



## Is Sabbath for Today?

Exodus 20:1-11 | J. Austin Becton | June 13, 2016

A generation ago, experts predicted that at this point in time we would be living in an era of unprecedented leisure thanks to labor-saving technologies that were beginning to proliferate then. They envisioned a future in which tasks that took up much of our lives would take much less time or even be done with little human effort. However, the reality is that while technological advances and processes have improved, we feel more consumed by work, and less rested than perhaps we've ever felt. Instead of enhancing our rest these advances have pushed us to simply "do more" (e.g. smart phones). We feel the angst to stay connected. We use these advances not so that we rest better, but so that we can be more efficient and productive (e.g. Favor, Uber). Versus slowing down on the taxi ride to the airport, we cram in a little more work or knock a few things off the to-do list. Versus slowing down and enjoying lunch outside, we don't leave our desk because Favor bringing lunch to us. Interestingly, companies report that a growing number of North American workers do not take all of their annual allotted days off. Although many companies allow for a portion of those days to be rolled over to the next year more than half of employees lose some amount of their vacation time each year. Working nonstop is a "subtle badge of honor" in today's world, said Matt Norquist, general manager at the global workplace consulting agency Right Management in New York. Its survey recently found that 70 percent of workers do not use all their vacation time in a year. We choose money over time; the quick route over the scenic drive; efficiency over leisure. Often our days are scheduled to squeeze the most in. Even when we take a vacation we don't slow down, feeling the pressure to visit all the "must-go" places. We are so tired and weary, but downtime is wasted time. Don't have time to work out, now you do – they've built a treadmill with a desk so you can walk and type at the same time! Preston, was sharing with me on Friday about a guy who built a "human hamster wheel" desk. The caption read, "Win the Rat Race with DIY Human Hamster Wheel." Whatever happened to taking a minute or two walk outside? What's driving us in this nonstop pace? What's fueling the human hamster wheel in our lives that tells us we have to keep going? More or better stuff? Bigger house? Nicer car? Coveted vacations? Security – financial (retirement), family (good, safe neighborhood)? Approval and affirmation? Perhaps you're a "Domestic Engineer" (the new name for a full-time mom)—is your fuel "survival"? If you don't make it happen who will? When we are enslaved to our work or play we are often left tired, anxious, discontent, waiting for the rug to be ripped out from us, or looking over our shoulders to see who is gaining on us. But, is the solution to simply slow down? Does merely cutting back our hours, taking a weekend getaway to do nothing, taking the slow route, turning off our phones, or taking a walk outside bring the rest we need?

### Sabbath

In verse 8 of our text this morning says, "Remember the sabbath day..." (Exodus 20:8a). What is sabbath really? Simply, sabbath means "to cease" and "to rest." However, we will see that the heart of sabbath is much more pervasive than a mere day of physical rest and non-work, although it includes that rightly so. This morning our text paints the picture of a sabbath that was to be a *holy* remembrance to the glory of God, an established *rhythmic* and *cosmic* practice for the children of God and whole of creation.

**Holy, rhythmic, and cosmic.**

### Holy

Picking back up with our text "Remember the sabbath day...and keep it holy." (Exodus 20:8)

To declare God as holy means that he is pure, righteous, transcendent, above all creation, otherworldly. But, when the term is used for creation in the Holy Scriptures it means that it has been set apart, dedicated, separated to this transcendent righteous God. So, keeping the sabbath day holy meant to set it apart, to set aside the day from the common routine of life, so that it might be dedicated to the Lord. We see in our lives that those things which are "holy" to us are the things we set aside time for in our routines – we prioritize them. What is "holy" in your life? What are the things you are ready and willing to adjust your schedule and even life for? What are the areas you allow to cram pack your calendar? What priorities trump most things in your life—that's what's holy to you? Perhaps, your career? "Me time"? Friends? What's most holy? Does work come before family? Or family before work? Now these perhaps are easy questions with clear cut answers. "Of course I'd choose my family over work!" Sadly, many of us don't.



But, what about the more difficult and complex questions such as: Do we set aside time this week to participate in City Group as a family (even though it's not at the ideal time for our kids) or do I stay home so my 15-month old can get to bed on time? Or maybe you have had an extremely stressful work week, you worked all day Monday through Saturday and still aren't caught up – Do I set aside time to attend the Sunday gathering or do I go into the office another day in hopes of catching up or perhaps just stay home to have some “me time”? **These decisions show us what is truly holy in our lives. More than that, these decisions shape us, and over time train our children and hearts, and depending on what we set aside it will lead them to find rest in something other than Christ.**

So how does keeping the sabbath holy help us to find true rest? Our text provides a primary clause for keeping the sabbath holy...verse 11 says, “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it [made it holy].” (Exod. 20:11) In Genesis 2:1-3, we see that the day of God’s “resting,” is the first thing in the Scriptures which is declared holy. Why did God set this day of sabbath, or rest, apart from the six days of creation? Was God tired? Did he overwhelm himself? His rest wasn’t mere recuperation from an exhausting work week; it was sovereign rule. God rested on the seventh day because he had finished establishing the whole of creation – dividing the darkness from the light, separating dry land from the seas, declaring by the word of his mouth all creatures into their existences, fashioning man and woman in his image. Sabbath is not merely a day we set aside for play, brunch, non-work, and lazing around. Sabbath is a time we set aside for the glory of God. To worship him and remember that he is the sovereign supplier of all good things. And, if God is the sovereign supplier of all good things, then not only are all things his gracious gift to us, but so is all our time. So, how did God intend this holy gift of sabbath to be set aside? This takes us to our second point...**rhythmic.**

### **Rhythmic**

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work [...]” (Exod. 20:9-10a) *And everyone said AMEN!* God worked for six days and rested on the seventh. This rhythm is imprinted into the very fiber of creation. The sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening, nature bursts forth in the spring and takes a break in the fall, animals gather in the spring and summer and hibernate in the winter. Genesis 2 reminds us that we, man and woman, were made in the image of God, we bear his mark, a reflection of the divine reality, in this we work and rest just as God worked and rested. It’s the rhythm God logically designed within us – prior to the fall – prior to this Mosaic Law. It’s been coded into our physical and spiritual DNA since the beginning. However, the rhythm our culture is enslaved to is hamster wheel of work and play. Or of production and consumption, as Allen Johnson, former professor of anthropology at UCLA words this sobering point, *“As a result of producing and consuming more, we are experiencing an increasing scarcity of time. This works in the following way. Increasing efficiency in production means that each individual must produce more goods per hour; increasing productivity means...that to keep the system going we must consume more goods.”* He goes on to say, *“Free time gets converted into consumption time because time spent neither producing nor consuming comes increasingly to be viewed as wasted.... The increase in the value of time (its increasing scarcity) is felt subjectively as an increase in tempo or pace. We are always in danger of being slow on the production line or late to work; and in our leisure we are always in danger of wasting time.”* It’s no wonder that we struggle with true rest. In this rhythm you have stepped onto the human hamster wheel and getting off threatens your way of life - your value, identity, and purpose in the world – the wheel continues faster and faster. Perhaps you’ve had the deeply unpleasant and scary experience of attempting to jump on or off a moving treadmill. As we are captive in the wheel of production and consumption, or enslaved to work and play, we are left tired, anxious, discontent, waiting for the bottom to drop out, or fearful of those gaining on us (e.g. keeping up on Instagram, working late into the night). Sabbath, however, is a holy rhythm given to us – gifted to us by a gracious Lord – that we might be able to set aside time to slow down to remember that he is the sovereign supplier of all good things. Perhaps, your initial instinct is to say “I’m too busy and I don’t have enough time.” You just can’t fit it in. If you slow down you might lose the sales leads, get passed up on the promotion, or lose your beloved “career”, or the house and kids may simply implode! Did you have any “me time” this week or weekend? Did you set aside time to watch TV? Did you make your way down to Deep Eddy’s? Perhaps you feel exhausted and weary from the daily tornados in your life. When you get a break at the end of the day or someone decides to graciously



babysit for you and your spouse, what do you do with the time? Consume it by feeling the pressure to have to go do something “special”? To play hard? Or can you routinely find rest by setting aside time to sit on the patio or in the quietness of your own living room and allowing your body and soul to feast on the richness, beauty, and eternal rest of the sovereign God in Christ Jesus? This **does not** mean you shouldn’t do some of the things we’ve mentioned – watch a TV or movie, go to Deep Eddy’s, or do something special. **What it means is that we are not enslaved to work or play, prisons in the human hamster wheel...It means we are not bound finding ultimate satisfaction, rest, and joy in those things.**

Exodus 20:2 God declares, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” (Exod. 20:2) Here, the sabbath rests in the context of God’s redemption. God has graciously provided – building in to our DNA – the need for a holy rhythm of regularly setting aside time for remembrance and worship of who he is, and in so doing we stop and are freed from the routine demands of life, we physically rest without feeling any pressure to produce or consume, and we spiritually rest and are strengthened – knowing that God is truly the provider of all good things – physically and spiritually. Practically, start small. Trying setting aside a little time each day. Perhaps it is as simple as waking up a few minutes early, pouring a cup of coffee and sitting in silence meditating on the goodness and blessings of the Lord. Perhaps it’s taking a walk outside and reflecting on the sovereign creator and giver of all good things. The point is you were created and hardwired to regularly rest in the Lord. My wife, Caitlin, told to me the other day...when she regularly sets aside time – keeping the sabbath holy and rhythmic – prays, reads the Holy Scriptures, meditates and reflects upon the Lord and the love of Christ – not only does she feel more joy, and a greater sense of fulfillment, but even if she is physically tired, she has more patience, a deeper love, and greater care for our daughter, Greta. When God is most holy, reflected in our rhythm of life, his sabbath rest reaches out and touches what’s around us. This brings us to our third aspect of sabbath...**cosmic.**

### **Cosmic**

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.” (Exod. 20:9-10) Sabbath radiates out cosmically – touching our family, friends, employees, co-workers, animals, and even land (Lev. 25:3-4). The Sabbath commandment specifically prohibits the shifting of laboring away from native to foreign workers or from free to hired workers or servants or from adults to children, or even to their animals. Envisioned here instead is an equal work stoppage that benefits the whole of creation, and leaves everyone free and able to set aside time for spiritual and physical rest with God. As a modern corollary, Christians today could not pretend to be keeping the spirit of the sabbath commandment while imposing on others demands which keep them or encourage them to not have rest. A simple example of this is Chick-fil-a; as much as I hate that they are closed on Sundays – they are closed so that the owners along with all the employees have a day set aside for rest. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t go lunch today, but what it is asking is “Are we people of God’s sabbath rest to the world?” And so, when sabbath is kept holy, regularly setting aside time to remember that the Lord is the sovereign supplier of all good things we are no longer bound to work or play, rather we are enabled to slow down to be an extension of God’s rest to the whole of creation. We are able to slow down and be conscious about how the Lord is working out his mission and justice across world. We can tune out the weariness of a full inbox, the anxieties of keeping up, and share with others in the Lord’s sabbath rest. Perhaps your boss snaps at you. When you’re caught up in the rhythm of work or play you might be blinded to the reality that your boss is going through a difficult time in his or her life.

Maybe you have received hurtful words from a family member. When we are stuck on the human hamster wheel it’s easier to simply stop speaking to them – no need to waste your time and life on them – they need to get over it. We are too caught up to care about what might truly be going on. Environmentalist (even gracious ones) seem like “idiots” to some because they are slowing down the vicious cycle of production and consumption. Animal rights advocates – is it really so bad that people want to protect endangered species? **We are made in the image of God. To rest in him and to be an extension of his gracious rest to the whole of creation.** When we find our rest in him we are able to care for our family, neighbors, co-workers, those in need of mercy, even the animals and land. Sabbath is cosmic – it joins us in God’s mission and justice in the world. How often do we think, “If I had more time I would love to...serve more, evangelize and disciple better, help the poor?” What’s holding us back? Are we being held captive by your pursuit of the perfect family, “me-time,” a neatly ordered life, a particular position of influence at your job,



success, or maybe just wealth accumulation? What is holy to you? What are you setting aside? Why? What's your motivation, your goal, the end game? Is it to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself? Or is it something else?

### **The Lord of Rest**

Perhaps this morning you are tired of spinning on the human hamster wheel of work and play – of production and consumption – riddled with stress, anxiety, and weariness. Perhaps, you're tired of hearing the whisper that downtime is wasted time? Or if you don't do it, it will all implode. Rest for you might only be a dream. **But**, Hebrews tells us that deep, eternal sabbath rest is in Christ's finished work, and by faith in Christ will you be able to walk away from slavery to work or play into true rest. In Christ, the human hamster wheel begins to slow down and come to a halt. Within Gospel of Matthew, Jesus identifies himself as the Lord of the Sabbath – or the **Lord of Rest!** To enter his rest, we must receive his gracious and free gift in faith. This, requires removing our faith from whatever we "make holy", whatever we look to—work or play, and turn to Christ, the Lord of Rest in humble (and perhaps even weary) faith and repentance. **His work is finished for you. And, he stands with open arms to give you rest. Let's enter his rest.**