

The God Who Makes Sabbath Holy

Thomas Robinson, *Rest & Delight in God's Presence 1*, August 16, 2015

Genesis 1:31 – 2:3

1:³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, **it was very good**. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2:¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day **God finished his work** that he had done, and **he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done**.

³ So **God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation**.

Mark 2:23-27

²³ One Sabbath Jesus 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 him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

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?"

²⁷ And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath." ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath."

Exodus 20:8-11 The fourth of the Ten Commandments.

⁸ "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 (*Yahweh*) 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 (*Yahweh*) made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD (*Yahweh*) blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

Deuteronomy 5:12, 14b-15 The fourth of the Ten Commandments given again.

¹² "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD (*Yahweh*) your God commanded you. ... 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 (*Yahweh*) your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD (*Yahweh*) your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."

Exodus 16:23 The Sabbath command is first given when God gives Israel Manna.

²³ Moses said to them, "This is what the LORD (*Yahweh*) has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD (*Yahweh*); bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.'"

Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ "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."

Matthew 6:24-35

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters (Lords). Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Mammon).

²⁵ Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life [*psyche*, soul], what you will eat or drink; or about your body [*soma*], what you will wear. Is not life [*psyche*, the soul] more important (something more) than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Jesus and the Meaning of Sabbath

Our congregational retreat topic, *"In God's Presence – Seeking Rest and Delight in Everyday Life,"* began from meditation on the understanding of Sabbath in both the OT and NT.

The Sabbath, "Rest," is one of the 10 Commandments, linked to the story of creation in which God sanctifies the seventh day (Saturday). It has always had a very prominent place in both Jewish and Christian thinking. In late antiquity as the Roman empire became Christianized, the use of 'Sabbath' shifted for Christians from Saturday to Sunday as a legal rest day.

Should we be concerned with the concept of the Sabbath. The Gospels describe Jesus' many controversies with the Pharisees over the Sabbath, often read as Jesus refusing to keep the Sabbath. Jesus disagreed with the Pharisees' definition of Sabbath restrictions, but he affirmed the Sabbath was made for us humans and claimed to be "Lord of the Sabbath." Indeed, Jesus called laboring, weary people as disciples promising to give them real Sabbath.

God and the Music and Language of Time

In a sense the idea of Sabbath has a unique place in the OT story. It is linked both to Israel's own story and to the understanding of all creation. The creation narrative in Gen 1-2:3 is a creation of the rhythm of time (evening, morning, day one...). But the sequence doesn't end with the creation of humans on the very busy 6th day. God takes a day off. He rests. He doesn't do tests on creation to make sure it's working. He sanctifies a day/rhythm of rest.

But nothing is said about that holy rest for a long time. Only when he delivers Israel from Egypt, leads them into the desert without food, and begins giving them Manna to eat. This marvelous food spoils daily except on the 7th when it stays good. Trust God's provision/rest.

Sabbath takes a central spot in the 10 Commandments. It links trust in only one God in the first commands and building a trustworthy, non-exploiting community in the later. God has built a deep, moral rhythm into time. It becomes our language expressing our deepest values.

"Time is Money" and the Doctrine of the Free Lunch

Sabbath tells a distinct story about human existence. We are not the source of our well-being by our hard work and accomplishment. It reminded Israel that their food and all life is a gift from God as creator (Dt 8:3: 'Man does not live by bread alone.').

In our day, of course, we all know that there is "No free lunch." Someone has to earn it, pay for it. But the giving of the Sabbath with Manna teaches that every lunch is free. All are a gift of God. Every ability to earn is a gift of God. Every day is a gift. Creation is God's gift of grace.

Today, it's our glory to work 24/7, multi-tasking all the time. Time is money and the wealthiest are often not a leisure class but never stop working, achieving, proving their value. The poor have to work multiple jobs just to survive. We all serve Mammon who demands every moment.

Rest and Delight in God's Creation

Jesus warns against serving the great false god Mammon. He urges us to take the day off from worrying. Trust in God. Make it clear to yourself and to the world that you dance to different music, speak a different language of time, experience a different source of nourishment.

For Jesus, Sabbath Rest is a sign of God's kingdom, of trust in God. It is a time for delight in creation, rest for the weary, justice for the oppressed, healing. He is Lord of the Sabbath.

Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*. Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*. Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. Marva Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*.