8. Free to Rest (3Q 2021—Rest in Christ)

Biblical Material: Mark 2:1–12; 1 Kings 18; 1 Kings 19:1–8; Matt. 5:1–3; Isa. 53:4–6; 2 Kings 2:11; Ps. 27:1.

Quotes
- Love turns work into rest. *Teresa of Avila*
- We humans have lost the wisdom of genuinely resting and relaxing. We worry too much. We don’t allow our bodies to heal, and we don’t allow our minds and hearts to heal. *Thich Nhat Hanh*
- The god who exacts the last drop of blood from his Son so that his just anger, evoked by sin, may be appeased, is not the God revealed by and in Jesus Christ. And if he is not the God of Jesus, he does not exist. *Brennan Manning*
- Our identity rests in God’s relentless tenderness for us revealed in Jesus Christ. *Brennan Manning*
- The Bible nowhere enters into an argument to prove the person and being of God. It assumes His being and reveals His person and character. *Edward McKendree Bounds*

Questions
How does Jesus set us free to rest? What does this even mean? As we look at Jesus, what do we see and understand about God? Whether in the Old or the New Testament, what is God working towards? What is he trying to achieve? How can we explain this to those who ask, especially if they have a flawed perspective on the character of God?

Bible summary
Mark 2:1–12 is the story of Jesus healing the paralyzed man who was let down through the roof. 1 Kings 18 and 1 Kings 19:1–8 tell the story of Elijah and Ahab, and the showdown with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, along with Elijah running away from Jezebel. Matt. 5:1–3 is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, and the blessing of those who recognize their spiritual poverty. “He was the one who took up our weaknesses and loaded himself down with our pain—but we assumed he was being hit, beaten, and humiliated by God. But he was wounded because of our rebellious acts, he was crushed because of our guilt. He experienced the discipline that brings us peace, and his wounds heal us. All of us have wandered off, just like sheep. Each of us has gone our own way, and the Lord allowed all our guilt to fall on him.” Isa. 53:4–6 FBV. 2 Kings 2:11 described Elijah being taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. “The Lord is my light and my salvation! How could anyone scare me? The Lord is my life’s fortress! How could anyone terrify me?” Ps. 27:1 FBV.

Comment
The man in Mark 2 needed healing from his paralysis. King Ahab and the nation of Israel needed healing from the paganism of Jezebel. How do we link these two very different stories together? The answer is in the over-arching framework of the great controversy, where God seeks to heal the damage of sin and to restore his creation to its original perfection. In order to do this he has to answer the charges leveled against him by the Devil, and demonstrate he is not the kind of Person he has been accused of being. He has to reveal his true nature and character. He does this in different ways at different times, as demonstrated by the varied nature of the Biblical
material for this lesson study. At its center, however, is God in human form, the Jesus who came to show us the Father.

In this context the words quoted from Isaiah 53 are particularly important. The verses of Isaiah 53 provide the main theme for this week’s study. They are poetic, very moving, and persuasive. They reveal in uttermost clarity the mission of Jesus.

Yet even here the Devil has done his work. By perverting our understanding as to the method of God’s atonement, he has made it appear that God has an unrelenting demand for payment before he will forgive, and that Jesus was made to suffer so that God might be persuaded to offer salvation. Nothing could be farther from the truth. As the Bible makes so clear, Father, Son and Spirit are equally committed to our salvation, and there is no sense to the concept that one part of the Godhead needs to persuade or make provision for another part.

So when we read that “by his stripes we are healed,” we are not to read that in a pagan sense of appeasing the wrath of an offended deity; rather that sin has painful—even fatal—consequences that we need to see and understand. Though we may “consider him stricken by God,” this is our flawed perspective, and not the truth. Otherwise we have the picture of a tyrannical dictator who metes out vindictive punishment on an innocent in order to satisfy his own demands for vengeance. This is not our God, and so when we read “it was the Lord’s will for him to be crushed and to suffer,” (53:10 FBV), we must understand that statement in the same context as other Biblical assertions that assign responsibility to God for events that occur that he may not have caused. The classic example is God hardening Pharaoh’s heart, but there are many more in which God is credited for actions that he surely did not commit. In stressing the all-powerful nature of God, even Bible writers may be saying more than they intend about the will of God…

Nevertheless, the “suffering servant” described by Isaiah is surely a compelling image of God as he truly is. In looking for their Messiah, this passage seems to have been forgotten by the Jews of Jesus’ time. Because they believed they needed a powerful earthly leader who would vanquish the Roman occupiers, they glossed over those passages that did not fit their image of who Messiah should be. Is it possible we can do the same kind of thing—make our Messiah in our own image? In conclusion, how does Jesus set us free to rest, and what does this really mean? We need to ask ourselves such questions, and discover the answers God gives us.

Ellen White comments

Taking humanity upon Him, Christ came to be one with humanity, and at the same time to reveal our heavenly Father to sinful human beings. He who had been in the presence of the Father from the beginning, He who was the express image of the invisible God, was alone able to reveal the character of the Deity to mankind. {MH 422.2}

God saw that a clearer revelation than nature was needed to portray both His personality and His character. He sent His Son into the world to manifest, so far as could be endured by human sight, the nature and the attributes of the invisible God. . . . {RC 39.6}

Christ came to reveal God to the world as a God of love, full of mercy, tenderness, and compassion. The thick darkness with which Satan had endeavored to enshroud the throne of Deity was swept away by the world’s Redeemer, and the Father was again manifest to men as the light of life… Christ declares Himself to be sent into the world as a representative of the Father. In His nobility of character, in His mercy and tender pity, in His love and goodness, He stands before us as the embodiment of divine perfection, the image of the invisible God. {5T 738-9}