

# ***Sabbath: A Rhythm Of Refreshment***

**Matthew 12:1-14**

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*"O Day of rest and gladness,*

*O Day of joy and light...*

*most beautiful, most bright*" says an old hymn about the Sabbath.

That's what it was supposed to be.

And originally, well, maybe it was.

However, a bunch of religious rule makers got hold of this day and totally institutionalized it. In doing so, they virtually sucked any benefit right out of the Sabbath.

Sabbath - Comes from an old Hebrew word, *Shabbat*, meaning -  
*stop, rest.*

Sabbath was the safe space built into Creation for beat-up, tired-out, and pushed-around people to get a break, to take a breather, to slow down and stop.

Sabbath - stop time, rest space, oasis of refreshment.

We're taking the season of Lent to think about what Sabbath means for our lives today.

We began last week looking at Jesus as Sabbath incarnated.

Sabbath come in the flesh.

Sabbath - the person of Jesus, giving hope and rest and peace to our tired, guilt-ridden, work-driven lives.

Sabbath - Jesus gives us a break, Jesus gives us rest.

Sabbath - Christ's day.

For Christians we use Sunday - the day when Jesus rose from the dead.

The eighth day we call it.

The day of eternal new beginnings.

Refreshment day.

The Old Testament is where we got the idea of Sabbath from.

Sabbath is crucial to Jewish thinking - for them it is practiced at the very end of the week.

"6 days you shall labour," God had told them. Their landlords, employers, and family needs saw to that. always more to do.

Come Friday evening, every Jew was thoroughly exhausted.

Which is why the commandment continued - "*But on the seventh day you shall not work, neither you, nor your sons or daughters, nor the sojourner who is within your gates....*" The rabbis and other religious officials saw to that:

No riding animals

No cooking.

No cleaning

No carrying more than a certain weight

No walking more than a certain distance from your front door.

No.....

Get this – The religious machinery developed more than 1500 rules and regulations pertaining to correct Sabbath observance.

For the Jew it certainly was a day quite different from the others. Though, honestly, if one had to put one's finger on it, it was probably so that this day was more oppressive than the other six. It was a day filled with "don'ts."

The Jew might have identified with W.C.Fields - a friend of his once walked into his dressing room unannounced and caught him reading the Bible. Knowing Fields's cynical attitude toward religion, he was surprised. Fields himself seemed embarrassed and quickly shut the book: "*Just looking for loopholes*" he explained.

Which is how many Sabbath observers felt – would there be any possible way for them to get around some of these rules and do something, anything, on the Sabbath.

Into that strode Jesus who, to stand back and watch, seemed for all intents and purposes to be a bull in a china shop:

Walking along the road on the Sabbath much further than the rules allowed;

Picking grain;  
 preparing and eating it against what the rules dictated  
 AND -

*if you can believe it!!*

Actually doing medical work – healing someone on the Sabbath.

“Why couldn’t he have simply waited a few hours till Shabbat was done?”

What we read in Matthew is by no means the only time Jesus has a run-in with the leaders over Sabbath observance.

Did you know that more miracles of healing are recorded as being performed on the Sabbath than any other day?

Miracles of release and restoration on the Day of Refreshment.

What was our Lord trying to say about the Sabbath?

What was He saying to the Jews?

And what does He want to say to us today?

Sabbath has it’s roots right back in the great saga of Creation.  
 God worked for six days to make the universe, says Genesis 1.  
 And then he stopped.

Genesis 2:2-3:

*And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.*

Do you think that Almighty God was tired out? Weary of working?

Is that why He took this day for no work?

Silly to even suggest that, isn’t it?

Rather - I’d like you to imagine God....

....Sitting back and **enjoying** what He had made.

Savoring it.

Reveling in it.

Friends, if we ever allow ourselves the holy privilege of taking Sabbath time - **stop time** -

It becomes time to enjoy, to savor, to revel in

God

and

His Creation.

For our first human parents, Adam & Eve, the time after they were created was a continual Sabbath,  
 a time of continual enjoying creation,  
 continually enjoying each other,  
 and continually enjoying the Lord.

Then came the Fall.

They were sent East of Eden into a land of thorns, sweat, pain, murder and anguish. Enjoyment, refreshment and play disappeared. Rest was gone. Struggle became the big theme of human life.

And struggle is still very much there, isn’t it?

All that remained was the promise of God that one day the curse would be removed and Sabbath rest would be restored.

As a foretaste of that, the Creator commanded His people to build rest time, stop time, Sabbath time into their rhythm of life.

*Six days you shall labour, but the seventh is a sabbath....*

Commandment number 4 of the great 10 commandments.

Rest for God’s people; rest from the back-breaking labour of carving a living out of the cursed creation.

Every week a time to **STOP**.

The Sabbath was meant to be a small oasis in a tired, broken world. In this time people were again given a glimpse of the rest, the peace, the wholeness that God originally had in mind for His people.

Sad thing is that, just like Creation, the institution of the Sabbath became distorted. Rigid legalism made the day an end in itself, a day filled with "don'ts."

Jesus, the Saviour, came to set that right.

By His own example He showed ideal Sabbath, restful living. By his actions Jesus shows that the Sabbath is not a rigid slot into which our activities must be mindlessly pressed - where we have to go hunting around for loopholes.

Rather, it is a day where we can once more get a handle on our priorities and activities before we dive back into the fray during the other 6 days of the week. It is the day to see our proper place in Creation.

Even more – **first of all** - it is a day to see our proper place with the Creator.

There are lots of distractions in our lives. There's lots to keep us busy. There's lots that clamors for our attention and energy. There are many lies out there that would seek to sidetrack us and destroy us.

Certainly not bringing us enjoyment, fulfilment and play!

Sabbath rhythm helps to give us moments to spiritually breath.

Gives our souls and bodies and minds a chance to rest.

Helps us to get properly oriented again.

This past winter we've had some snowmobile tragedies. Riders going through the ice and drowning. Those who know about these things say that one of the problems with going through is that once you're under the water it is very easy to become disoriented. With all the splashing and bubbles and swirling water and ice chunks and the like, you can't figure out which way is up.

Our lives can be splashing, swirling sequences of time - with chunks of activities and demands and encounters banging against us. And sometimes we can get all disoriented, forgetting which side is up. Priorities can get all messed up. And we can actually drown under them.

Sabbath is the weekly time that actually pulls us up and out of the swirl of our lives. It gently sets us down on the bank, and allows our souls and minds and hearts and even our bodies to get cleared up and rested up and sorted out.

Key to Sabbath is time with the Lord Jesus, and with community of God's people.

There needs to be time for Sabbath **praying**.

with songs that wing our praises to heaven

with prayers that unload the burdens of the week

with reading the Word of God for new direction

with fellowship among other believers building communal strength

with deliberate focus on the cross

with renewed commitment to the guidance of the Spirit

It's what the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment means when it says:

*Remember the Sabbath Day, and keep it holy.*

And then, the commandment continues -

*"Six days you shall labour and do all your work*

*BUT*

*the seventh day.... NO MORE WORK!!"*

After **praying** comes a time for Sabbath **playing**.

Ah - how hard that is.

There's always more work.

There's always projects unfinished.

There's always another file to finish, call to make, wall to paint.

Sabbath says - **STOP!!**

And reminds us that life is about far more than our working, our doing, our producing.

Sabbath helps remind us that we are human **beings**

not

Human **doings**.

Work – ah, so easy to get caught up in it, right?

One more evening at the office.

One more hour before I go home.

One more shift of overtime.

One more load of laundry.

One more renovation project.

Gets to the point where it takes over. We begin to feel guilty if we relax.

And Sabbath rest pulls us forcibly out of the squirrel cage and says, “**stop!**” There's more to life than work. Your body and mind need to stop. Those around you need you to stop.

Enjoy your Creator.

Enjoy the Creation.

Enjoy those he has placed around you in that Creation.

Which is why it is so good to see families take hikes or play games or somehow be around each other on the day of Sabbath Rest. And why it is so good for people in church to spend time visiting with each other.

Sabbath - a refreshment time to pray and play.

A time founded in the one who is the Bringer of true Sabbath

- true freedom

- true rest

Jesus Christ.

He brings people like you and I into a place of peace with God, a place where we are accepted by God, drawn into His holy family, loved and cared for, guided through every step of our lives;

- a place of deep rest and security.

And notice -

How much does our salvation depend on our **WORK?**

By **Christ's** death and resurrection we are brought to the place of freedom.

His **WORK** of victory over death is a victory for us.

His **SAVING EFFORT** of carving a road into eternal life is what allows us to travel into heaven and everlasting peace.

And so –

- forget the lie that says you'll find your meaning in life through your work

either work at the office

or work at doing religious ritual

or work at sacrifice and community service

or work at planning for the future

or work at caring for others.

Forget it!

Take the cue of Sabbath and focus the centre, the heart, the core of your life on Jesus Christ – **there** is life!

Resting.

In the grace that He gives.

A grace that doesn't demand any work.

A grace that simply invites us to enjoyment.  
To receive.  
To be.

Most of you spend some time in front of computers. You've probably all had times when they crashed – the screen goes funny or freezes up; the keys stop working; programs shut down unexpectedly. The machine got into a log jam of sorts. So what do you do?

Hit ctrl-alt-del: the computer three-finger salute.  
And everything starts up again fresh, reordered, memory cleared.  
Refreshed.

Sabbath time is the time for our hearts, souls, minds and bodies to hit the reset key; where everything starts up again refreshed, reordered, memory cleared.

I know it doesn't meet any test of productivity (at least, on face value), and for some of us, can even make us feel restless or guilty.

Which makes me wonder - how overly important have we allowed our work and striving and efforts to become, anyway?

Is the world depending on us?  
Does our salvation depend on it?  
Our self-esteem?  
Why **do** we keep working so hard?

Friends, I believe that deep down Sabbath - *stop and refresh time* - is something **ALL** our souls and minds and hearts and bodies crave and need.

And so today, in the name of Him who is Sabbath Incarnate, I'd like to invite you to give yourself permission to STOP.

Permission to simply BE.

Were you planning to pick up a hammer this afternoon?  
Were you thinking about checking your blackberry?  
Or logging into the office network?  
Or heading for a meeting?

May I please issue a Sabbath challenge to that?

I invite you to s-l-o-w d-o-w-n.

To

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P.

Lent is the season for self-examination, for making new beginnings and letting go of bad habits. It is the season for confession to the Saviour.

This year, I invite you to reflect on your Sabbath practice,  
and make renewed room for it in your life.