9. The Rhythms of Rest (3Q 2021—Rest in Christ)

Biblical Material: Genesis 1; Genesis 2:3; Exod. 20:8–11; Exod. 16:14–31; Deut. 5:12–15; Psalm 92, Isa. 58:13.

Quotes

- Sabbath, in the first instance, is not about worship. It is about work stoppage. It is about withdrawal from the anxiety system of Pharaoh, the refusal to let one’s life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being. Walter Brueggemann
- Every time we turn to Christ in faith it is like a moment of Sabbath, a little foretaste of eternal rest and glory. The gift of that moment lies not in what we do but what we receive. It is the holy time set aside to receive the greatest gift of God ever has to give, which is himself, in his own beloved Son. Phillip Cary
- At least one indication of unbelief is the tendency to measure life’s challenges against our own adequacy instead of God’s promises. To enter our Sabbath rest, we must put an end to self-reliance—trusting in our own abilities to overcome difficulties, rise above challenges, escape tragedies, or achieve personal greatness. Charles R. Swindoll
- Sabbath is a way of life (Heb 4:3; 9-11). It is simply “casting all your anxiety on Him,” to find that in actual fact “He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). It is using the keys to the Kingdom to receive the resources for abundant living and ministering. Dallas Willard
- The sabbaths of Eternity. One sabbath deep and wide. Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Questions

How do we understand the Sabbath in this context of rhythms of rest? How does true Sabbath-keeping really work? Why have we spent so much time focusing on what we don’t do rather than what we do? How can we best explain Sabbath to others? How do we avoid the charge of legalism? What kind of God do we represent?

Bible summary

Genesis 1 and 2 show the rhythm of creative work and rest in the beginning of this word. Exodus 10:8-11 is the Sabbath commandment with reference back to Creation. Exod. 16:14–31 records God’s provision of manna to feed the Israelites. Deut. 5:12–15 is the Sabbath commandment with reference back to freedom from slavery. Psalm 92 is entitled “A Song for the Sabbath Day.” Isa. 58:13 is a call to enjoy the Sabbath and honor it.

Comment

God sets about making the universe. As part of his vast creation he makes Planet Earth. Makes it the way he wants it to be. In perfect harmony, all nature in beautiful balance, a wonderful world that is very good. Part of this is the creation of the Sabbath, a time for rest and reflection that God initiated for us, since he surely did not need to rest because he was tired!

When people are introduced to what we believe as a church, one of the very first questions is about the Sabbath. Once the doctrinal details are established, once the eternal validity of the Sabbath is clear, what do they immediately ask? How do I keep Sabbath? What must I do? And most importantly: what mustn’t I do?
Sometimes I do feel for the scribes and Pharisees. You can imagine the situation in Israel. Again and again the religious leaders would be asked: “Is it all right to do such-and-such on the Sabbath? What about this? Is that OK on the Sabbath? What about this man’s behavior? Surely he shouldn’t be doing that on the Sabbath?” And so on.

The real problem there is that the religious leaders listened to the people, and answered them as specifically as they were asked. Instead of pointing out the principles on which activities are judged appropriate, they gave them precise and exacting details. So much so that the people ended up with hundreds and hundreds of regulations they were meant to observe. The result? All through the Sabbath they had to think whether they were breaking any of these many rules!

What a wrong concept! For what principle did they already have? Isaiah 58:13,14: “If you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord.” Sadly people are not satisfied with that. They want to know whether they should do this that or the other. Their view of the Lord of the Sabbath is of a God who delights in burdening them down with restrictive regulations.

God’s Sabbath is a delight, not burdensome; it is a time to be with Jesus. If we are worrying all the time about rules, we will not enter into the joy of true obedience. The Sabbath is important in what it tells us about God. For many of the Jews, the Sabbath said the wrong thing about God!

Jesus told them, “The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.” And what did they do to the Son of man? Executed him for breaking God’s laws, for Sabbath breaking, and for blasphemy! Here we see that through the rhythm of rest was maintained in the weekly cycle, God’s people failed to recognize him when he came to them. Meaning is more important than observance!

**Ellen White comments**

You should labor with care and observe periods of rest. By so doing you will retain your physical and mental vigor and render your labor much more efficient. Brother F, you are a nervous man and move much from impulse. Mental depression influences your labor very much. At times you feel a want of freedom and think it is because others are in darkness or wrong or that something is the matter, you can hardly tell what, and you make a drive somewhere and upon somebody which is liable to do great harm. If you would quiet yourself when in this restless, nervous condition and rest and calmly wait on God and inquire if the trouble is not in yourself, you would save wounding your own soul and wounding the precious cause of God.--1T 622. {PaM 69}

The Sabbath is a token between God and His people. It is a holy day, given by the Creator to us as a day upon which to rest, and reflect upon sacred things. God designed it to be observed through every age as a perpetual covenant. . . . {CTr 110.6}

The Jews accused Christ of trampling upon the Sabbath, when he was only seeking to restore it to its original character. The interpretations given to the law by the rabbis, all their minute and burdensome exactions, were turning away the Sabbath from its true object, and giving to the world a false conception of the divine law, and of the character of God. Their teachings virtually represented God as giving laws which it was impossible for the Jews, much less for any other people, to obey. Thus in their earthliness, separated from God in spirit while professedly serving him they were doing just the work that Satan desired them to do,—taking a course to impeach the character of God, and cause the people to view him as a tyrant; to think that the observance of the Sabbath, as God required it, made man hard-hearted, unsympathetic, and cruel. {GCB, March 5, 1895 par. 24}