

The 'Rest' of the Story ~ Genesis 2:1-3

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church, August 26, 2007

This passage in Genesis 2 speaks of rest, and before we look at the details, it's worth taking time to think about rest. This concept of rest is important enough that God mentions it not only in verse 2 but also in verse 3 and over and over again in the law this pattern God laid down on creation week. True rest may be a foreign concept to many in our fast-paced, hustle and bustle, frenetic lifestyles, busy, drive-thru, nonstop, on-the-go modern lives. We live in a restless world.

There was a *TIME* magazine lead article (Dec. 17, 1990) showing the massive and growing inability of many people to sleep or relax – the subtitle was “Too little rest.” There were five suggestions for how to deal with stress and the lack of ability to relax, but it didn't speak about the biblical pattern or truths God gave Israel.

God calls to us in Psalm 46 above the noise and commotion and distraction of our world: “Be still and know that I am God.”

When we fill our lives up with endless activities and entertainments to the neglect of our spiritual and devotional life, we make that choice, and we are responsible for the consequences (we can't blame all of that on the world). Quiet time with God, rest in God, meditation upon God and His Word – these are usually the things that go when we're busy in life.

Warren Wiersbe makes the observation,

“The ability to calm your soul and wait before God is one of the most difficult things in the Christian life. Our old nature is restless...the world around us is frantically in a hurry. But a restless heart usually leads to a reckless life.” (*Men's Life*, Spring, 1998)

Augustine said we are made for God and “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.” We are designed to rest in God, but the problem preventing us from doing that is sin. The Scriptures speak of the wicked having lives that are like the churning sea that never rests. That is what sin causes. “There is no rest for the wicked.”

In contrast to the wicked, God Himself in this passage “rests” and is the source of rest. This theme of rest runs through the Bible:

- first expressed here in Eden
- later pictured by ceremonial laws about Sabbath rest
- symbolized as the rest of the Promised Land (a rest they never fully entered, cf. Heb. 4)
- personified in Christ, the true and ultimate fulfillment and source of rest, who will bring all who experience the rest of salvation through faith into the eternal rest of heaven

The day of rest, the Sabbath, was a hot-button controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees. Besides making Himself equal with God, John 5:18 says that the way Jesus treated the Sabbath was the other main reason they wanted to kill Him; right up there with His claiming deity.

The Sabbath was, in fact, so important to Jews at one time in their history, that they were willing to die rather than take up arms as soldiers on that day, and many were massacred by their

enemies on this day. The Sabbath day of rest was more important than life itself to many Jews. It's ironic that the Sabbath, this O.T. principle of rest, has caused so many to *wear themselves out* arguing about what should be done to *rest* (can you do recreation, can you do anything fun, are some sports ok on the Sabbath, which ones, what about entertainment, going out to eat, etc.) The Pharisees were experts at this type of minutiae and coming up with rules for every conceivable activity and scenario (any many you would never think of). You can get pretty tired reading all the endless literature about Sabbath rest, but so much of what is written is tradition and speculation and assumptions and doesn't always deal carefully or completely with the biblical text itself. We want to take a look at what the Bible actually says, with God's help and grace.

VERSE 1

“completed” – other translations have “finished” - at the end of the sixth day all was done. The world is no longer in a process of being created, there is no evolution taking place.

VERSE 2 - **“By the seventh day God completed [NKJV “ended”] His work which He had made”**

There were different words the Jews used for “work” or “labor” – the one used of God here is the word for ‘skilled labor, work that is performed by a craftsman or an artisan. Such is the measure of the finesse and professional skills of God’s work.’¹ The text implies that the work God rested from is the work of creation

“and He rested”

God did not need to rest like man does. The Scriptures say He neither slumbers nor sleeps, He never goes weary or tired.

Isaiah 40:28 (NKJV)

*28 Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, **Neither faints nor is weary.** [NASB “Does not become weary or tired”]*

Human beings do become weary and tired, in fact, most of us will spend the equivalent of 20 or more years of our life asleep, totally unconscious. This is an everyday reminder God has given us that *we are not God*. Each night is an opportunity to be still and know that God is God, and I am not.

The word “rest” in Genesis 2:2 has the nuance of “ceased” – in fact it’s used this way in Genesis 8:22 “While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not **cease.**”

Genesis 2 is saying God ceased creating, literally “He abstained from work.” There is no speaking or creating like He did on the other days, the type of work He did the first six days was completed.

The Jewish commentator Cassuto points out it has a negative connotation “not to do work”

The passage repeats 3x the idea that God did not work on this day, making the point emphatic.

As the Israelites in the wilderness would be reading the Torah that Moses wrote, this would be very important for them in light of the Sabbath law revealed at Sinai. The phrase “the seventh day” is also repeated 3x for emphasis

The rest here is not the rest of inactivity, as God is always working (John 5:17-18), it is the rest of achievement, similar to how the N.T. speaks of Jesus being seated or sitting down after He finished His work of redemption. Jesus didn’t sit down because He was tired, instead it signifies that work was done.

The work of creation was completed by God, so He rested, and when the work of redemption was accomplished, Jesus sat down having completed His task. Salvation was accomplished by Christ, and is now applied by the Holy Spirit to those chosen by the Father.

Our Lord didn’t stop working because He was *fatigued*, He was *finished*. And there was a satisfied refreshment as well.

Exodus 31:17 says “in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was **refreshed**.”

He was **refreshed** – in other words He enjoyed and delighted in His creation, He was pleased because “it was very good.” “The imagery is like that of a master artisan who, having completed a masterpiece, pauses to admire and reflect on his finished work.”²

The implication and application is that we should take regular time to stop and enjoy God’s creation as well. God knows that our human bodies need refreshment and recuperation – and He graciously gives man the opportunity to do that every evening, as well as when man can take a day off. Such rest is not just for our well-being, but so that we can focus on *God’s being* and person and work, where true satisfaction and rest and refreshment are found in God alone.

Exodus 23:12 says the purpose of us ceasing work is also “so that you ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as you stranger, may **refresh** themselves.”

Notice the kindness of God in giving man the Sabbath.

- Slaves as well as strangers were to benefit
- Even animals were to be given break (as well as the land)
- Gathering sticks was prohibited, which was a menial task, and God protects their slaves from menial things
- Building fires was prohibited, as a grace to wives and moms so they would not be tempted to cook, God gave them a break

NOTICE THE WORD “SABBATH” DOES NOT APPEAR IN GENESIS

Exodus 16 is the first time the word “Sabbath” appears in the Bible:

21 They gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat; but when the sun grew hot, it would melt.

22 Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses,

23 then he said to them, "This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning."

24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it.

25 Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field.

26 "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none."

27 It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.

28 Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?"

29 "See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day."

30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

Note in verse 35 that this pattern (no manna on 7th day and had to prepare on 6th day) continued for 40 years. God in His grace gave them a weekly reminder, so that every seventh day when they would come out of their tents, they would see no manna on the ground. This pattern would be indelibly marked on them as gave them a weekly aid to help them get used to Sabbath-keeping.

Man's tendency is not to rest or remember, but God made sure that they had to do their work on Friday, gathering more food, so that on Saturday / Sabbath they would have food for the day. Verse 27-28 reminds me of my preschool teacher trying to get us kids to rest at nap time for their own benefit, but the kids don't want to (now that we're adults, we wish we could nap everyday!)

Remember that these people were slaves who had been mercilessly worked in Egypt all their life, who never had a day off – and now God in His great kindness sets up the pattern of manna so that every week for the next 40 years they're reminded to rest on the seventh day – the right attitude is not "we have to" – "we get to!"

No grumbling "ahh, man, I *don't* have to work today? I liked it better when we were in bondage in Egypt and never had a break."

God gave the Sabbath to Israel as a gracious gift to former slaves:

- To the Jews this was liberating, not a legalistic yoke
- It was to be a blessing, not a burden
- It was to be a delight, not a drudgery, as Isaiah 58 teaches.
- Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man – in other words it was to benefit man, it was not to put him in bondage (as Pharisees later abused it).

Deuteronomy 5:15 (NASB95) You shall **remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt**, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; **therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.**

Every Sabbath was to be a reminder of their deliverance from Egypt. Each week they were to be reminded of the mighty hand and arm of their mighty and matchless Redeemer God. The Passover meal was also used to remember this, kids would ask their parents the meaning, and it seems the Sabbath was to be the same way as the family would be together at home on the day.

Exodus 16:29 says they are to remain in their place; this was not a day that they went out. This is a fact rarely brought up in Sabbath discussions – the Sabbath laws were not primarily about gathering for *public worship*, the focus of the Sabbath law was *private rest* in your homes. Certainly you could and should use “down-time” to worship and pray alone or with your family, but it was not a time when Jews were commanded to travel to a big meeting place to worship with everyone, in fact traveling was discouraged. We know that many devout Jews would not go beyond a Sabbath day’s journey (about 1,000 yards from home; alluded to in Acts 1:12).

Some of the passages like Lev 23:3 do speak of “a holy convocation” (sometimes these refer to priestly duties) but that same text says “complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the **Lord in all your dwellings.**”

Activities outside your home, Sabbath school, morning corporate worship services on the day, evening services, attending synagogues, Rabbis preaching on the Sabbath, going to church, youth group – none of these things are a part of the biblical Sabbath law. That’s not the focus of the Sabbath commands in scripture. In fact, going to church, synagogues, and Rabbis are not even mentioned in the O.T., they really began to develop after the exiles when synagogues, Rabbi’s and Pharisees developed between the O.T. and N.T. Jesus and the apostles *did* go into the synagogues for evangelistic purposes (not commanded in O.T., but not a bad tradition either to meet together – just not the focus of law).

Don’t read *what we do on Sunday* back into what the Israelites did on Saturday and assume it’s the same thing. Sabbath-keepers when the law was given to Israel look a lot different than how those live today who claim to be keeping the Sabbath as God’s unbroken law since the earliest times.

- How and when was the Sabbath to be kept? Lev. 23:32 says “from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your Sabbaths” (specifically sundown Friday till sundown Sat.)
- This Jewish order of reckoning days is seen in Gen. 1 “and there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day”
- It says in Luke 23:54, when they took Jesus down from the cross later afternoon of what we call “Good Friday” – it says “it was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.” The passage goes on to say what a hurry they were all in to get him buried before day’s end so they could rest on the Sabbath. John 19:31 also shows the Jews urgency to have the soldiers break the legs of Jesus, so he could die and be taken down before day’s end, before the Sabbath began
- The evening-to-evening reckoning also shows that Jesus had Passover the night before and was also crucified on Passover day (which began Thursday evening and ended at sundown Friday)

So when we read in the Ten Commandments to remember to keep the Sabbath day set apart,

don't be so quick to think this means "go to church on Sunday" (which I think you should do, of course, based on other scriptures not the Sabbath laws) – but the actual command God gave His people here was to rest every seventh day (Friday night around 6:00 p.m. until Saturday night)

Notice also in verse 9 that the other side of the command is that you are to work the other six days and only rest on the Sabbath (our Saturday). So if you want to interpret this literally as the original writer and original reader understood it, this is a command to work on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday – Friday, then begin observation sunset on Friday and rest through day's end Saturday. I've met a lot of people who dogmatically insist "the Fourth Commandment is for today" – but I've never met one who was as dogmatic about his obligation to work every Sunday. There's no question this is how it was obeyed in the Old Testament, and we can't only take the command in verse 10 and ignore the command in verse 9. I've been accused by some as not taking the fourth commandment seriously and literally, but I can point out neither do they.

The Sabbath law included the death penalty for violation, it included sacrifices that were mandatory. Most who call themselves "Sabbatarians" typically do not consistently try to begin their observance on sunset Friday, and no one has continued the required sacrifices or given someone the death penalty if they picked up sticks on the day. But how can we pick and choose some parts of Sabbath law, and not others, and how do we know what gives us the right? Is the Sabbath law for Christians or not? (You'll have to come back next week for that question)

Notice for now that at the end of Exodus 20:11 it references the creation week. *This takes us back to Genesis 2.* If the Sabbath command was not in the Ten Commandments, or not based on God's creation pattern, there probably wouldn't be a controversy. But because the Ten Commandments are so foundational and seen as the heart of God's moral law, and because Genesis 2 says God blessed and sanctified the day at the end of creation (not Sinai), many see it as important, so we need to look carefully at this issue.

VERSE 3 - "Then God blessed the seventh day"

The word "bless" has been used of the creatures and it had been used of man and woman in relation to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. But now God blesses a DAY. Perhaps the day is now blessed because it is spiritually life-giving, because it is in some way related to productivity and fruitfulness and refreshment in our physical life. You certainly can demonstrate this scientifically, how a seventh day off is optimum for our wellbeing.

"and sanctified it" - ESV has "made it holy." First time root for word "holy" is used (*qiddesh*) – God hallowed the day. The word means set apart, to be different. The stem of the verb implies causation, "God made it holy," and this form of the verb also has a declarative sense, i.e., "he declared the day to be holy or consecrated it."³

The reason He blessed and sanctified it, the text says: **"because in it He rested from all His work"**

Notice it says "God rested" – it does not say "man rested" or was commanded to. There are many who teach that on this day Adam and Eve also rested because God commanded them to.

The difficulty is that the text doesn't say that. And why would God force them to rest when they were just created less than a day earlier and would not understand the difference between work and rest? In fact, I'm not sure there was much a difference before sin.

Even though Genesis doesn't record it, many teach that the Sabbath laws of what you were to do or not do on the seventh day were given to Adam in Genesis 2 and then he passed them on to all his descendants in the rest of Genesis. So the laws prohibiting work and various activities were passed on and observed every seventh day by Abel and Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and all good patriarchs kept the Sabbath through Genesis. Many great men in the Puritan Reformed tradition developed this argument in the 17th century and onward.

The difficulty again though is that the Bible doesn't indicate this, you have to read it back into the text. Many good men assume and teach that God commanded all mankind to keep the Sabbath day, and therefore it is a perpetual obligation for the human race, rather than something instituted in the Mosaic Law. The phrase often used by Sabbatarians is "creation ordinance." In other words, Christians generally believe the Mosaic legislation, ceremonies, sacrifices, and rituals were all shadows that pointed to Christ and were fulfilled in Christ, and are not required of Christians. There were many such things in Exodus through Deuteronomy that were unique to the nation of Israel living in the land, that were part of the old covenant, that were to be in place as long as the covenant was in place and were fulfilled in Christ and therefore no longer required. Christians readily agree on that point.

Institutions like marriage, on the other hand, were ordained at creation by God, and are therefore to continue throughout the human race, no matter what covenant we're under. So their argument is that Sabbath keeping is in the same class as marriage.

The difference, though is that the text of Genesis 2 does describe how marriage was given as a gift to man by God, but it does not speak of the Sabbath the same way. The undeniable fact is that the word "Sabbath" is not mentioned anywhere in Genesis, and there is no clear record of any Sabbath observance before the time of Moses. This provides a serious problem to those who must argue the primary point of their case from silence. While Genesis 2 (written by Moses about the time as the rest of the Torah) does say God rested, it nowhere records man resting. Reading a command in-between the white spaces is not a solid foundation to build doctrine or application upon. Even some in the Puritan tradition (Gill, Bunyan, Milton, Hewlyn, etc.) have admitted the Sabbath does not appear to be a creation ordinance based on the evidence of scripture.⁴

Even if it could be shown from Scripture that God gave Sabbath commandments and laws to Adam in Genesis 2, I don't think that means it would always have to be that way and could never be altered. Because Genesis 1:29-30 does explicitly command vegetarianism as a "creation ordinance" if you will – this does not mean that all God's people must eat fruits and plants only until Jesus comes back. Later revelation modifies that, and I believe later revelation in the N.T. speaks to the Sabbath question as well.

The fact that a religious practice existed before the time of Moses does not in itself prove that it must continue after Christ. I think this is an unwarranted assumption.

We see sacrifices taking place in Genesis 4 and from earliest time (ex: Job 1), we see circumcision as a requirement for Abraham, etc. These were in place before the Mosaic law, but that doesn't mean they automatically are required after the Mosaic covenant ended.

WAS EDEN A PLACE WHERE MAN NEEDED A "DAY" OF REST AND REFRESHMENT AND WORSHIP, OR WAS IT A LIFE OF REST AND REFRESHMENT AND WORSHIP?

Could it be that because the text does not mention "evening and morning" for the seventh day, that this state of blessed and sanctified rest was to continue for Adam and Eve rather than ending at sundown? Was this not their entire life before sin? They had fellowship with God, no toilsome labor, they could always rest in and with God, enjoying His creation and works, worship was an everyday thing for Adam and Eve, not one day a week.

It may very well be that man joined God in the type of rest spoken of here with the words "blessed" and "holy." All of life was blessed and holy, and this continued not just on the seventh day, but on the eighth day, the ninth day, the tenth day, however many days took place before Genesis 3. It seems to me that the blessed and holy state of this passage was something mankind was intended to enjoy continually everyday in this sin-free world.

It may be that mankind was blessed with this principle, but it doesn't seem that God would have to command them a bunch of do's and don'ts like we see in Sabbath law – the only restriction recorded for Adam and Eve was not to eat of the fruit of one tree. It seemed there was only one possible sin or law to disobey – eating of one tree was the only restriction.

To suppose that Adam and Eve were given the Sabbath prohibitions during creation week, when they were less than a day old, seems questionable at best for a number of reasons:

- First, the need to rest from toilsome labor did not exist prior to the Fall (Gen. 3:17-19).
- In fact, Adam and Eve's entire life in Eden would have been refreshment and delighting in God daily – in some sense, the later Israelite Sabbath was a picture of the true rest and refreshment that man had forfeited by sin.
- The prohibition to not leave their dwelling place would have no meaning when the whole earth and garden was theirs.
- Similarly, restrictions against building a fire were apparently unnecessary since they were in a perfect state without clothes or need of warmth.
- Prohibitions against baking or boiling would also seem irrelevant in a garden of fresh food daily.
- The laws against carrying a load or buying and selling would similarly have no meaning.
- There was no necessity to set apart a certain day for meditation or communion with God, as He apparently walked through the garden in some form.
- Eden is in many ways a picture not of a place where man needed rest every seventh day, but a place of perpetual eternal rest such as paradise restored in the future (cf. Heb. 4).⁵

MacArthur writes:

'So everything about Adam's life before he sinned was precisely what the Sabbath laws pictured. In a sense, Israel's Sabbath observances were designed to show in microcosm what life in Eden was designed to be. And this aspect of Moses' law was merely a ceremonial reminder of what God's original design for human life involved.'⁶

Genesis 2 does not prove that Christian must keep the Sabbath. God blessed His completed and perfect creation, and the point seems to be that this blessed and holy state of “rest” and refreshment in Genesis 2 was something mankind was intended to enjoy continually everyday in this perfect world.

But this blessed and sanctified state of “rest” and paradise that God had created did not last forever. This state was lost, and would need to be restored someday.

I believe the “rest” of paradise lost was pictured in the O.T. Sabbath laws which were to be a taste of things to come, the spiritual rest would be restored in Christ by salvation through faith not works, and in an ultimate sense, it will be fully restored in the new heavens and new earth – paradise regained.

It’s interesting that the first time the word “Sabbath” appears in the N.T., that Jesus uses this terminology immediately before in context

Matthew 11:27-12:1 (NASB95) 27 *“All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. 28 “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and **I will give you rest.** 29 “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and **you will find rest for your souls.** 30 “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

The point of Hebrews 4, I believe is that the ultimate meaning of the Sabbath can only be entered by faith in Christ, and the final restoration of Eden’s lost rest will be restored in the eternal state.

Illustration: Missionary John Patton – trying to find word for “faith” in his translation, used the word to rest completely after exhaustion of working

This is a picture of saving faith in the Lord of the Sabbath.

Kent Hughes writes:

‘When you truly trust Christ as Savior, rest comes because the burden of your sins is lifted. You rest from your works. And because you are in Christ, you enter the Sabbath rest of God ... Everyone who has truly come to Christ has experienced that rest. All the impossible striving to gain salvation was then over. You rested in Christ, not in yourself. The burden of guilt was lifted. Your soul was light with rest. And now as a believer the principle is: the more trust, the more rest. Our belief or unbelief makes all the difference. Few have lived as stressful a life as Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission. But Taylor lived in God’s rest, as his son so beautifully attests:

Day and night this was his secret, “just to roll the burden on the Lord.” Frequently those who were wakeful in the little house at Chinkian might hear, at two or three in the morning, the soft refrain of Mr. Taylor’s favorite hymn [“Jesus, I am Resting, Resting”]. He had learned that for him, only one life was possible – just that blessed life of resting and rejoicing in the Lord under all circumstances, while He dealt with the difficulties, inward and outward, great and small.

It is possible to live a life as harried and busy as Hudson Taylor and yet be resting. Resting is trusting. Believer, you can have perpetual rest by resting in him ... St. Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless ‘til they find their rest in thee.” He knew from experience that life apart from Christ is striving, that men and women will remain restless regardless of what they attain or obtain in this world. You will never find rest apart from redemption in Christ.

But when you come to him in faith as your Creator and Redeemer, you find a Sabbath rest for your soul – his own rest that he has enjoyed from creation ... Will you come in faith, believing and trusting in him?⁷

¹ Victor Hamilton, *Genesis*, NICOT 1:142.

² MacArthur, J. (2001). *The battle for the beginning : The Bible on creation and the fall of Adam* (184). Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group.

³ D. Kelly, 237; Leupold, 103

⁴ Such as Peter Hewlyn (1636) and John Milton (cited as anti-Sabbatarian by A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 409). John Bunyan wrote: “In all the Scriptures we do not read that the breach of a weekly Sabbath was charged upon any man from Adam to Moses,” and John Gill concurred: “None but the Jews were ever charged with the breach of the weekly Sabbath.” As cited by Phil Johnson in “Keep the Sabbath.”

⁵ The section indebted to Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Christ*, 74-77.

⁶ MacArthur, 186.

⁷ Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, 46-47.