



## **Rest in Jesus (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)**

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How many times have you asked someone, “How’s it going?” and heard in reply, “Man, it’s been really busy.” All the time, right? It’s typically followed by weary sigh and stories of stress at home or work. I’ve rarely heard someone refer to busyness as a good thing. But if busyness is bad, you would think rest is presumably good. So why is it uncommon to hear someone answer the same question by saying, “it’s been really restful lately”?

I think part of the reason is our tendency to ground our identity, our sense of worth and value, in our activity. Busyness justifies my existence in a way rest does not. You don’t get a promotion for resting. You get a promotion for working. You don’t get paid for resting. You get paid for working. You don’t achieve success by resting. You achieve success by working. We live in a work-driven, performance-oriented culture. It’s a false gospel, a cult of busyness many readily embrace.

Some of us react to that tendency by taking the exact opposite approach. In your mind, work is an unfortunate necessity. Work is a drain. Work is a drudgery. And when you do have to work, you’re thinking about how soon you can rest because rest is where it’s at. No responsibilities. No claims on the way you spend your time. That’s the good life! Spending every week on vacation, every night watching TV, every weekend playing sports. Unlimited recreation. Unlimited screen time. That too is a false gospel, friend, a cult of entertainment many also embrace.

Our culture vision of rest tends to be just as unbiblical as our cultural vision of work. But we forget that. We try to find life by balancing our idolatry of work with a little idolatry of rest, or our idolatry of rest with a little idolatry of work. Friend, slavery to a balanced array of idols is still slavery! We need God to deliver us from both the false gospel of work, the lie that says my identity comes from my activity, and the false gospel of rest, the lie that says life is found in complete freedom from any responsibility whatsoever.

We need the Spirit to renew our minds so that we see our work for what it really is and look for rest where it’s really found. Because only when our pursuit of work and rest aligns with God’s plan for our work and rest will we find true life in our work and rest. And that’s what makes the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment such a gift. In Deut 5:12-15, the

Lord address the way we think about work and rest, though he gives primary attention to our practice of rest. Hear the Word of the Lord:

*“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a 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 ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 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 an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”*

We do well to answer three questions to grasp the claim God’s Word makes on our lives: (1) Why did keeping the Sabbath matter for Israel? (2) How does Jesus change what it means to keep the Sabbath? (3) What does keeping the Sabbath look like today?

### **1) WHY DID KEEPING THE SABBATH MATTER FOR ISRAEL?**

The basic principle, at least in a behavioral sense, is easy enough to grasp. Rest, don’t work, on the seventh day of the week. But that’s not the first thing the Lord says when he explains what it means to honor the Sabbath as a holy day, a day set apart for God. He begins by saying in v. 13, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work...” Why? Because work is just as much part of God’s good and perfect design for our lives as rest!

From the divine mandate to “fill the earth and subdue it” in Gen 1 to the command to “work and keep” the Garden of Eden in Gen 2, Scripture never treats work as an unfortunate necessity. Rather the fact that God works and created us to image his creative handiwork in our work infuses our work with incredible dignity and value.

So if work is so good, why stop? Because rest is just as good. It too is an act of worship. It’s one of the ways we image our Creator, fulfilling God’s glorious purpose for our life. Rest is not an unfortunate necessity in light of the pain and sorrow of work. God established the 7<sup>th</sup> day as a day of rest in Gen 2 *before* the curse of sin entered our world in Gen 3 and made work painful and depleting.

That means the priority of rest, the importance of the Sabbath, is grounded in something deeper and greater than our need to get patched back up so we can

survive another week of toil. **It's grounded in the goodness and perfection of God's work and our absolute dependence on him and his work as our Creator.**

Have you ever wondered why God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day? If he doesn't "faint or grow weary" as Isaiah declares, or has not need to "slumber nor sleep" as the psalmist proclaims, why did he rest? He rested for the simple reason that his creative work was perfectly complete and he delighted to do so. Allen Ross' insight is helpful on this point. Speaking of God decision to rest, he writes: "it describes the enjoyment of accomplishment, the celebration of completion." God rested because the work he finished was very good, exceedingly worthy of being enjoyed and celebrated.

Rooted as it is in God's own example in Gen 2, the Sabbath is fundamentally a celebration of the perfection of God's work and an expression of our dependence on him as his creatures. Think about it. What does an Israelite landowner have in common with his servant? The same thing the servant has in common with a donkey. They're all creatures, fashioned by the God in whom they live, move, and have their being.

No matter how great as your teacher or employer or spouse or coworkers think you are, friend, you are not omniscient, omnipotent, or omnipresence. You don't know all things. You are not all powerful. You are not everywhere present. You are a finite creature. You have spectacular dignity and worth by virtue of being created in God's image, but you are not the One who holds all things together. You are not the source of your life. God is. You are not the one who upholds your life. God does. That's what observing the Sabbath was all about. It was a powerful expression of dependence.

Life in the Ancient Near East was fragile. They didn't have refrigerators, or freeze driers, or canned goods. They ate whatever they grew. A severe drought or a hard freeze before harvest was more than an inconvenience. It meant potential starvation for you and your family. If you waited an extra day to gather the harvest and a hailstorm came through or the Philistines set fire to your fields, you were done. Game over.

So you're telling me that even during harvest, even when your life, and your wife's life, and your kids' lives, depends on getting that grain into your barn, you're going to set aside an entire day to not work? Say what? Is God commanding them to be irresponsible? No. He's calling them to trust him as Lord who provides by resting from their own labor. To express their dependence on him by ceasing from their work that they might renew their trust in His.

The rest the Sabbath required wasn't passive or aimless. It wasn't about checking out in front of the TV. It was active and intentional. Look at the beginning of v. 15. Moses tells Israel what to do with the time they would otherwise have spent working. Notice it involves more than the absence of work. It's about taking time to remember and meditate on the faithfulness of God.

"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 an outstretched arm." Why did Israel need to stop and remember what God had done for her all those years ago in Egypt? Because the exodus revealed something that was still true 40 years later, something that is still true for every Christian today. God is the source of our life. Apart from him, Israel was nothing. Apart from him, brothers and sisters, we are nothing.

Who are you, Christian, apart from God's redeeming work in our life? You are enslaved to sin and death, running headlong toward judgment. So what did God do? He opened your eyes to see your need to be reconciled to your Creator. He led you to the cross where he displayed his great love for you by dying in your place for your sins. He led you to the empty tomb where the Father vindicated the sufficiency of the Son's sacrifice, holding out the gift of resurrection life. And then the Spirit enabled you to respond by surrendering to Jesus as your Savior and King.

What Israel remembered in the exodus from Egypt we remember in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We remember who we once were. We remember how God broke in. And we remember the abundant life we enjoy even now as his precious sons and daughters. The life God has given you, Christian, is ultimately the fruit of his work, not yours. You are not a self-made man. You are not a self-made woman. You are a trophy of grace. 1 Cor 4:7, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"

Have you ever wondered why observing the Sabbath made the top 10? Why was resting on the Sabbath day the sign of the Old Covenant? Why do the prophets who came after Moses routinely excoriate Israel for breaking the Sabbath? Neh 13, Isa 58, Jer 17, Ezek 20, Amos 8. What's the big deal? It wasn't about observing a religious ritual. It was an outward expression of her heart posture toward the Lord.

Do I believe my life depends on what God does for me or what I do for myself? Am I a creature, or am I not? Do I need a Savior or do I not? The Sabbath mattered bigtime for Israel because it was all about remembering and expressing her dependence on God's perfect work by resting from her own.

We are no less dependent, brothers and sisters. Ex 20 grounds the Sabbath command in our dependence on the Lord by virtue of creation. Deut 5 grounds the Sabbath command in our dependence on the Lord by virtue of redemption. And both creation and redemption shout the same thing! God is the source of our life. The question is not if that's true, but whether we will believe as much and trust God accordingly.

Kevin DeYoung, "The Sabbath principle from creation to exodus to the New Testament Lord's Day has always pointed in the direction of trust. That's what the Sabbath has, at heart, always been about. Can you trust God to give you manna for two days on the sixth day? Can you trust God to make up for the 'lost' work on one day by blessing you on the other six days? Can you trust that this burden you're carrying is not yours to carry alone? Can you trust God to carry it (and carry you!) if you have faith enough to stop striving and start worshipping?"

But can we really draw a straight line from the Old Testament Sabbath to the New Testament Lord's Day? If we're no longer under the law in a covenantal sense, what claim does the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment have on our lives? Remember the question we're asking every week. How does the person and work of Christ transform our understanding and application of the Sabbath?

## **2) HOW DOES JESUS CHANGE WHAT IT MEANS TO KEEP THE SABBATH?**

The Sabbath was all about Israel expressing her physical and spiritual dependence on Yahweh, experiencing the rest of soul that only comes through leaning the weight of your life on the Lord who provides. Listen to how the author of Hebrews compares the Israelites under the Old Covenant to the people of God today and identifies trust in God as the key to experiencing true rest.

Heb 4:2-11, "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. For we who have believed enter that rest...So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."

What kind of rest does Hebrews urge us to enter? Nothing less than "God's rest," the rest God himself enjoys, the satisfaction and joy of knowing his work is perfect. His work is finished. His work is complete. So how do we enter God's rest? How do we

experience the very joy God himself enjoys? Through faith. Those “who have believed enter that rest.” So what’s the object of our faith? What or who must we believe? We believe in Jesus, the Son of God Incarnate.

Heb 4:14, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.” It’s our confession or faith in Jesus and the saving work he accomplished for us at the cross that enables us to experience true rest, God’s rest. It’s the rest that comes from abandoning our futile efforts to create life for ourselves and clinging to Jesus as the only who can give us life and sustain our life. The Sabbath, like so many other Old Testament institutions, points forward to God’s spiritual and physical provision in Jesus.

On this side of the cross, we don’t keep the Sabbath by not working on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week. We keep the Sabbath by leaning the weight of our life on Jesus. Jesus is our Sabbath rest. The Father delights to provide for all the spiritual and physical needs of those who trust in the Son. Rom 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

Jesus himself makes the same promise in Matt 6:31–33. “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (trust in Jesus, obey Jesus) and all these things will be added to you.”

When Israel kept the Sabbath, she expressed her trust in the God who provides. When we hold fast to Jesus through the obedience of faith, we express our trust in the God who provides. The way we keep the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment has changed, but not the heart attitude behind it. It’s always been about resting in the God who provides!

Matt 11:28–29, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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.” Why? Because of Matt 12:8, “For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” The rest God requires in Deut 5, no less than the rest God enjoys in Gen 2, is ultimately found in him.

### **3) WHAT DOES KEEPING THE SABBATH LOOK LIKE TODAY?**

At this point, some Christians start thinking like, “Pastor, that’s wonderful. It’s sure good to know that as long as I believe in Jesus, I can do whatever I want on Sunday.” How about some food, some football, and a long nap!” If you think that’s the best



Sunday has to offer, then you have yet to experience true rest. Why do I say that? Because Jesus hasn't left it completely up to us to decide how we want to express our dependence on him. **Rest is the sweet reward of depending on Jesus *in the way he has prescribed.***

In other words, Scripture doesn't just tell us to depend on Jesus. It tells us to express our dependence on Jesus in specific ways. Take Heb 10:23-25 for example. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Is there ever a week you don't need to be exhorted to hold your original confidence in Christ firm to the end? When don't you need a brother or sister in Christ to stir you up to love and good works? Clinging to faith in Christ isn't just significantly harder than observing a whole day of physical rest. It's downright impossible apart from gathering with the saints in the community of the local church.

Listen, trusting Jesus as our Sabbath rest doesn't turn the church into an optional event. It makes the participating in the life and worship of the local church a matter of life and death because it's the people of God that will keep you clinging to the person of the Savior. That's why church membership is so critical and why Sunday mornings are the most important time of the week at KingsWay.

It's not because there's something special about Sunday as a day. The Apostle Paul makes that abundantly clear in Col 2:16, though we have biblical and historical evidence for Christians meeting on the first day of the week or "the Lord's Day" in celebration of the day Jesus rose from the grave. It's because something supernatural happens when God's people gather to read the Word, pray the Word, preach the Word, sing the word, and participate in the Word through baptism and the Lord's Supper. God strengthens our faith in Jesus and empowers us to follow him.

Kevin DeYoung, "Too many of us see corporate worship as a good thing to do if the weather is nice but not too nice, if the football game is uninteresting, and the sports practice doesn't interfere; or if they're not too tired. Somehow we've gotten the idea that gathering with God's people to worship at God's throne and to hear from God's Word is something that's fine to do when it fits in our schedule."



Friend, if you get in the habit of staying home on Sunday mornings or attending only when it's convenient, you're not just missing a meeting. You're missing out on the important work God is doing in your life – renewing your faith, strengthening your trust, deepening your joy in the salvation rest Christ has won for you through the gospel. And in so doing, you're disobeying the Word of God.

All of history is moving toward the goal of God's rest. Through faith in Christ, that's a rest we experience now in part. One day, we will experience it in full. Until that day, the organized gathering of the local church is God's plan for getting you across the finish line. You cannot say you are depending on Jesus, finding your rest in him, if you stop gathering for corporate worship with the church.

Gathering for corporate worship is one of the most important applications of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment under the New Covenant because it's one of, it not the most important way we express our trust and dependence on Jesus. But there's another application I want to briefly mention. While there's nothing in the New Testament that instructs us to observe the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week as a day of physical rest, as finite creatures with physical bodies, physical rest and sleep are essential expressions of humility before God.

Ps 127:2 is just as true on Sunday as it is on every other day of the week. "It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep." Creating and maintaining a healthy rhythm of rest for your physical body is a very practical way we demonstrate our dependence on the Lord.

Far too often, we think of sleep as a good thing, but not a matter of obedience. Are there times God calls us to sacrifice physical rest for his sake? Absolutely. No mom of young children should feel guilty, any more than the Apostle Paul who endured untold sleepless nights as a missionary. But if your normal lifestyle does not include the physical rest your body needs, don't pat yourself on the back as a noble workaholic. Humble yourself and repent. Physical expressions of dependence like taking time to sleep or go on a walk are ultimately spiritual expressions of humility.

Remember what all the people and animals in v. 14 have in common. They're all creatures. They all need rest. So do you, my friend. We too are creatures. We too are dependent. Rest is the sweet reward of depending on Jesus in the way he has prescribed. That includes the grace of physically gathering with the church for worship and the grace of sleep for our physical bodies.



## CONCLUSION

God created you to depend on him. God saved you to depend on him. He delights when we rest in his work by ceasing from our work. It's the very logic of the gospel. Strength for today and hope for tomorrow doesn't come from what we do for ourselves. They come from what God does for us.

Remember, rest isn't found in the absence of work. Have you ever spent a long weekend binging on Netflix or video games and found your body and soul strangely tired at the end? **Rest is the sweet reward of depending on Jesus in the way he has prescribed.** That requires gathering for worship as a member of the local church. That requires getting the sleep your body needs.

It may also mean going on a walk or taking an hour this afternoon before the Superbowl to read a Christian book that will strengthen your dependence on the Lord. It may mean asking a sister to hold you accountable for leaving the office by a certain time or spending time before bed praying and reading God's Word instead of watching TV. It might even mean staying away from your email inbox or the stack of paperwork calling your name until Monday morning.

We certainly need to be careful to not foist our personal convictions in areas of Christian freedom on fellow believers as if the habits you've developed are the only ways of expressing our dependence on Jesus.

At the same time, we must love one another enough to speak up if you see a brother working himself to death or a fellow member stop showing up on Sunday morning. The absence of rest, the absence of depending on Jesus in the way he has prescribed, is a sure sign that faith in God's work has been replaced with faith in our own.

If you don't know how to grow in depending more on Jesus' work than your work, especially in your job, ask for help! Read Kevin DeYoung's book, *Crazy Busy*, or Christopher Ash's volume, *Zeal Without Burnout*. Both have been immensely helpful to my soul. We all need help to distinguish between purposeful rest and selfish apathy.

May we be a people who are happily busy with the things of God, and a people who actively and intentionally find our rest in him, for his yoke is easy and his burden is light.