

## ***Recollected: On Rest***

### ***Introduction:***

So we're talking about Sabbath and Rest today.

And when I realized that I'd planned this message for today, I immediately felt, just...discouraged as I prepared to prepare for it, because I just feel like, you know, Sabbath & Rest were the wrong things to talk about. I mean, for all sorts of reasons.

For some of us, we're having tons of forced rest, while others of us are having the opposite, no rest at all--we wake when our kids wake us and we sleep when...well, do we? And then others of us were in Adult Ed talking about this, like, 2 weeks ago, and...here we go again. It just felt like the wrong time.

But then it occurred to me that, as far as life goes, as far as our society *especially* goes, it's always the wrong time to rest. Nothing about our lives invites rest. That's probably why God created it, modeled it, and called for it. To follow God, after all, is to often go against the grain.

Let's talk about rest a little bit. First, we'll pray.

### ***Prayer:***

***What we can't do today.***

Here's what I don't want to do. I don't want to be caught up in an in-depth conversation about the Sabbath and "keeping the Sabbath holy," the 4th commandment, and what this means for a Christian.

Christians love to discuss--at best--and argue--at worst--about this stuff. I know I can't just ignore it, of course, so let me talk about it a tiny bit as fast as I can.

God, having created everything, took a breather. We read in Genesis: **"...the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and [made it holy] because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation."** And part of what would mark the special people God decided to make for himself would be that they, too, rested on the seventh day, "kept the sabbath holy," as it's phrased in that set of rules that would help govern the life of God's people.

And keep the Sabbath Israel did, right up to (and beyond, really) Jesus. And the Sabbath-keeping helped differentiate them from other people. It helped them remember that God was creator, it created-built in limits to what they could possess and produce. We

could talk about all sorts of things, but aren't.

And Jesus shows up, and throws a wrench in things. Because with him the rules that governed the life of Israel get cranked up a notch; the moral demands that come with being God's People become nearly impossible to meet--except that Jesus' followers are given God's own Spirit to live up to the task. And at the same time, many of the rules that helped to set Israel apart from other people become unnecessary: People are set apart by trusting Jesus, walking with the Spirit, being Christ to the World. And Jesus was born, lived, died, rose again, you know: important things. Where the commandment to "keep the Sabbath" fits in here is fodder for argument.

On the one hand, we like rules, they clarify, they let us know if we're in the right or in the wrong, on the other hand, Jesus gives us very few rules and calls us to an ethical life that centered on mimicking him through the Spirit's power. For a long time the church--which was basically culturally Jewish--met on the Sabbath--which is Saturday, Spanish retains this, you know, by calling Saturday "Sabado," or "Sabbath"--and gathered *also* on Sunday--the first day of the week, "The Lord's Day," because it's the day Jesus rose from the dead. Again, you know, Spanish keeps this in front of us by calling Sunday "Domingo," or "The Lord's Day."

But give this a few hundred years and a few million

Gentiles coming to Christ and the Christian Holy Day tips to Sunday, so much so that people start calling Sunday the Sabbath, which only added to the confusion.

And there have always been pockets of Christians, ethnically Jewish or ethnically not, who have hung to this truth that Saturday is the Sabbath, and the idea that it's a day that we should especially rest on.

I'll just reveal my cards: I don't think that we're called to keep the Sabbath, because I don't think that we're bound by the Ten Commandments anymore; we're bound by Christ-conformity, which goes above and beyond them, making them more demanding than we could imagine, to the law that the Spirit has written upon our hearts, good and bad determined not by rules, but by whether what we do mimics or doesn't mimic Jesus, who is the "image of the invisible God." And apart from this broad theological statement, there's passages in the New Testament that point us this way:

Paul, when he writes to the Christians at Colossae about how they've got to continue living in Christ, freed from the demands of the law and their sin, says **"...do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to**

**Christ.”** Jesus is the the one that all the commandments pointed to, and staying rooted & growing in him through the Spirit is what all Christians are called to, the substance of our faith, really.

Jesus points out that those who labor wearily under the demands of the old system of rule-based faithfulness, can come to him for rest: **“Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**

By reminding the pharisees that **“The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”** Jesus reorients his people away from “keeping the sabbath holy” for holiness’ sake, to resting for humanity’s sake, our sake.

God, the creator of people, in whose image humanity was formed, rested on the Sabbath; the Israelites who had information about the only true God knew that human souls were hard-wired for rest; but rest can become unrest and hard work when an entire day is spent worrying if you’re resting or not.

So. Is making Sunday--the first day of the week, “the

Lord's Day"--is making it special a worthwhile thing to do? Totally. Is setting aside a day for resting a good habit--whether that's Saturday, the Sabbath, or any other day? Yes: it's part of taking the Christian life seriously, and living well as a Christian. It mimics God's practice, it positions us for the rest that we critically need to live as fully human a life as we can live. But is it necessary? Only in the sense that without rest, the human soul withers away like a plant without water.

### ***Oh, World: Privilege***

But we have a sort of dysfunctional relationship to rest.

We consider rest a personal right, something we deserve--no matter really who we are or what we've done. And maybe people always have considered rest a personal right, ever since sin broke the world.

But sin did break the world, and rest--which was supposed to be something that's a part of everyone's life, a part of what it means to be human--that was broken, too.

And now--like fasting, like the choice for simplicity, like all sorts of things--rest is often a privilege that only those who have wealth and resources are able to acquire. It's too often the case that our rest comes at the expense of other people's difficult work, and if

they were to take the rest that we would, it would cost us.

### ***Oh, World: Produce***

But sin has let loose another problem in our lives, which is the constant pressure to be more efficient and more productive. We live in a world that constantly pushes us toward productivity and efficiency. Honestly, this is just as true now, in a pandemic, as it's ever been. And in fact, the pandemic has presented the truth that what matters more than simply a human life is a human life that is able to get things done.

But why wouldn't we want to be more productive, more efficient--so we could do even more, accomplish even more. Why not? We get more money for it, we get more accolades for it, we get to avoid silence and confrontation with our souls. There are enormous benefits to radical production.

Except that people need rest; we were created by a God who rests, and meant to rest as well. We are not machines, and we are not immortal, and when we ask other people, or are asked by others--bosses, co-workers, pastors even--to constantly accomplish more and more, it destroys us. It erodes our humanity. And this urge to be productive seems ultimately a fight against our own mortality and against the truth that at least as far as this world goes, we will end up utterly unproductive.

And rest, by the standards of the world, by this mobility, frenzied call to make and do more--it *feels* utterly unproductive.

One thing rest does, of course, is that it retrains us to realize just how outrageous the level of work that we do really is--of course, when we've spent decades being trained one way, rest has its work cut out for it.

But before we talk about what rest does, let's talk about what rest is.

### ***What Rest Is:***

And we start treading on dangerous ground, here, right? Because many of us "do rest" differently, and "rest" is a personal thing--because we do get so little of it--so ain't nobody telling us what to do when it comes to our time to rest.

I don't want to tell us how to rest, and we wouldn't listen to me anyway. So. Instead I want to tell us about what rest does, what it does in our souls, and then it's up to us to take the time to figure out if the way we would all say we rest actually does any of this stuff. If it doesn't, then I would ask when is this happening?

I had wanted to define rest, for us: "Applied non-productivity," maybe "Intentional Worklessness:" It just seemed gimmicky.

But these gimmicky things lead me to at least one conviction, and again, you don't have to agree with this. But I don't think rest is play. I don't think rest is play. Play takes work. It may be work that doesn't pay the bills, but it's work. Rest isn't work. This isn't to say that it doesn't require effort to achieve rest; of course it does, especially in a world that demands we work all the time. People play hard and work hard, but nobody claims they rest hard.

We usually confuse rest and play, largely because we're so, so bad at resting. Playing feels better than resting does, you know? Because we've done something, and that makes us proud of ourselves. Resting doesn't leave us with something to show for ourselves, except ourselves, present and awake and refreshed. There's a fine line between rest and play, but it's an important one, because if we have our druthers, we won't rest; we'll work and play, and try to achieve in those things what we can only get by resting. If we ask ourselves, after that thing we love to do, whatever it is, "Do I feel rested or at rest?" And we can honestly answer "Yes." Then what we've done is, probably, rest.

I don't think resting can wear us out, make us tired.

### ***What Rest Does: Start***

The base consideration we have to make, if we're

going to think of our rest as Christian, is if our rest really is helping us become more like Jesus, or if it's doing something else. Does our rest open us up to God's guidance or distract us from our souls? Does it position us to be people who are caring, or people who are tired? Does it help us to notice the needs of others, or does it leave us focusing on our own needs? Is the rest we take downright *ungodly*, by even the loosest standard?

But rest does so many other things, and they are notes in a chord, really, players in a game: these things interact with each other, but we can divvy them up a little.

### ***What Rest Does: Restores***

Rest restores us.

Often, we enter into rest because we simply need it, you know. We're worn out, weary, and we need rest--it's one thing we know. We need "recharged."

But entering into rest does more than "recharge us." We're not batteries, we're people. A battery's sole purpose is to store energy so that it can be used up however a person wants. We don't have sole purposes; we're complex, called to do all sorts of things, and created for all sorts of reasons, so: resting does more than "recharge us," if it does that at all.

We can say it energizes, maybe, but that's not even true: because resting itself doesn't automatically do much. Dissipation leads to dissipation, simple passivity only makes us weaker and more worn out. Honestly; it's celebration & play that energize us, not rest. Rest does something else; it restores us.

Rest restores us to our best. I could qualify this all sorts of ways: we're probably not our best, as Christians, unless we're close to Christ. We're probably not at our best, as people, if what we do to rest distracts us from who we are.

We're probably not our best, as Christians, if we're so tired that we can't help people, can't rally enough energy to care anymore about what's going on in the lives of those we love.

But rest restores us, gives back to us the strength, and attention, and concentration, and hopefulness, and expectation of good that hard work usually drains us of. Rest is restorative.

So we could ask: Does the rest we take restore us in these ways? Or not? And again: If it doesn't, should we examine the way we're choosing to rest? Because it may not be doing what it's supposed to do.

### ***What Rest Does: Empowers***

Rest empowers us.

Often, we feel as if we're at the mercy of many demands that are made upon us by family, friends, pets, work, things we own and organizations and their zoom meetings that we never should have said yes to.

Resting, though, can be one of the most empowering things that we can do in our society, because it helps us reclaim our lives. In the midst of the many demands that are made upon us, we effectively say "I am choosing this time for myself right now." And that is self-interested; but it's not selfish.

We cannot be good family members, good friends, good pet-owners, good workers, good stewards of our stuff, or good members of any organization if what we're always bringing to these places are the dregs-- the last drink, filled with gravelly bits that are just nasty and get caught in our teeth.

Rest empowers us because creating a habit of saying "no" to certain demands at certain times really does help us regain control and ownership over our own lives. Empty spaces in our lives will be filled by something. Time we don't claim will be claimed by something. Resting is a way to reclaim our time, and keep it out of the hands of those who have no business with it.

I won't qualify this much. You know that if a baby is

crying and it's your day off you still gotta feel the baby. Certain things need "yes-es" all the time, that's life. But we could be saying no to way, way more than we are if we could only say "yes" to rest a little more often.

So we could ask: Does the rest we take empower us in these ways? Or not? And again: If it doesn't, should we examine the way we're choosing to rest? Because it may not be doing what it's supposed to do.

I'll add this: Go to bed. Just go to bed. Do we trust God enough to go to sleep?

### ***What Rest Does: Reorients***

Rest reorients us.

This world is so packed with distractions, some of which we invite and some that are forced upon us. We get drunk with them, dizzy with them, unable to focus, to choose, to see clearly what options are before us and what potential options are coming down the road.

Rest reorients us. It sits us up straight, in a calm moment, and reminds us where we are, and knowing where we are, we can remember where it was we were trying to get to. Why did we start this project? Why did we take this job? Why did we want this thing that we're working to buy or working to pay off? Why Jesus? Rest's calming, stilling, quieting effects enable

us to think clearly about what we're doing here, and help us to remember where we were headed.

So we could ask: Does the rest we take reorient us in these ways? Or not? And again: If it doesn't, should we examine the way we're choosing to rest? Because it may not be doing what it's supposed to do.

And let me just say some things that we probably know, but may have forgotten.

### ***To Remember: Forced***

We need to remember that if we don't voluntarily practice this discipline, we may be forced into rest. Our bodies and minds and spirits were not made for always producing, always going, always working.

In this life we'll be forced into rest, whether we want it or not.

### ***To Remember: Follows***

We need to remember, too, that rest follows hard work--not the other way around. It's natural, maybe, in this broken world to want take the rest before we do the work; but it can't be that way: resting before work is sloth, it's laziness, and overcorrecting our too-productive lives by over-resting isn't a solution, it's a different sort of problem.

### ***To Remember: Shadows***

We must remember, too, that any rest we get in this life is incomplete. Our best rest here will be tinged with grief or interruption or terror, because of this world, we live in this world, and as the author of Hebrews notes, “a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labors as God did from his.” He calls us to “make every effort to enter that rest,” to keep the faith, and keep faithful.

We are looking forward to a restful world, a resurrected world, that we simply cannot imagine. And the rest we take now, it’s an incomplete shadow of the rest to come, the “sabbath rest that still remains,” waiting, just beyond our lives, when “labor” will give way to peace.

### ***Resting:***

And I want to suggest some ways to rest, you know: tips & tricks, but that gets tricky itself, because how we define rest is often very personal. I don’t want to prescribe how we should rest, ways to rest.

But does the rest we take do the things that I mentioned a moment ago? Does it restore us? Empower us? Reorient us?

Or are we just killing time, in a world packed full of demands upon us. Packed full of holy need?

But I gotta give us something, right? So. Here it is: Go to sleep. Not right now--I mean, if you're video's off, and you're in bed, I may have already put us to sleep. It's how God's using me today, to encourage rest.

But Going to sleep is the ultimate form of "intentional worklessness." Going to bed, instead of doing one more thing, is the ultimate empowering choice against productivity; it's the ultimate act of trust--that we'll wake up from our sleep, that the world won't fall apart if we don't finish what we must finish, that rest is worthwhile.

***Conclusion:***

Can you rest?

When?

How?

Rest, please. For you sake & mine as your brother in Christ. Rest for the world's sake, and the Lord's. Rest for your family's sake, stuck home with them as you are. Rest because we were made for more than working, more than playing: And we don't play well, or work at all--we're broken, in fact--without rest.