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Honoring God with Our Time, Part 2

Mark 2:23-28

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 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: 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?" And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

The Sabbath, the Sabbath. It's not a common word that we use in our culture today, but it comes from the Hebrew word *Shabbat*, which means to cease or to rest, or to stop what God is instructing of His people in the fullness of life here on a broken earth, in an earth that is cursed with sin, where we have pain and suffering and striving to carve out our living. He's saying, in the midst of the drudgery of life, take time to rest, to cease, to unhook, to stop.

Why? It's a weekly time set aside by our Creator in honor of His rhythm in creation. We are to celebrate the Sabbath and keep it holy, as if there's something different about one in seven days in the history of humankind. This comes from Genesis chapter two, where it says thus: the heavens and the earth were finished after God did all the work of creating in six days, and they were finished, all the host of them. And on the seventh day, God finished His work that He had done, and He rested from all His work. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested.

So in honor of the holiness of our God, and His designating a seventh day in creation as a day of rest, He encourages us to do the same—Old Testament covenant law, encouraging His people in the larger concept.

We have this idea: God is commissioning us to cease from our strivings, our pursuing the fulfilling of our longings for our own spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical renewal and refreshment. And why? Very simply, because He loves us. He loves us. He knows that we are but dust. That in this world we have this effort and angst and pain. And there's resistance in the world. And as we push to make our

living, and build our families, and build our communities, He wants us to know, hey, just great work. Six days you shall work.

Now, we've kind of missed that too. It's a whole different sermon. Six days you shall labor. But on the seventh, hit the pause button. Pull up your chair at the table of relative humility. God saying to us, admit that you're not Me and rest.

And I think God is saying to His people, if you take a break and you rest and you pause, it's okay. I'm still on the throne. God saying, you're not going to miss out. You're not going to fall behind. And because I love you, I just—I want you to have a rhythm of rest so that you can know the fullness of life.

And I think at the root of this, God knows that we get tired. We get tired. And it was General Patton who first made this statement to his troops when he was encouraging them to rest before going into another day of battle.

He said, fatigue makes cowards of us all. And so he commissioned his soldiers to rest. And I think God knows this, that when we get tired and worn out and we're striving too much, we're not optimal. We're not living in the fullness of life that He wants us to live. And so, because He loves us, He commissions us to get in a rhythm of rest that works for us, because He loves us.

But it's deeper than that. Not only is He saying pause, but He's saying observe. You see, to cease is the Sabbath. But then what does He want us to do on the Sabbath? Keep it holy. Which is to say, when we rest, we're setting it apart for something different than the strivings of this world. We're pulling out of the streams of the activities of the temporal nature of this world, so that we can enter into something spiritual, something holy, something transcendent, so we can connect with, grow closer to Him.

And this is why on a Sabbath, God gives us some just sort of basic structure: to meet with one another, to encourage each other, to listen to His Word, to draw near Him, and worship, and praise, and honor who He is. Because somehow, as we pull out of the streams of this world and we tap into the streams of eternity, something supernatural happens inside of us.

And we're not only refreshed physically, friends. We're not refreshed just emotionally and mentally, but something deep within us, as we connect with the Spirit of God, is renewed and refreshed, and our spirit starts to soar with the Spirit of God. And the life that is truly life comes into us. And we can be, like Jesus said, those with rivers of living water flowing through us, and will tap into eternity now.

Oh, He wanted more than just rest. He wants us to, because He loves us. Yes, to pause, but then to draw near to Him. To find the life that is truly life that He's wanting for us. You see this? James said it this way: if we draw near to God, He will draw near to us. And there's nothing better. There is nothing better than experiencing the presence of God in love. God has invited us into His fullness.

And it's beyond that. He doesn't just want us to get to know Him, but as we deepen with Him, then we move back into the labors of this life after our time of rest. He wants us to learn to trust Him and rely on Him—not just on a Sabbath day, but on the next day, and the next day, and the next day, where in Him

we live and move and have our being, and the fullness of God is operating in us. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. And this comes to us by faith.

You see, so as we pause and we step out of the temporal nature of this world, which will never satisfy, and we draw near to the Almighty and the transcendent and the eternal, we start to get to know Him and His fullness, and His power, and His strength, and His peace, and His joy. And we're like, I want to walk in that. And He says, you can walk in it all week if you want, in the fullness of God, by relying upon Me and ceasing your striving from human effort.

As the writer of Hebrews said, without this confidence in God, without this faith, we cannot seek Him. But if we seek Him, if we set aside time to pursue Him with our whole hearts, He will reward us. He will honor us. Now, all of this Old Testament Sabbath is actually pointing to something even better that is revealed to us in the New Testament. It's pointing to a new covenant, not where God has given a law for once every seven days.

We see in our gospel reading that Jesus did some work on the Sabbath. His disciples were out plucking heads of grain. You see, the religious leaders were trying to invoke the law on Jesus. But Jesus said they didn't get it.

And then He, He said these words: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Which is to say, God has given a rest to His people for them, not some hoop or legalistic rule they have to jump through. It's really about finding rest in God all the time.

And so we see the writer of Hebrews describing this. Jesus introduces it in Matthew 11, when He says, it's not about keeping a day, it's about coming to Him. "Come to Me," He said, "all who are weary and burdened. I'll give you rest. Take My yoke. Join yourself with Me. Learn from Me. I'm gentle and humble of heart." Jesus said, "You'll find rest for your souls."

Think of the angst in the souls in our world today, friends. His yoke is easy. His burden is light. The imagery in the Old Testament of this is found in Hebrews chapter three, where the writer of Hebrews is describing God freeing the Israelite people from the Egyptians. He brings them out with Moses as their leader. He gives them these commandments, and then He invites them into the Promised Land, which is known as the Land of Rest.

But the text says, when they got to the edge of the Promised Land, they sent in spies. And a couple spies came back and said, "We can go." And a number of other spies came back and said, "We can't go."

They're too big and they're too scary. And they lacked faith. And so they did not get to enter—all of that generation who did not believe did not get to enter the rest of God.

And then Hebrews chapter four says this: that rest is still open to people. And since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of us find ourselves falling short of it.

For we have been given the good news, just as they were given the good news. But the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share in faith in it. Now we who have believed, listen to this: we enter that eternal rest—the rest of God and the rest of Jesus. There remains a Sabbath rest. Friends, this is beyond this world. There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters, God's rest also rests from their works, just as God has rested from His.

Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest. And how do we do it? Through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ and faith in Him. Not just the salvation of our souls, but the eternal peace that we can walk in here and now—the life that is truly life.

We're going to celebrate communion together. And it's a celebration of... I just want you to think of this: in the Old Testament, the people were commissioned by God, year after year, month after month, to bring animals of sacrifice for the shedding of blood, for the atonement, for their sins—working and striving, and working and striving, and working and striving to keep their sins at bay before a holy God.

But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a virgin, born under the law, to pay the penalty for our sin once and for all. Praise Him. Praise Him.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for sending Jesus, not only to forgive us of our sins, but then to open up the doorway to the eternal Sabbath—the eternal rest that we can experience here and now in our spirits and our souls.

And Father, You have given us Your Word as a tutor to teach us the way into life. And You have clearly said in Your instructions that a part of the way into life is a ceasing from the strivings of the temporality of this world, and a routine of doing this so we can draw near to You and find what we can't find in this world—rest for our souls.

Father, as You minister to us here today, I pray that You are drawing us to Yourself. And maybe those that don't know You, You're opening their hearts to come and find rest. And Father, for all of us, we know that many don't enter the rest because of a lack of faith.

So help us with our unbelief. Strengthen our confidence in You. Give us the faith to enter into this new promised land of a supernatural life lived before You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.