

Rest!

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[0 : 0 0] So, the Bible speaks a lot about rest. And last week, we looked at love, and it's a bit like that in the sense that we came to understand love biblically is slightly different maybe from what we presume love to be.

You know, it's got much more depth and width and change because it's God's love that we come to know and understand in Jesus. And the same is true of the word rest biblically.

There's a lot of nuance and difference about the importance of what that means. But there are lots of shadows in this world and things that you know and I know and experience that do point towards it.

Now, I'm just going to do a very brief taster on this today. And please listen to the word of God for you in your life and you know, do that thing.

What is God saying? What am I going to take away from this? What is the challenge for my life from God's living word? It's not a dead word. It's not a lecture. What we're doing is we're seeking to preach under the power of God's spirit into our lives.

[1 : 1 5] So, when we think of rest, what do we think of? Maybe different things. Maybe we think of just stopping, don't we? Stopping. We need a break. We need to be refreshed. You know what I mean?

A hot day, you're working outside, maybe building a shed or you're maybe sunbathing. No, sunbathing doesn't work. You're doing something and you just, you want to stop.

So you go inside and you get a cold drink and it's just a change of scene. It's great. You rest or maybe at home during this pandemic, you've been working at home all day and you want to get up from your desk and go for a walk because you need a change of scene and you need, it's as good as a rest.

Maybe you've got a list of tasks before going on vacation or holiday and when you take the last one, isn't that the best feeling ever? Well, you can just look forward to your holiday then.

So it's kind of stopping, taking a break. But I think also it's sometimes for us means contentment. If you really enjoy doing something, it's not a labor.

[2 : 1 9] It's quite relaxing. And it's not, you know, like people say that, my job's just my hobby. I love it so much. It's not like it's hard work. And it's almost like you're so content in that that you're rested because it's your passion.

And again, sometimes I think it means trusting in someone, where for example, you've been doing a task for a long time and eventually you feel confident to delegate it to someone else.

And you step back as you trust them and are confident in them and you can kind of rest and say, well, that job's going to be well done. I've passed it on. I don't need to fret and worry about it again.

So even as we live our lives, there's different aspects maybe to rest. And I want you to keep these in mind as we go through it. But let's go to the Bible and see what the Bible's saying about rest as it is revealed to us in an introductory way.

Well, we read, didn't we? In Genesis chapter 2 with the kids just before they went, that God rested from His creation and in chapter 4 here, verses 3 and 4, it says the same.

[3 : 33] For somewhere He has spoken of the seventh day, God rested on the seventh day from all His works. And really this is the foundation for our understanding of rest biblically.

It explains why it's in our DNA. It explains why we want to rest. It explains why we need a break and a holiday and a change. It's part of what it means to be image bearers of the living God because God, what He did was He set a model in place and He worked for the six days that we have in Genesis 1 and then He rested because His work was completed.

His work was finished. He stopped doing this creative work of this glorious and beautiful creation and making humanity in His image on the sixth day.

He finished doing that. And when He finished doing that, He said, it's beautiful. It's absolutely great. And I'm at home. You know, if that's hard day's work and you fight, you go home, you go home and you rest there.

And that's a bit like He was a home there, God, on that seventh day. And He rested with humanity and relationship with them and the beauty of the creation around Him that He had created.

[4 : 50] And He said, it's really good. And He blessed that day. And remember, remember that's an open-ended day. It doesn't say that on the seventh day there was evening and there was morning.

It's an open-ended day because it's a day that was intended to go on forever with God and with His people at home, enjoying the creation and the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit and His image bearing humanity in whom He was in relationship when He walked in the garden with.

It's a place of refreshment, of variety, of satisfaction, of productivity. And it was a peaceful, restful place. So if you're looking for the real, absolute, ultimate definition of rest, you find that in Genesis 1, Genesis 2 and in that picture of God in relationship with His people in the world that He created.

But that's not the world you live in and it's not the world I live in, is it? We live in a world that's full of questions and unfulfilled desires, restlessness, a looking for meaning, a looking for home, tasting something.

But it's... It can't be grasped or if it can be grasped, we lose it quickly for belonging, for identity, for love. But there's a separation that means we're not at rest and we're not at home and we're separated from God.

[6 : 23] And it's introduced that destruction and that ugliness and that death because God, because humanity chose to leave that rest, didn't they?

They chose to leave that place of relationship and they wanted to become God's themselves. So God gave them what they desired. He banished them from the place of rest, from the garden, from that place of fellowship with them as a judgment.

Now, if I just said, and everyone sinned, I think you would have switched off because there's a formulaic reality there sometimes for us. Ah, yeah, the minister's going to talk about sin now and then we'll talk about the cross or something.

But think deeply about the reality of this restlessness that is in our... This striving, this wandering, this lack of contentment, this tasting of the shadows of rest that we love.

We love these things, but they're fleeting and we're getting older and weaker and more vulnerable and more prone to disease and difficulty and ugliness and separation and death because this isn't the world of Genesis chapter 2 verse 1.

[7 : 44] How do we know the rest of God? Well, we listen, don't we? We listen to the voice of Jesus. Now, I'm broadening this out here from this chapter, chapter 4 and verses 7 and 8 says, Today, again, He points a certain day, today saying, through David, so long afterwards in the Word already quoted, today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.

And we're listening there to the voice of Jesus. There's a quote from an Old Testament Psalm there, Psalm 95, 7 and 8, I think we've got that, for He's our God.

This is the Old Testament that we were singing from. We are the people of His pasture and today, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts as at Meraba, as at the day of Massa in the wilderness.

It's looking back today when the people of God didn't believe, when they were trusting in themselves and rebelling against God, and He says that through David the King, long afterwards, the words are spoken of again here in Hebrews.

And that is because there's a greater, a greater than David, a greater King than David who is Jesus Christ. And David and the psalmist in the beauty of the unity of Scripture is pointing forward to the day of salvation, to the day of the Messiah, the day when the head of the serpent would be crushed on the cross at Calvary.

[9 : 19] And Jesus is the one who comes to deal with that restlessness in our soul and in our lives and our rebellion. Now, can I speak reverently here, and I'm not sure if this is theological, but it's as if God's rest was interrupted the moment Sin entered the world, and He had to work again to restore that rest by sending His Son.

What a work He came to accomplish the Father's will on the cross, so that He could say, and there's a voice that speaks.

And Jesus says, come unto me, all you are rest in Matthew 11, 20, all you are labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. He's thinking of that.

Genesis rest with the Father that He knew, and He says, I'll give you that. And He's saying that to us, and He's saying that as Christians. And He's saying that to you if you're not a Christian today.

He says, come unto me. He's on the cross also, and John 19, He says, it is finished. When Jesus received the sour wine, He said, it's finished.

[10 : 31] He was working again for our salvation, and on the cross it was done. It was almost like Genesis 2 again, where God rested on the seventh day. And now on the cross, Jesus says it's finished again, and there's a possibility of entering rest in relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

And then in Luke 23, He says to the thief on the cross, sorry, I got that verse wrong. I find no guilt in this man, that's true.

But the verse I'm going to put up was, today you will be with me in paradise. Today, isn't it interesting that Jesus uses that word again today, the word that we have in Hebrews, the word that we have in the Psalms, the word that goes back to that day of rest today?

He says, you'll be with me, because there's a sense in which today is so important. And that comes into what the writer says here. Today, he says, there's a point, a certain day, if you hear my voice, don't harden your hearts.

The cross deals with our restless souls and enables us to come into relationship with God. And as we listen to the voice of Jesus, there's a couple of things we do. The first is we're always to remember to enter His rest.

[11 : 51] Verse 11, let us therefore strive to enter that rest so that no one may fall by some sort of disobedience. Maybe today you've got to come to terms with the bigger picture of the Bible that looks at the Psalms, that looks at Genesis, that looks at Hebrews and sees one clear message and sees that you are part of the story.

And see that you need Christ's rest. And as Christians, we all need Christ's rest. But if you're not a Christian today, can I ask you to consider putting your trust in Jesus in His work?

And in His Word, verse 2 speaks about the importance of uniting hearing with faith in trusting our lives to Him. Something today about maybe the weariness and the heavy laden soul you might have.

Now you might not be 57 like me, you might not be getting older, you might not have a lot of life experience, you might be here as a student for the first time, young person. But I think you can still be weary and heavy laden.

You can still be battling. And you can still be restless and isolated and struggling with identity issues and with belonging and with a lifestyle that you question.

[13 : 18] It can be crushing. And it's so important to... We didn't read verses 12 and 13, but it speaks about the Word of God being living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword and it exposes what's hidden in our hearts.

Maybe that's the case today with you. He says, well, I have never met this guy before and yet he seems to be preaching into my condition and my need. And that's often how God works through the preaching of His Word.

And He says, come to me, all you are labor and are heavy laden. Enter His rest. That is that relationship with Him of trust. Begin to enjoy Him again as we were created to do.

It's great. And if you're young and you're not a Christian, this is the best time to ever commit your life to Jesus. Brilliant. So, enter His rest. And as Christians, we must remain in His rest as well.

Verse 9 says, therefore, remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. So in other words, as Christians, we're... Rest...

[14 : 20] I'm going to say three things as I close. Rest is an ongoing trust. That's the first thing for Christians. That means it's a continual state for us. We continue to rest in Jesus.

We continue to exercise faith. We don't return to unbelief. We battle because there's dark times. We trust when we don't understand because we're in a relationship.

And because we've come to say, God is good all the time, all the time. God is good. We're going to try it in a childish and in a careless way that doesn't walk... where He doesn't walk with us through the darkness.

But it's wrestling with the struggles and the battles that we face, recognizing that there's something better as we trust in Him. That's where we're free.

And we don't need to justify ourselves before God and others because Jesus has died in our place. It's great news.

[15 : 18] Your rest is ongoing trust. So you're a Christian here, you've been a Christian a long time. What do you take from this? You keep on trusting. Are you thinking of giving up? Keep on trusting.

When you don't understand when things are like a battle, keep on trusting. Find the truth constantly in the promises of God.

So His rest is ongoing trust. The second thing as Christians as we remain in His rest is rest in His presence. We're back to Genesis 2.

God created this world, a great place to be in His presence. So rest, what I'm saying is that rest is not an act of obedience. It's a relationship.

It's company. It's company with the God who made us. So God rested and then the intention was for Him and all His creation to be together in that glorious never-ending day.

[16 : 17] And the opposite of that is isolation and loneliness, spiritually and together. So we rest in His company and in the company of His people.

Can I say community, gospel community is so much part of that understanding of rest. So much part of it, it's enjoying His presence in our hearts and in the company of God's people both formally and informally.

The importance of being together, I will not underestimate because we are a body of people created to be together. Zoom is a poor substitute.

Online is a poor substitute. It's useful and it's been hugely significant over this 18 month. I'm not decrying that, but we are made for presence. We are made for being in physical company with one another and with God.

Not just formally in worship, but in our lives, we are made to pray together, to live together and to sense the divine in the company we have with one another.

[17 : 24] At home with God and with His people created to be at home with Him. And that's Sam that we sung, we abide. We keep on abiding with Him and with His people.

And I know it's so easy. It's easy to stay abiding with Christ, isn't it? It's perfect. And He's beautiful and He's God and He's sovereign and He's judge and He's Lord and all these things, but His people, that's much harder.

But yeah, He calls us to do that. The spiritual of company of God and of His people. They seem so dull. And God seems so dull.

But we seek to find our rest in His company. And maybe we need to relearn that again in our lives. I certainly do. Resting in Him, meditating.

You know, meditating today is the idea of emptying your head. But that's not scriptural. Scriptural is filling your head with the company and the presence and the promises of God as you meditate on Him.

[18 : 28] When you walk in the hills, when you're on the bus, when you're at home, the blessing of doing nothing in Him and His company.

So rest as presence as the idea of company. Also as the idea of contentment, isn't it? In the presence of God. You don't need to prove yourself to God.

You don't need to do things to make Him happy with you as Christians. You don't need to grasp at life because He said, you're my child.

When I see you, I see Jesus, my son. You're covered in His righteousness. You're accepted. Your sins have been paid for divinely in a trinity and salvation and you're free from the guilt of that.

There's a contentment. And as Christians, we quite often are chasing elusive wealth or we're coveting the alleged lifestyle of others.

[19 : 26] But our worth is not, isn't it? In what we own. It's not in the letters after our name. It's not in the money in their banks.

Great title of that great book which I know all about but I haven't read. Which is true of many of the books in the world. The ruthless elimination of hurry. It's such a great challenge for us as Christians.

We're living with a discontentment today. Grumbling and unhappy with our situation and our circumstances and with the God who we trust.

So, rest as presence in company and in contentment. And the last, the third thing here, the last thing here is rest as a rhythm of life.

This maybe comes more into our thinking or understanding. So, we enter as presence, if you're not a Christian, you enter into the presence of God through Christ by faith.

[20 : 23] As Christians, we remain in his rest, recognizing it's an ongoing thing. It's recognizing his presence that that is what rest is. But it's also recognizing rest as a rhythm of life.

Because it comes into the sixth commandment, doesn't it? You know, the Sabbath day commandment. And that commandment kind of links the two parts of the decalogue, the Ten Commandments, about loving God and loving your neighbor.

And it's right there in the middle. And it goes back to God in creation. And it also goes back to God in salvation as he rescued the people from Egypt and from slavery.

And that command is therefore pointing forward to the today that's spoken of in Hebrews, the day that God has made, the day when He said it's finished, the day when He said, Today you'll be with me in paradise.

Rest is what God made us to do in His presence. Sin makes us restless. So as we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we see that new expression of the covenant of the sixth commandment and its truth changed because the people moved from worshiping on the seventh day, the last day, to the first day of the week, the resurrection day, the day that spoke of the finished work of Jesus Christ, they called it the Lord's Day.

[21 : 56] Very little said about it really in the New Testament. But that they gathered together, and they gathered together to worship on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. The resurrection made a huge transformation in their understanding, and it recognized they'd entered into something different, something new.

But there's still a rhythm there that God put in place from creation. And the rhythm is that we as created in the image of God by His decree need physical rest.

It's six and one, isn't it? He says, you need a rhythm. You know, Sabbath just means rest. The Hebrew word Sabbath just means rest.

And there's a great principle there for us. We need it. We need a break every week. We need a change. We need days off. We need festivals. We need, what do we call them?

Sabbaticals. Times of rest, not just days, but years. The Old Testament made room for years of rest, jubilee years. We break the cycle because God made us that way.

[23 : 09] God made us to be not to be routine, but not relentless in that. He gave us time for physical rest. And maybe in one level, the pandemic has forced that on us.

Almost at 18 months of rest at one level. And I know we're all thinking differently as a result of it. And we need to analyze that and work out what's important and what we can learn from it.

And did we all not say halfway through, this, we'll never go back to the old way, we'll never be as busy as it was before. I've learned a lot of things. And how many of us are exactly where we were 18 months ago, just as busy, just as relentless, just as driven?

Because possibly we haven't taken and learned, but maybe we have. So physical rest, we just can't be on the go all the time. God doesn't give us the Holy Spirit and say, you're now Superman or superwoman.

We need physical rest. And we also, this rhythm of life reminds us, we need spiritual rest and refreshment.

[24 : 16] As Christians, we're in a rest all the time with Christ. So that's that trust element. But I think the rhythm requires that we follow the New Testament practice and that the Lord's Day is still a reflection of the sixth commandment, that church on a Sunday is good.

It's biblical and it's right. Church is community together, but it's not a production line. It's about resting in Jesus together and worshiping Him and reminding ourselves of what it's pointing forward to, to that eternal rest in this presence.

That's where the sacraments is when we eat and drink. We're thinking forward to this festival and celebration and beauty and fruitfulness of the new heavens and the new earth.

And so when you don't come to church to serve the church and to be supported by the church, or to support the church, rather.

That's not the, the institution, the church is not the end goal. The church is here to serve you and to support you and to refresh and revive and renew you in spiritual rest so that you can serve the Lord God in your life and we can serve the Lord God together.

[25 : 42] It's a place of celebration and of rest and refreshment for our calling. So one day in the week it's good to change gear as we rest in Jesus Christ.

It can be active, but also surely it must be for us enjoyable. We take up His burden which is light and easy to serve Him. It's a great day for hospitality, a great day for, I hope, physical rest as well as appropriate for opening our homes, opening our hearts, being together and worshiping.

I know I'm an old guy and I'm traditional, I'm out of touch, but I like the idea still of twice on a Sunday to be in God, to be in God's company in the way of being together in church.

I think that's a good rhythm. It's not, it's not biblically mandated, it's just a good idea to kind of book end the days in worship. It's not like we see each other all the time all week.

We don't see much of each other and it's a good thing to be together on the Lord's Day. I know there's pressures and difficulties I recognize that and everyone must make their own decisions. I think it's good for families.

[26 : 50] Great to teach our families that sometimes they'll be going out to kids' church, but sometimes they'll come in maybe at the 5.30 and they'll just all sit together as a family in church.

I don't care about the noise and everything else. And I know it's stressful for mums and dads. I'm not trying to give anyone a hard time. I just think it's a good rhythm. I think it's good to teach our children that rhythm and of prayer together, teaching our children about praying together, that spiritual rest, beautiful fellowship together.

And of course, as that rhythm of life speaks of physical and spiritual rest, it also speaks of anticipation. So always pointing forward to finally coming home.

What theologians call the already, but they're not yet. So there's already things that we know are right and good in Christ, but there's much, much more to look forward to.

Sunday is meant to be an anticipation of that. It's meant to be a little bit of heaven. Sometimes it's not, is it? I think sometimes it's, well, I'll not say, but it is meant to be that in fellowship and in love and in commitment together and in just prioritizing loving God and loving one another, the glorious renewal ahead.

[28 : 16] So that rest is a rhythm of life. Let's not be content with the shadows. Remember the whispers of rest that we enjoy, our only whispers pointing forward to something much, much better.

I mean, let's pray. Father God, help us to understand and to know rest in You and what it means. Help us to love You.

Help us not to be brow-beaten by one another. Help us not to be legalistic. Help us to love one another.

Help us to see the beauty of this rhythm and of presence in God, in rest, and in ongoing trust when maybe everything around us is telling us, don't bother with these things.

Don't bother with God and don't bother with truth. He's let you down. He's abandoned you. Just live for yourself. All these temptations, Lord, forgive the selfishness of my heart that is a battle and a struggle every day, and help us to find each of us tremendous rest in Jesus and what that means.

[29 : 29] Pray especially for maybe those who are here today who don't really understand the Gospel or who don't know You and who have not found that rest of communion and fellowship with You and trust.

May You open their eyes today. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.