

# SABBATH—CELEBRATE!

## INTRODUCTION

A couple of weeks ago, Tim talked about his experience of Sundays while growing up. I think mine are similar. I grew up on a farm, and that's where I live now.

My dad, who is 91, was a schoolteacher and a farmer. Formed by the Great Depression, he was a very hard worker Monday through Saturday, but when Sunday rolled around, things were different. Sunday was a day of rest and a day of church. We did no farm work on Sunday unless it was absolutely necessary—like feeding animals.

For example, if we had 100s bales of hay on the ground at the end of Saturday that we couldn't get to, those bales would remain on the ground until Monday. It didn't matter if there was rain in the forecast for Sunday night. The hay would stay put—untouched—until Monday, even if it got soaked.

I was not allowed to hunt or fish on Sundays—things I enjoyed. We never ever mowed the grass or did anything that was like normal work. On Sunday mornings, we went to church for Bible class and worship. Afterward, we would go home or to someone's home for a big lunch. Sunday afternoons were for visiting, resting, and relaxing. Then at 6 p.m., we would go back to church again.

For a long time, when I was a child, we would not eat out on Sundays and never went to any store because by doing so, we were encouraging others to work on Sundays, which my parents considered to be outside the will of God. That's what Blue Laws were about—way back in the day. Blue Laws—where stores were ordered closed on Sundays—were rooted in the biblical idea of Sabbath, a day of rest. That's mostly changed now, of course, but Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby, for example, still choose to stay closed on Sundays. Why? Because their owners, based on biblical teaching about Sabbath, believe in a day of rest.

While my parents never articulated it, their Sunday rest routine was their way of getting at the heart of Sabbath—which is really about trusting God. God will take care of us. God will take care of it. God will take care of things. We step back and stop. We rest. We get still. We know God is over it all. So we celebrate with worship.

Sunday was treated like the Bible Sabbath Day where all work stops and worship takes place, but according to the Bible, the Sabbath Day is the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week, Saturday. Sunday is the first day of the week. How did the Sabbath Day seemingly get switched to Sunday? It's because Christianity comes out of Judaism. A lot of people just carried over Sabbath ideas and concepts and made Sunday the new Sabbath. That's why Tim and I, and probably some of you, grew up the way we did. There's also a historical factor.

In 312 A.D., the Roman Emperor Constantine had a dramatic conversion to Christianity. A year later, he ends the persecution of Christians by making Christianity legal in the Empire. In 321, he declares that the concept of Sabbath rest be observed on Sunday. He said all work should cease, thus, providing the opportunity for worship. Sunday becomes a day of rest in the Empire. It looks like the old Sabbath and that tradition has been handed down for 100s of years.

There is a long complicated—sometimes confusing—history about Sabbath and Sunday. The important thing, as Tim said a couple of weeks ago, is to understand the concept of Sabbath is really about Jesus; that makes sense. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said He did not come to destroy the Law and Prophets, including the 10 Commandments, including the 4<sup>th</sup> one—Sabbath-keeping—but to fulfill them. True Sabbath and true rest—the things we crave—are found in Jesus. We should rejoice! We should celebrate! We should worship! Today we are going to explore Sabbath and celebration, and it's so encouraging!

## DISCUSSION

I saw this photo about teachers and learned a new word, *exhausterwhelmulated* (JPEG). It's the feeling of being exhausted, overwhelmed, and overstimulated all at once. Anyone feel that way? The God who made us understands us better than we understand ourselves, so, from the beginning, He tells us to take a Sabbath rest. This is the way to not be *exhausterwhelmulated*.

The word Sabbath is a churchy word that may cause you to want to check out of what I'm about to say. Please don't. I have words to share from God's Word that can change your life and mine. That churchy word, Sabbath, simply means "to cease, to end, to stop, to rest." It goes back to Creation.

God creates this world in 6 days, with humans as the crown of creation. Throughout Genesis 1, God looks at his daily creative work and says, "It's good." At the end of Genesis 1, after day 6, He looks at it all, and says, "It's *very* good."

*So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of creation.*

—Genesis 2:1-3 NLT

Much later on, God starts shaping his people to be different from the culture. He wants them to enjoy life! He gives them the Law of Moses, which is summed up by The 10 Commandments. These 10 are fairly familiar, but the 4<sup>th</sup> is often forgotten, and it's the one we really need to hear today.

*Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.*

—Exodus 20: 8-11 NLT

God tells His people to stop and rest once a week on the Sabbath Day, Saturday. In addition to weekly Sabbath rest, God gives 7 Feasts or festivals that incorporated Sabbath and Sabbath rest. The best place to see them is in Leviticus 23. For sake of time and boredom, we won't look at them now. Some of these feasts are somewhat familiar to us because Jesus participates in in them, and they are mentioned throughout the New Testament. Most of us have heard about Passover, Pentecost, and Day of Atonement.

These Feasts were designed for God's people to enjoy life! Have a party! Celebrate! It all leads to and ends in worship! It begins with rest—Sabbath rest. It's about stopping, getting still, and knowing that God is good, loves us, and takes care of us, even when we can't or don't. God wants us to enjoy life. He doesn't want us miserable. He's not a killjoy. He wants us to enjoy Him, which is the ultimate enjoyment in life. The key, believe it or not, is Sabbath-keeping.

Isaiah, after calling his people out for not worshiping from the heart, encourages them to give their lives and their hearts to God. "When you do, you'll enjoy it." For them, keeping Sabbath was the key.

*Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don't pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the Lord's holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don't follow your own desires or talk idly. Then the Lord will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the Lord, have spoken!*

—Isaiah 58:13,14 NLT

I don't know about you, but when I read this, I kinda see where Constantine and my parents were coming from—about taking a day to do nothing but rest, but are we really supposed to do this today?

It's a political season, so I am going to say, yes and no. The truth of it all is found in Jesus. Jesus fulfills the Old Covenant, and as He was doing so, He ticks off a lot of people, especially about Sabbath. He really deconstructs some false ideas that had sprung up around Sabbath observance. It had become too legalistic; it was not enjoyable. As Jesus is being loudly criticized for not “doing Sabbath right,” He says this, as a corrective, and as an insight for our practice of Sabbath:

*“The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!”*

—Mark 2:27,28 NLT

Did you catch that Jesus says Sabbath is about meeting our needs? What do you need? Paul says some interesting things about Sabbath that help clear up the confusion about how Sabbath keeping.

*Don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.*

—Colossians 2:16,17 NLT

Jesus is where true Sabbath is found, where true rest is realized. It's less about a day and more, much more, about a relationship. One day, Jesus and his people were so busy helping others they didn't even have time to eat. After a while, I imagine Jesus lovingly tells the crowd, “Sorry, we have to go now.” He then gathers His friends to Him, looks at them, and says what we all want to hear.

*“Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.”*

—Mark 6:31a NLT

Can you hear that invitation? It's more than just getting away. It's more than a vacation. It's more than a simple cessation of work and activity. Jesus is inviting them, and us, to true rest—a deep rest for our souls.

It seems to me that many people are really tired, and it goes beyond the kind of tiredness that sleep or vacations will fix. People are busy, hurried, stressed, and anxious about so many things—kids, conflicts, politics, the stressful search for true identity and significance in this life—so many things. There seems to be a weariness, an exhaustion, a deep fatigue physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. We need Sabbath rest!

I was listening to Craig Groeschel the other day on a podcast talking about rest. He says there is a kind of tiredness that can be fixed with sleep and vacations, but many people are beyond tired. We are weary and depleted. We feel drained, empty, and defeated. What we need is a kind of rest that leads to replenishment. We need physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual replenishment. Where can we find it?

I believe deep soul-satisfying replenishment comes from the God who rested from His work. Replenishment comes when we stop, get still—so still we can hear the invitation of Jesus.

*“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”*

—Matthew 11:28-30 MSG

Jesus takes away the pressure to find significance in my performance and your perception of me. He takes away the pressure to have it all, be it all, and to do it all. We can relax, rest, and find peace for our souls.

## CONCLUSION

How does all of this tie into Sunday? Sunday, while not the New Sabbath, is the Lord's Day, according to Revelation 1:10. It's His Day because it's the day of the Resurrection. Jesus the provider of true rest, Jesus the replenisher of our souls, walks out of His tomb on a Sunday morning.

Gathering on Sundays with other believers is God's desire for us. He wants us to connect with others as we worship Him. It's been going on for around 2,000 years. He wants us to take a break on Sundays, to rest, to remember His goodness, especially seen in Jesus. He has empowered us with His Holy Spirit, who was also given on a Sunday morning—Day of Pentecost. He is the giver of all good things—all the way from the breath in our lungs to all the things we enjoy in life.

We are not required to do all the things the Jews did or didn't do on the Sabbath Day, but God does ask us to rest and to remember His goodness. When we do, we celebrate, and I believe celebration extend out turns into worship. We gather to worship all that is God—Father, Son, and Spirit.

My personal practices extended beyond our worship assemblies. Probably influenced greatly by Constantine and by my upbringing, I treat Sundays differently. I do minimal physical work on Sundays. I have never mowed grass or done any farm work outside of feeding animals on a Sunday. I don't turn on the TV until Sunday afternoon. I'm not as strict as my parents, but I reflect the way I was raised.

I don't think it's legalistic. I don't bind it on anyone. It's just my way of resting, taking a break from the usual routine to remember that it is Lord's Day, to remember all the goodness of God that has resulted in my salvation that gives me peace, joy, and confidence in a world that would quickly destroy them all. This day sets the tone for the week where I strive to travel at the speed of love and pace of grace.

True Sabbath rest is a relationship with Jesus. He loves you as you are, but loves you too much to leave you there. He does not want you stressed, anxious, and worried. He doesn't want you weary and worn out. He wants to give you rest—true deep rest that will replenish your soul. How does He do that?

He invites us into His Story. You learn about it by reading the Gospels. You'll like Jesus. You'll love Jesus. He offers eternal life through belief in Him. He wants you to live and love as He lived and loved. He wants you to reenact His death, burial, and resurrection in the waters of baptism. He wants you to wake up daily and say, "Yes, I will follow you again today." That's true even if you have strayed away.

## COMMUNION

As we prepare to take communion, consider these words from Hebrews 4:

*There is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world.*

—Hebrews 4:9,10 NLT

The writer is talking about Heaven, I believe, but Heaven's rest is available now, on earth, through Jesus. We don't strive and stress. We can relax and rest. Jesus is inviting you to commune with Him this morning. Just stop for a few moments.

Rest. Remember. Replenish. Celebrate. Worship.