

God's Rest and Ours

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I asked some people recently what their idea of a restful weekend was. For one person with children, they said it was a distant memory.

Another person just said that it was somewhere near the beach. Another person said it was cooking. That was their idea of rest, was cooking. I said, come around to my place any time. I remember chatting with a different group about this idea of rest, and one person said for them it was lying on a banana lounge by a white sandy beach with some sun, a gentle breeze, and the sound of the waves softly rolling up the shore.

We went, oh. I don't know what it is about that is your idea of rest, but today's commandment is all about rest. It's the Sabbath commandment.

As many of you know, we've been doing a series on the Ten Commandments, and today is the fourth one, as I said about the Sabbath rest. In fact, the word Sabbath means to cease or to desist or rest.

But why were Israel to obey this commandment? What's it all about and what does it mean for us today? I mean, are the Seventh-day Adventists right for having church on the Jewish Sabbath day, which is Saturday?

[1 : 2 3] Or on this next movie, next slide, I think if you remember this movie, Eric Liddell, Chariots of Fire, was he right not to race on Sunday, which for him was his Sabbath?

In fact, is Sunday the new Sabbath? Well, these are the questions that this commandment raises for us, and so let's begin by looking at the commandment itself. So point one on your outlines and verse eight in your Bibles.

This will be our longest point. So we read in verse eight, Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 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, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

Here God commands Israel to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. The word holy can mean two things. First, it can mean morally pure, so holy in terms of character.

[2 : 2 7] Or secondly, it can mean set apart as special or different. And it's that second type of meaning here. The Sabbath day was to be set apart as special or different.

How? Well, by being different to the other six days. Where you worked on the other six days, the seventh was to be different by no work. Instead, it was to be a day of rest. And notice that this rest day is part of loving God.

Verse 10 says that the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. It's meant to be a day dedicated to God. It belongs to him. And the way they are to love God is to rest, which sounds all right, actually.

In fact, though, even if they wanted to work, they had to rest. Even if they felt they had to work, especially during harvest time, for example, they couldn't.

They had to rest. It was God's day and he wanted them to stop, trust him and rest. But what's more, it's here that God seems to also institute a seven-day week.

[3 : 30] In ancient Egypt, the poor Egyptians, they had a 10-day week. So three weeks per month, only three weekends, not four, poor guys. But now that Israel was out of Egypt, they would have a seven-day week, six days of work, one day of rest.

And they would set it apart as holy, dedicated to God. And he wants them to rest on it. But why? Well, verse 11 tells us. If you've got your Bibles there, it starts with the word for or because.

In six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them. But he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Verse 11, of course, refers to Genesis where God created the world. And so just as God ceased his work of creating on the seventh day and set it apart as special, holy, so Israel was to rest from work on the seventh day and set that apart as special or holy.

But is this commandment simply about imitating God? God rested, so they should rest. Well, it includes that, but I think there's more going on here.

[4 : 42] For starters, God makes a big deal about the number seven in the Bible. So this commandment about the seventh day of rest actually starts with the seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet. I didn't know that, but I had to look it up.

There's also seven groups who are to rest. So if you've got your Bibles there in verse 10, you can count them out. You, your son, your daughter, and on it goes. Seven groups. God also gave Israel seven festivals to celebrate each year.

And he told them that every seventh year was also a sabbatical year for the fields to rest and the slaves to be released. It's a bit like our parish counsellors now.

Every seventh year they are set free for a sabbatical. And on it goes in the Bible. The seventh day is a big deal. What's more God's rest in Genesis is more than simply stopping work, I think.

So on the next slide, we read from Genesis, I think. Yep. God saw all that he had made and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning the sixth day. And then in chapter two, by the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing.

[5 : 51] So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, set it apart because on it, he rested from all the work of creating, that he had done.

So he got made the seventh day, holy or special by resting on it. But the thing is, it's not as though God got tired. I mean, God doesn't get tired, does he?

He didn't need a break. Rather, he rested because he had finished his work of creating. And now it was time to enjoy it. You see, everything was now created.

Everything was very good or perfect. He'd achieved his goal. In other words, which was to create a people in his image, in right relationship with him, who would live together as God's people in God's place and enjoy God's blessings.

And now that he'd finished, now that he'd reached his goal, well, he rests in order to enjoy that goal. It's kind of like if we build or bake a cake.

[6 : 58] In fact, my daughter Katie baked some cupcakes yesterday. Once she had finished, she rested from her baking. And then we all enjoyed her cupcakes. In fact, Katie counted them and found that someone enjoyed one extra one without asking.

It wasn't me. But you see, the seventh day is not just about resting from creating. It's about resting in order to enjoy that creation. And for creation to enjoy God's blessings.

And what's more, this seventh day has no evening or morning. So as you can see on the slide there, the sick, no, go back. Sorry, Ash, back. Sorry. To Genesis two.

Genesis two. One and two. Yep. So the sixth day, the one that you're on. That's it. So at the top of the slide, you can see that at the end of the sixth day, there was evening and morning.

Do you see that there? But the seventh day, no evening and morning. It's as though this perfect seventh day where everything's completed, is not meant to end. Just continues on.

[8 : 04] And so I take it. The picture of God's rest at creation is one that continues where he enjoys his creation and vice versa. It's one where people like Adam and Eve are living together as God's people in God's place of the garden and enjoying God's blessings.

You see, I think God's rest is much bigger than just relaxation. It's rest with a capital R that includes relationship and enjoying his blessings in his place.

It's like a package deal, if you like. It's kind of like those package deals you see. You can go to the next slide now. I got these on the internet. Here's one to Fiji from Hoot Holidays, which is a nice looking picture there.

And it includes return flights transferred to the islands. And I think on the next slide, I've got some inclusions there. Five nights, all meals are included. And then under extras, you get a bottle of wine and a fruit basket, daily laundry, water sports, sunset canapes.

That's a drink, right? It's a canapé drink. What's it? Food. Whatever that is. It sounds lovely. Sunset. I clearly have never been to one of these.

[9 : 17] Adults get a Sulu, which is like the male dressing, and the kids get a free t-shirt. It's all included. It's a package deal, you see. It only costs \$5,000 per person, but we all ignore that.

You see, this package deal is much more than just relaxing in the sun. It includes lots of things. And God's rest at creation, capital R rest, is like that.

It's not just ceasing to create. It's also enjoying that creation, where people live in right relationship as God's people, together in God's place, and enjoy God's blessings of peace and safety and so on.

Of course, sin spoiled everything, and so Adam and Eve left God's place, and were no longer in a right relationship with God, if you remember. And so God now made a people for himself through Abraham, which led to Israel.

And now he gave Israel this Sabbath commandment to rest from work, not just because it's good for them, but in order to remember his capital R rest at creation, and to some extent even experience it.

[10 : 28] We see this by the other references to the Sabbath in the Old Testament. So for example, Israel was to rest on the Sabbath in order to enjoy God's blessing of refreshment. So on the next slide, we read from Exodus 23, six days to your work, but on the seventh, do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household, and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed, and them as well, of course.

Israel was to rest in order to be refreshed, enjoy the blessings of God's creation. But not just that, they were also to rest in order to remember God.

So on the next slide, from Exodus 31, he says, You see, they were to rest each Sabbath day, so that they would remember it's God who set them apart.

It wasn't just being refreshed. What's more, they were to be in right relationship with God, like at creation. And so this meant, had to sacrifice for sin.

So on the next slide, from Leviticus, I think, or Numbers, yeah, that's right, sorry, go back, Ash. From Numbers, we read, that on the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year without defect, a year old without defect, together with a drink offering, and a grain offering of two tenths of an ephah, of the finest flour mixed with olive oil.

[12 : 06] This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath. And a burnt offering, we're told in the Old Testament, was an offering for sin. It made atonement for the people's sins.

And they did this on the Sabbath. Because part of God's creation rest was people living, Adam and Eve, living in right relationship. And so the Israelites made sacrifices to be forgiven and live in a right relationship.

But it was also living together as God's people. And so on the next slide, from Leviticus 23, there are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly, gathering together.

They would assemble together as God's people. What's more, this rest was also associated with a place, a promised land, in fact. In fact, sometimes the land was even called the resting place.

So on the next slide, from Deuteronomy 12, we read, you, Moses speaking to Israel, you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the Lord your God is giving you.

[13 : 14] What's this place? Well, you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land. That's the resting place and inheritance. The Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. And he will give you rest as well from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety.

Do you see how all these references to the Sabbath day help them to remember God's goal at creation? A rest about living in right relationship together as God's people in God's land, God's place.

Enjoying God's blessings like safety and refreshment. And this is actually what makes sense of why Moses changes the reason for this Sabbath commandment when he repeats them in Deuteronomy.

Remember, the Israelites came to the promised land the first time. They disobeyed, so they wanted the desert for 40 years. Then they came back for round two. And at round two, God repeated the Ten Commandments.

I mean, this time, it's a different reason. So I think I've got a slide from Deuteronomy 5. It's a long one, but he starts off, Observe the Sabbath day, keep it holy as the Lord your God commanded you back in Exodus.

[14 : 29] Six days shall you labor and do all your work by the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God and on it goes. But then, the reason changes. It says, 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. Notice how the reason's different now? It's not creation anymore. It's redemption. But the thing is, yes, they're to rest.

Yes, they're to remember God's redemption of them. But notice at the end, it says, He saved you with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep his Sabbath. How does rescuing them from Egypt equal keeping the Sabbath? How does that work? I mean, I understand the Genesis one, God rested, so you rest.

It makes sense, doesn't it? It's quite clear. But how does I rescued you from Egypt, so you rest? How does that work? Well, it works because both the goal in creation and the goal in redemption are the same.

[15 : 46] God wants a people of his own who will live in his place and enjoy his blessings. That's why he was saving them from Egypt, remember, to bring them to the promised land to enjoy his blessings.

You see how all these references to the Sabbath show us that it's bigger than just relaxation. No, no, it's about enjoying God's blessings together as God's people in God's place.

And when Israel entered the land, they started to do that. They almost got back to Genesis 2 and God's goal at creation. But of course, sin spoiled everything again.

And so God sent Jesus to deal with sin and to give us his rest. Point two. On the next slide, we read from Colossians this. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ.

He forgave us all our sins by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside and nailed it to the cross.

[17 : 04] Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. You see, God gave his only son to die for us so that we who believe might have our sins forgiven.

And that means we're no longer under God's Old Testament law, which includes the Sabbath. In fact, it says there that the Sabbath was only ever a shadow or a picture.

The reality is found in Christ. For he is the real deal who delivers God's rest in full. It's like on the next slide, it's like this picture of a Snickers bar.

It looks pretty good, doesn't it? Especially if you like chocolate and the slogan there is Snickers really satisfies. But it's not the real thing, is it? It's just a picture. And when the real thing comes along, well, then it just makes the picture irrelevant, doesn't it?

[18 : 16] Because no one is looking at the picture anymore, are they? I took too big a bite at the earlier service and I was chewing it for the rest of the sermon.

But do you get the point? When the real deal comes along, it makes the picture, the shadow, irrelevant. And so the Sabbath, whether it's a Saturday or a Sunday, is now irrelevant.

Because Jesus has come and replaced the Sabbath. He is the Sabbath replacement. He is the real deal. He's the one that really satisfies. He's the one that gives God's rest.

How? Well, he was a sacrifice for our sins so that we might have a right relationship with God, remember. And by uniting us together as brothers and sisters in Christ, we are one people of God, which was another thing the Sabbath was supposed to do, bring people together.

together. And he gave us every spiritual blessing from God. And he secured for us a heavenly resting place, which is the place of God.

[19 : 27] You see, all these things that make up God's rest in creation, his goal for people, all those things are now found in Christ.

rest. So no longer do we need to have a seventh day rest instead of we are to have an everyday trust in Jesus. For Christ alone truly brings us God's rest now in part, being his people, spiritual blessings, and fully later with God's heavenly place.

And so unlike the other commandments, in fact, unlike all the other commandments that help us to either love God or love others, this one commandment is really helping us to get a bigger and better picture of Christ, who brings God's creation rest for all who trust in him.

So the first question for us this morning is, do you do that? Do you trust in Christ? For the Jews today, they are still seeking to keep the Sabbath command in order to earn their salvation, to the point where they come up with all sorts of inventions.

So in the Old Testament, one of the Sabbath laws included, I think it's on the next slide, you're not allowed to light any fires. So that was a law in the Old Testament. And so what they've done is, they've now said, well, you can't turn on any light switches on the Sabbath.

[20 : 52] It's true. And so they've come up with some inventions, like the next slide, you put that over your light switch with some batteries, put a timer, and it turns it on and off for you. That's quite clever, I thought.

But it's also a bit sad, isn't it? Whereas Jesus said, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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. rest. You see, Jesus gives rest now from coming up with crazy inventions to keep God's law and earn our salvation.

He gives us rest from all that, and he secures rest for our souls later in heaven. So have you come to Jesus? Do you trust in him? That's the first question. For us who do trust in Christ, and there's two things.

One, do we realize that God's capital R rest in Christ actually brings our little R rest in life? Let me explain.

[21 : 59] As we've seen, God's capital R rest in creation includes being one of God's people. It's a package deal, but that's one of the things. But that in turn gives us rest from all sorts of things like fear and anxiety and the like.

So, for example, when things happen to us, we do not need to be overly anxious or fearful because we know as one of God's people, God is with us.

He will never leave us nor forsake us. In fact, I was speaking with someone from our church a few weeks ago who was facing surgery and they said, look, I had a real peace about it before the surgery because I knew the fellow upstairs was watching over me.

You see, in Christ, he had God's capital R rest as one of God's people and that in turn led to, well, a kind of psychological rest from fear and anxiety.

You see how it works? As many of you know, we've lost three parishioners over the last couple of weeks and yet every one of them took comfort in the fact that they knew where they were going, that their eternal rest was secure.

[23 : 13] I'm not sure that anyone looks forward to dying. After all, we're wired to live, but they did not fear. In fact, I was visiting one before he passed and I read to him from Psalm 23 and that was that well-known line, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

And I remember saying to him, Errol, as you pass through the valley of death, don't fear for God is with you. Your future is secure. I don't know if he heard me, but he passed away peacefully three hours later.

See, this is what God's capital rest in Christ does for us. It gives us little rest from fear, anxiety. It even gives us security and self-confidence as one of God's people.

So I remember another time talking with a non-Christian and he was saying that in business he'd struggle for the last 20 years and it really took its toll.

He was on the verge of depression and giving up and he said, look, I've got a new business venture, it's looking really good and I'm looking forward to, over the next 20 years, getting all the things that I've missed out on in this life.

[24 : 36] And I kind of thought to myself, what happens if something happens to that business venture? I mean, through no fault of your own, but you've put all your hope in that. Whereas being one of God's people means our self-worth, our identity is not wrapped up in our job or career or whatever, it's wrapped up in being one of God's precious children.

And so it's secure, you see. You see how God's capital, our rest in Christ, brings us little rest from fear, anxiety and so on. But the second thing we need to realise is that we need to still persevere until we reach our heavenly rest.

Remember, Christ brings us God's rest now in part, but fully later. And so on the next slide, we read this from our second reading, from, no, we'll keep going to Hebrews chapter four.

And we read that, for if Joshua had given Israel rest when he took them into the promised land, God would not have spoken later about another rest, which he did through Psalm 95.

And so the author concludes, there remains then a Sabbath rest or a resting place for the people of God. For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his on the seventh day.

[26 : 02] And yet, tomorrow's Monday and those of us who've got a job go back to work. So we're not there yet, are we? And so he says there, on the last paragraph, let us therefore make every effort to enter that heavenly rest, so that no one will perish by following Israel's example of disobedience.

See, Joshua led Israel to the promised land, but even while they were in there, God spoke through David, Psalm 95, saying there's still rest to come.

And so, as I said, the author concludes, heavenly inheritance is our rest. And we need to make every effort to enter by continuing to cling to Christ.

When I was at Bible College, our year had 120 people in it. And I remember the lecturer saying that it was likely there would be at least one person who would give up being a Christian from our year.

And I thought at the time, no way! We're at Bible College, come on! A year later, before we'd finished, one of the girls studying left her husband and her children for another guy, and now no longer calls herself a Christian.

[27 : 13] Our church has well over 120 people in it, doesn't it? And while I know God will not let even one person here go, part of the way he does that is by telling us, make sure you make every effort to enter that heavenly rest.

Well, I'd like to finish and pray there, but it might be worth me saying something quickly about Sundays. What about a day off? What about Sunday? Well, in terms of days off, take one day, take two days, take as many as you can.

The Bible gives us freedom on this. Though wisdom tells us that our bodies need to have regular rest. We function better with rest. But the amount of rest is different for different people.

And it will be different at different times of the year, different stages of life. So I don't think we must have one day off and six days on. Rather, the Bible gives us freedom.

What about Eric Liddell, who took Sunday as his Sabbath? Well, again, the Bible even says those who have weak faith don't judge them. They can do that if they choose.

[28 : 24] And so we have quite a bit of freedom when it comes to how we rest, how long, which day, and the like. Provided we remember that the Sabbath is actually replaced by Christ.

For it's him and him alone that brings God's rest. Let's pray. Now, gracious Father, we do thank you for the Lord Jesus who came to earth and died on a cross for us so that we might have a right relationship with you.

We might become one of your people. We might be gathered together as your family and that we might have the certain hope of living in your heavenly rest. Father, we thank you that in Christ, the rest at creation is ours.

And so, Father, we pray that you'd help us to cling to Christ until we stand side by side on that last day, praising you. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.