pause)

Turn with me to 1 Cor. 14:6. In this passage, the Apostle Paul is speaking about the proper function of spiritual gifts in the church. Specifically, he's talking about the gift of tongues. Our topic this morning is different, but Paul makes a point here in verses 6-8 which applies in a beautiful way to our discussion. Beginning in verse 6, he says:

"Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I help you unless I speak to you with a revelation or with knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷ It is similar for lifeless things that make a sound, like a flute or harp. Unless they make a distinction in the notes, how can what is played on the flute or harp be understood?"

(Brief Pause)

Have you ever stopped to think about what separates music from common sound? There are many notes and tones in nature. But we do not call nature *itself*, music. As Paul astutely points out here, what makes music *music* is how the sounds are separated. Music is punctuated by rests. The ebb and flow of a symphony is created by tempo—fast, slow, and complete stop.

CORE (slow down, emphasize)

Today, I want us to apply this awareness to the lives we lead—in groupings of days, as seven bars. I want to suggest that the significance of Sabbath keeping and our human need for rest both find meaning in the song of life that God is writing. Everything that is, He created. In perfect harmony, the millions of interrelated systems which hold creation together testify to His magnificence. And out of all creation, we alone bear His image. We, have been made to reflect His person. And for this reason, we must rest.

TRANSITION to Spiritual Rest

Turn over to Hebrews chapter 4, and put a finger or bookmark there for just a moment. In the time remaining, I want us to build onto the idea of physical rest as we've discussed it. We're going to do so by considering the concept of *spiritual rest*.

Hebrews is a letter originally written, not surprisingly, to people enculturated in Judaism. The purpose of the letter is to share with hearers the Good News about Jesus the Christ. He or she does this by demonstrating Jesus' fulfillment of the Torah. Hebrews communicates that Jesus makes the Torah work for God's people. Or, better said: Torah work is completed for God's people in Jesus.

For the Jews living in Jesus' time, keeping the Sabbath was *insanely* important. Centuries of religious leaders had built volumes of precepts around the original Law that God gave Moses at Sinai. Instead of helping God's people reflect His person, these man-made ordinances kept them estranged. People were so busy working to serve the Law that they had become strangers to the Law-giver.

Of 56 instances of the word Sabbath in the NT, 41 of them occur during interchanges between Jesus and religious leaders (not a coincidence). On each of these occasions (many of which are parallel accounts between the Gospel writers) Jesus confronts the would-be experts' understanding of the Sabbath. And on each of these occasions, they go away conspiring. Eventually, Jesus and His disciples' handling of the Sabbath is one the capital offenses brought against Him on the night He is arrested and sentenced to death.

Safe to say, Jesus—the Son of God—knew better than they what it meant to keep the Sabbath. He knew better than anyone why His Father commanded the Sabbath be kept holy. And because He wanted rest for God's people, His words are recorded in Scripture. Concerning the rest of the Sabbath, Jesus said things like:

(SLOW DOWN)

- “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:27).
- "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" (Mk. 3:4)
- "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? {16} "So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound; think of it; for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" (Lk. 13:15).
- "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" (Lk. 14:5).

Jesus also said,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfill them” (Mt. 5:17).

(Brief Pause)

(SLOW DOWN)

Jesus revered the Sabbath more than the religious people who would eventually have Him crucified. He revered the Sabbath so much that He laid down His life so God’s people could find rest. Sabbath rest punctuated human life for Jesus. By healing people in the face of the self-righteous, damning their contempt, He played loud and clean the love song of the Father for fallen humanity:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry” (Mt. 11:28-30).

(Brief Pause)

As we close, let’s look at Hebrews chapter 4, verses 9 & 10.

“⁹So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His. ¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”

There remains for us, *there is extended to us*, the same day of Sabbath rest that Jesus offered. The Sabbath is a day. Scripture clearly shows the Sabbath is the seventh day—a period or a comma, a whole note’s rest—between bars and bars of six days’ work. It’s needful for our bodies to rest. There’s much that could and probably should be said about disciplining ourselves (our schedules) to cease from the grind religiously once a week. But, as we prepare to leave here *this* Sabbath day, God wants each of us to know how much He desires our spirits to find His rest.

The context for what we just read in Hebrews 4 is a choice we make. A choice we make once, and then each day following. It's the choice to trust God and enter into His rest. Look at verse 1...

¹Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ²For Good News came to us just as to them, but the words they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."

Now listen as I read these words once more... (SLOW DOWN)

Therefore, while the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us pause, and examine the state of our lives, lest we fail to enter it. For the Good News about a Father in love with His children has come to us today. Let us not be like those who have hardened their hearts and gone away empty, weary. Let the life in these words be germinated in our hearts through faith.

(Brief Pause)

It's been said that "There's no better time than the present." We're here. God is here. It's the Sabbath. God is speaking to each of us. He's pleading with us to cease from our labors and enter His rest. It could be our labors to be good enough—for Him, for others, for ourselves. It could be the work we thrust ourselves into to avoid dealing with the stuff of our past, or present, our relationships. How about the task master's whip to find security? Security on our own is a myth.

Right now, our Heavenly Father is saying to us: Let go, I've got this! The hard part's already been done. It's good, because I've said "It is good." It's good, because my only Begotten said "It is finished!" Whatever *it* is, wherever you've been. It doesn't have to be a catastrophe... It could be as simple as a traffic ticket you're sweating, or one of many headlines filling the news wires. Rest is why we're here. We all need to rest from our labors and receive more readily the loving, perfect, completing rest of our Father.

Let's pray.

Father, we hallow your precious name. We humbly bow in your presence. But we come before you as your children. In Jesus' name I ask that you cast aside any distractions. Bind the wicked one. Speak to us. Expose within us any thing that holds us back from entering your rest.

As the band plays, and the Holy Spirit continues to move, receive the Good News that has come to you today. Do business with God. Lay your life bare before Him. If it's therapy you need, let the Spirit sooth. If you would like brothers and sisters to pray with you, we are here for that. Whatever you need, whatever God is doing: you are here, today is the day. Be open. Be bold. Find rest.