

Faith at Work: Integrating Christ and Your Career

Rest From Your Work (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-17)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on September 29, 2024

Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're wrapping up our series called *Faith at Work*. **We've been exploring that important intersection between our personal faith and our life vocations.** Next week, we'll start a new series on select passages in the Gospel of John. Covering the seven I AM statements of Christ. But to conclude our current series on faith and work, I want to address the all-important (but often overlooked) topic of rest and Sabbath in relation to our work.
 - **I think many of us would confess to be workaholics.** We don't know how to rest. We feel like there's rarely enough time in the day to accomplish all that we need to do. So the idea of taking a sabbath – an entire day of rest from work – seems impractical. Perhaps even irresponsible.
 - But this is where we need to ask some soul-penetrating questions. **Why do I work so hard? Why do I find it so hard to rest?** What does my inability to rest say about how I view myself? Or how I view God? And what do I do with God's own command for me to rest? To observe a sabbath? It's in the Ten Commandments. Listen to **Exodus 20:8-10**, “⁸*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.*”
- ❖ **The fourth commandment is telling us to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, and that's done by not doing any work on that day.** Just as God rested on the seventh day of creation, we too are to rest. That sounds straightforward enough, but it actually raises a host of questions. **Like, how do you define work?** Ever since given the Commandments, Israel has wrestled with the practical challenge of defining work. Of determining what it looks like to keep Sabbath. And if you're familiar with their story, you know they took it too far. Adding layers of legalism. Eventually losing the spirit of the Law.
 - And as God's people today, we're in danger of doing the same. Because we're just as confused. Not only are we confused about what it looks like to keep Sabbath, we question whether Sabbath-keeping is even a relevant category anymore. **Is it part of our Christian obedience? Do the people of God today have to keep Sabbath?**
- ❖ **And this confusion expands beyond the Church.** Our society is confused. If you grew up here in the States – if you grew up in the 20th century – then you probably remember how on Sundays there was no mail service. Banks were closed. Groceries didn't sell alcohol. Department stores didn't sell household appliances. Car dealerships were closed. And it's not because they were motivated by religious conviction like *Chick-fil-a* is today. No, there were laws back then regulating commerce on Sundays. They were known as **blue laws**.
 - Now most blue laws in Texas have been repealed. But even in our secular day and age, liquor stores in Texas can't open on Sundays. Car dealerships are required to close at least one day of the weekend. From a secular viewpoint, that makes no sense. Why are dealerships forced to close for one of those days while the mall gets to stay open? These confusing blue laws are vestiges of our society's Judeo-Christian heritage when Sabbath was observed by Christians and non-Christians alike.

- ❖ **But even for Christians today, we don't know what to do with the Sabbath anymore.** We sense that it must have some relevance, and yet we're quick to avoid any practice that reeks of legalism. **And so Sabbath-keeping has boiled down to just "going to church" on Sundays.** That's all it means to most Christians. I keep the Sabbath holy by going to church.
 - But somehow that alone feels hollow. **It feels like we're missing something if keeping Sabbath just means showing up for worship and being home an hour or two later in time for kickoff.** If Sabbath-keeping is one of the Ten Commandments – and if we acknowledge the other nine as still relevant today – then it seems like the Sabbath should be significant and observed in our practice.
- ❖ **So what is that significance?** And if that significance extends beyond the ancient Israelites and remains relevant for the people of God today, then how should we observe it? To tackle these important questions, we're going to consider three points: (1) The purpose of the Sabbath, (2) The perpetuity of the Sabbath, and (3) The practice of the Sabbath.

The Purpose of the Sabbath

- ❖ Let's begin by considering the purpose of the Sabbath. When God gave his people the Ten Commandments, why did he include Sabbath-keeping? What was it for? Well, let's look at what the fourth commandment actually says. Look back at Exodus 20:8-11. We read earlier that it commands God's people to, "*Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy.*"
 - **So to remember – or to observe – the Sabbath means to treat that day as holy – as set apart, as different than the other days of the week.** In vv9-10, it says God's people can do that by working on the other six days but refraining from work on the seventh (i.e. Saturday). And that rest from work would pertain to any servants in the household and even livestock. Everyone gets to rest.
- ❖ And in v11, the rationale is given. "*For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*" In other words, the Sabbath is rooted in the pattern of creation where God made everything in six days and rested on the seventh.
 - **So in keeping the Sabbath holy, we're not just following God's command but following God's lead.** The implication here is that all of us – created in the image of God – we all have a 6+1 Sabbath rhythm built in to how we were designed. So that we flourish and are most productive when we respect that rhythm of life.
 - But if we disregard a Sabbath rest – if we overwork and overexert ourselves – we're actually working against ourselves. We're ignoring our Creator's design. We're rejecting the way he designed us to flourish.
- ❖ This is what Jesus meant when he said, "*The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.*" (Mk 2:27) **The command to Sabbath and rest from your labor was given for our good.** There are three good purposes we could highlight.

- ❖ **First, the Sabbath was intended to refresh God’s people.** So far in this sermon series, we’ve stressed that we were created to work. We were made in the image of a Divine Worker. But even the Divine Worker took a day of rest to be refreshed. That’s emphasized later in Exodus 31:17. Listen to it, “[The Sabbath] *is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.*” **So if even the Lord of all creation took one day to rest and be refreshed, then who are we to think that we don’t need it?** That’s the logic of the Sabbath.
 - By consciously observing a Sabbath, you’re *recognizing* your creaturely limits. You’re *respecting* your Creator’s design of a 6+1 rhythm of life. And in so doing, you’ll find *refreshment*. You’ll find new strength for a new week.

- ❖ **Second, the Sabbath was intended to remind God’s people.** It served as a sign. That’s what the LORD calls the Sabbath in Exodus 31:13 and 17. It’s a sign. “*Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.*”
 - **Up to this point, God had given Israel other signs – signs of the covenant.** When he promised to never again flood the earth again, the sign of that covenant was the **rainbow** (Gen 9:12-13). When he promised to make Abraham the father of a multitude, the sign of that covenant was **circumcision** (Gen 17:11). **So whenever God’s people saw a rainbow in the sky or when they circumcised their sons – they were reminded that they are a set apart people.** They’re a holy people in a unique covenant relationship with a holy God.

- ❖ Well, the Sabbath was meant to remind them of the same. Look at vv16-17. “¹⁶*Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. ¹⁷It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel.*” **The Sabbath was another covenant sign.** Whenever Israel saw that day on the calendar, as they were making their weekend plans, they were reminded that they are a set apart people. Other peoples, other tribes, other nations do work on the seventh day. But not Israel.
 - **Remember, theirs was an agrarian society.** No one had a five-day, 9 to 5 work schedule. Because you can’t predict when the fields are ripe for harvest. If it so happens that the best time to pick the harvest falls on Sabbath, the Israelites would stay home. While Gentiles work their fields, shaking their heads in disbelief that their Jewish neighbors would let a good harvest spoil just because it fell on the wrong day.

- ❖ **But that’s what it meant to be holy, to be set apart.** Circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, a kosher diet – they were the means by which Israel would set themselves apart from the nations. These were visible, tangible signs meant to signal something – to draw attention to something. **In this case, keeping Sabbath draws attention to the true source of our trust.** Are we ultimately trusting in the fruit of our labor – be it abundant crops, a big paycheck, a cushy retirement fund? Or is our trust in the Lord? The One who graciously called us into a vocation and gives us our daily bread. The Sabbath reminds you of who you really trust.

- ❖ **Third, the Sabbath is intended to reorient God’s people.** From the beginning, God’s people have been tempted to put God on the margins and center their lives on idols of this world. There will always be competing claims on our attention and our allegiance. There will always be people, possessions, or pursuits that we are tempted to orient our lives around.
 - A Sabbath is not just about a refresher after a tough week at work. **The point is to intentionally enter into a holy moment, to embrace a sacred time – where you meet with God, to worship him, and to reorient your life around him.**

- ❖ Look back at Exodus 31:13, “*for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.*” **In other words, at the heart of Sabbath-keeping is the desire to know the LORD and his sanctifying power.** In the busyness of our week, we can so easily forget and lose sight of God and his power. So a weekly Sabbath is meant to reorient us to put God back at the center of our lives.
 - Notice how this passage on the Sabbath in Exodus 31 comes immediately after a long discourse, starting back in Exodus 25, on the tabernacle and all the holy objects inside it. Suddenly that discussion wraps up in chapter 31:11, and we shift to instructions on the Sabbath. It feels like a sudden tangent. But the more you think about it, the more the tabernacle and the Sabbath go together.

- ❖ **The tabernacle was a holy place and the Sabbath a holy day where God’s people could uniquely meet with him and worship.** Under the old covenant, God set apart sacred space and sacred time for his people. Gather here, in this place, on this day, to worship me.
 - There were so many distractions for God’s people – so many things vying for their attention and allegiance – **that God wanted to set apart a sacred space in the middle of their camp (the tabernacle) and a sacred time at the culmination of each week (the Sabbath).** So that the attention and allegiance of his people would be brought back and reoriented around him. That’s the purpose of the Sabbath.

The Perpetuity of the Sabbath

- ❖ It’s God’s gift to us – to refresh, to remind, and to reorient his people. Now, clearly, the Sabbath was significant for Israel in the Old Testament era. **But, of course, the big question is whether Sabbath-keeping is meant to be carried over into the New Testament era.** Is it still applicable for the Church today? Let’s consider the perpetuity of the Sabbath – the question of whether or not it lasts forever.
 - **I use that language because it is spoken of, in Scripture, as “a sign forever.”** Look back at Exodus 31:17, “*It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel.*” So because the Sabbath is called a “sign forever” and because its roots are found in creation order – we shouldn’t be too quick to dismiss Sabbath-keeping as merely a feature of the Old Covenant that has no relevance to those under the New Covenant.

- ❖ Circumcision and kosher are easier to understand. We know those laws are no longer binding for Christians. Since they were never grounded in creation order. **But even if something is grounded in creation order, it doesn’t necessarily mean it’ll last forever.**

- ❖ Take marriage for example. It's instituted in Genesis 2:24 and rooted in creation order. And yet Jesus taught that it's a temporary institution that will end in the New Creation (Mt 22:30). **So to figure out whether the Sabbath (or any other OT law) is applicable today, we need to consider – not just the context of when it was established – but whether it's reaffirmed as binding in the pages of the NT.** And that's where we see NT authors describing circumcision, kosher laws, *and the Sabbath* – as signs and shadows that are passing. That find their fulfillment in Christ Jesus, particularly in his death and resurrection.
- ❖ When it comes to Sabbath, **Colossians 2:16-17** is most relevant. **There Paul compares Sabbath-keeping to a shadow whose substance is Christ.** *"¹⁶Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."*
 - Think of the different ways in which Christ fulfills so many OT realities. **Even the ones spoken of in perpetuity, as if they'll last forever.** So you've got God promising to David in 2 Samuel 7:13 that he'll, *"establish the throne of his kingdom forever."* Or in 1 Kings 9:3, God says his name will be on Solomon's temple forever.
 - He speaks of forever, but we know that both David's throne and Solomon's temple were eventually disrupted or destroyed. But, even still, Christians insist that God's promises didn't fail. **We'd argue that those "forever promises" were actually fulfilled in Christ.** The throne and the temple were OT shadows that find their substance in Christ.
- ❖ But not only does Christ fulfill these realities, you could say he expands them. **Because of Christ, the temple is no longer a unique holy place.** Because, through him, we can meet God anywhere, in any place. Because of his cross, the walls of hostility were broken and the veil before the Holy of Holies was torn. Meaning the temple's role has been fulfilled. There's no longer one hill, one spot, one city where we must go to be in God's presence. True worshippers can worship the Father in spirit and in truth wherever we gather (Jn 4:23).
- ❖ **And because of Christ, the Levites are no longer a unique holy tribe.** Through Christ, all God's people have direct access to him. Since Christ now sits at the Father's right hand interceding for us (Heb 7:25) – we Christians have the gift of intercession. Like an OT priest, we can make holy intercession, presenting requests to the Lord on behalf of others.
 - **Along the same lines, because of Christ, the Sabbath is no longer a unique holy day.** Because, through Christ, all days are holy and to be lived out in God's presence. Because Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath, every hour of every day of the week is sacred time when we can meet with God.
- ❖ So, again, under the Old Covenant, there was a sacred space and a sacred time set apart for worship, and it was all mediated by a sacred priestly class. But under the New Covenant, all spaces, all days, and all who are in Christ are sacred. **That's why I think the New Covenant people of God (Christians) are no longer bound to keep the Sabbath as a matter of Law.** I recommend leaving it as a matter of wisdom.

The Practice of the Sabbath

- ❖ Because I wouldn't be so quick to dismiss the principles underlying the OT observance of Sabbath. Even though the Law has been fulfilled in Christ, we can't ignore how Sabbath-keeping is routinely rooted in creation order. **I think it's unfortunate that many Christians today have, for the most part, abandoned any kind of intentional observance of a Sabbath.** Not respecting that 6+1 rhythm intrinsic in all of us. Not setting apart time in the busyness of our week to rest from our work.

- ❖ **For all Christians, this, at minimum, would mean prioritizing the weekly assembly of God's people for worship.** Also known as, going to church. That's the closest parallel we have to OT Sabbath observance. We get it – that there's no longer any holy day or holy hour. Because any day and any hour can be set apart for the worship of God in Christ.
 - **But we can still recognize the importance of treating one day of the week as special.** As that particular day when the Church assembles to worship our Risen Lord. And that's why, early Christians chose Sundays, the first day of the week, as that special day to gather (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). They called it the Lord's Day. It was in the morning, that first Sunday, when he resurrected and appeared to his disciples.

- ❖ So we should at least start there. **We should make it a priority to be at church every Sunday morning to worship with the people of God, to sit under biblical preaching, and to observe the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.** And again, since it's not a matter of law anymore, we shouldn't apply the same degree of strictness you find in the OT.
 - We recognize that, for some Christians, their vocation requires them to occasionally work on Sundays. We don't treat them as law breakers for not showing up to church. **But, at the same time, if your career choices result in a rhythm of life where you're consistently missing church and not resting from your labor, I'm not as worried about you violating the fourth commandment as I am the first.** "*You shall have no other gods before me.*" Perhaps you're putting career before God.

- ❖ **So if you haven't already made it a practice to worship in a gospel-preaching church on a regular, weekly basis, then that should be your priority.** But it's not that simple. Our worship service only lasts an hour and fifteen minutes. You can join us for Sunday School and lunch. But that's still only about three hours.
 - **Does a three-hour slot on Sunday mornings really capture the essence of Sabbath rest?** If it's true that the very principle of Sabbath is rooted in creation order – if we're designed to operate within a 6+1 rhythm of life – then it seems like a Sabbath rest would involve an *entire* day.

- ❖ Now, again, it's not a matter of law. **But it would be a matter of wisdom to respect the way God designed us to flourish.** So I wouldn't call it a sin if you checked your work email today or cracked open a school book to prepare for that test. I wouldn't say you're in disobedience if you scheduled a work meeting on Zoom for later today. Or if you skipped out on Sunday School and lunch to grab yourself a couple extra hours of study.

- ❖ But I think it would be good to at least ask *why* – why do you feel the need to do that? **Why do you find it hard to pull away from your labor for just one day out of the week?** Could you have worked more efficiently and prepared better earlier in the week, so that you're not under such pressure to work on Sunday?
 - If you're consistently using the Lord's Day to do your own work – and you haven't chosen an alternative day of the week to rest – then what does that say about how you view yourself and how you view God? **If God rested, why won't you?**

- ❖ **As a student or an employee, you know there's always more work you could do.** It'll never be enough. If you orient your life around meeting the needs of others, you know they'll never be satisfied. There's always more they'll ask you to do. **Wouldn't it be better to reorient your life around an all-sufficient God?** One who is absolutely sovereign and has no needs for you to meet. And yet who graciously invites you into a relationship with him through faith in his Son. He gives you more than enough reason to take a break. To rest.

- ❖ **Look, if you're not doing it already, I encourage you to set aside a full day out of the week to rest *in* God and *with* God's people.** To rest from your work or studies. The ancient Israelites did it by resting for 24 hours between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday. **Well, as Christians who prioritize the Lord's Day, consider taking a weekly Sabbath rest from sundown Saturday to sundown Sunday.** If that's not possible due to the demands of your vocation (and as a pastor, I get it), then find an alternative way of maintaining the general principle. Since it's not a matter of Law, you have that kind of flexibility.

- ❖ **But I wouldn't want you picking up this practice unless you recognize that a Sabbath rest is meant to bless you.** Unless you realize that God made you with a 6+1 rhythm in your soul, and that your joy and productivity will flourish when you respect that rhythm.
 - **And on top of it being a matter of blessing, a Sabbath rest is a matter of Christian witness.** By keeping a Sabbath, you're giving a witness to family and friends, to colleagues and classmates, that the most important thing in your life is not school or work but God – your life *in* God and *with* God's people.
 - **As your peers push on ahead while you keep Sabbath, they may not understand why you would “waste” such precious hours.** But they can't deny that worshipping God must be of more value to you than whatever it is they're chasing after. That's a compelling witness for the glory of God!

- ❖ **But the Sabbath is about more than just *not* working or *not* studying.** Otherwise it would have little relevance to those of you who are retired or unemployed or those at home caring for children or elderly parents. The Sabbath was made for you as well. **So don't just focus on the work you *shouldn't* be doing on Sabbath. Focus on what you *can* do intentionally.**
 - What can you do to be refreshed? What can you do to remember that you're a member of a set apart people, holy to the Lord? What can you do to reorient your heart and your schedule around the worship of God with God's people?

- ❖ **Families, what will you do to set apart Sundays, as a family, that makes this day distinct (holy) from every other day of the week?** And, sure, that means going to church – but is there more? Is there anything more you can do together to truly make it a *full day* of rest? Is there a healthy routine or tradition that you can introduce in the family to refresh one another? To help each other remember that you're a family set apart for the Lord? And to reorient everyone in the home around the presence and worship of God?

- ❖ **And for those of you living on your own or with roommates, what can you do with your Sundays that sets you apart – as a member of a holy people wholly devoted to the Lord?**
I have no interest in making a list of approved activities.
 - **I'd rather challenge you to *not* be satisfied with having the remainder of your Sabbath (after you get home from church) looking and feeling like every other day of the week.** What's going to make it holy? What's going to set it apart? What can you and fellow believers do to remind yourselves that you are chosen people? What kind of activities will help reorient all of you around God? These are the kinds of questions I want you to talk about as a family or as a community group.
 - **If it's the Lord's Day (his day), then can you honestly say you're spending it like it belongs to him?** Let's honor God by keeping a Sabbath, not because we have to, but because we get to. Because we love him and his people.