

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we're going to talk about REST. We all need it. Few of us think we get enough of it. We all love it. Those with Mon-Fri jobs love Fridays because it means rest is coming soon! We love our vacations and can't wait for them. Rest. We look forward to retirement when we don't have to go into work anymore, and when we can rest. We all love our R & R... rest and relaxation.

But none of these things bring true rest, do they? How much do you really rest on the weekends? It's really just a different kind of work, isn't it? Vacations are nice and they are needed, but some leave you more tired when you get back than when you left. And retirement... well, ask most retirees how much they get to rest.

So, we like rest, and we like to talk about rest. Well... God likes rest too, and his Word that he gave us talks a lot about rest. You will be happy to know that God wants you to have real rest. It's something God wants us to have. In our Old Testament reading today we heard about a day of rest that God commanded... the Sabbath day. The Old Testament people of God were to work for 6 days... Sunday through Friday... and on the seventh day, Saturday, they were to rest. As I read the text again, keep in mind that the word Sabbath means rest.

**Deuteronomy 5:12-15** **“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. 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 manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.**

So when God says, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” He means, remember the day of rest by keeping it holy.” This special day... Saturday... was set apart from the rest. A day of holy rest, both spiritual and physical.

The first time we hear of a Sabbath day... a day of rest... in the Bible is actually at the creation of the world. It says in Genesis 2:2-3 *“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. {3} And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”* God rested, not because he was tired, but because he was finished creating. He ceased from his acts of creating on that seventh. There was nothing more to make, and nothing made that needed to be improved upon. Everything God had set his hand to was absolutely perfect, including the two people God had made.

Notice that God does not give a command to rest on the seventh day to Adam and Eve. It simply says God rested, or ceased from his creative activity. Adam and Eve were created in a perfect state of rest. Because there were perfect they were always at rest. They were at rest with God, at rest with each other, at rest with all creation. There was no trouble of any kind in their lives, no arguments, no disagreements, no nagging worries, no guilty conscience - there was only peace, only rest - rest that was to last forever. For Adam and Eve, every day was a Sabbath day... a rest day, holy and set apart for God.

But then everything changed. One day that rest went missing. One day they found themselves in

a state of disturbing unrest. A serpent came and convinced Eve to eat fruit from a tree, even though God had clearly forbidden it. She ate... and Adam watched idly by. In that one act of disobedience, they in essence declared war on God. The peace and rest they had enjoyed was suddenly and completely destroyed. The lack of peace and rest was immediately evident in their relationships. They hid from God because they saw him as their enemy. They blamed one another for the sin. It also became evident in their daily lives. Pain in child birth... weeds and hard work. Ultimately, death would come on them. They were no longer at rest. Life was no longer a vacation Sin spoiled it all.

But although sin changed us and it changed our world, man's rebellion did not change God. God lives for holy rest. He created us for holy rest. When we spoiled the rest he designed for us to enjoy, God will for us didn't change. And so he gave his people Israel the third commandment. **the seventh day is a Sabbath (a rest day) to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.**" A day dedicated to God for perfect, holy rest, both from work and from all sin. How well do you suppose the Israelites kept this commandment? It was difficult to even observe the part about physical rest! How about a day of being holy to God? They struggled. And how about you? How well do you keep this commandment? Now, God has not commanded us New Testament Christians to take a day off and rest from our labors. But we do take days of rest. But when you do rest, do you really have the true, body and soul *holy* rest that God designed for you to have. Or are you still have unrest in your soul, even on those days? We are far from the perfect rest God designed for us to have in paradise, aren't we?

So why did God give the Third Commandment if we cannot recreate the holy, perfect rest God wants us to have? He gave it for that very reason... so that we will see that we cannot make for ourselves that holy, perfect rest that God so wants us to have. God wants us to fully understand and feel how far we are from his perfection and holiness. He wants us to see our sin, and recognize our guilt. In fact, he wants us to know what the restlessness we feel now is just a foreshadowing of the restlessness a person deserves to experience in eternity for his sin and rebellion. Of course we lack rest when our sins have separated us from our God!

But what's interesting about the Third Command about keeping the Sabbath (rest) day holy, is that it is not only a command of God that we see we have not and cannot keep. But it is also a foreshadowing of God's love and mercy. The imperfect rest that was mandated on the Sabbath day was a shadow of the perfect rest that God would establish when the promised Messiah would come. The Sabbath day was a day to hear God's promises and love. Even when God reminded them of the commandment, he wanted them to remember it in connection with God's mercy: **"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."**

God gave you rest from you Egyptian oppressors, so observe the Sabbath rest... which foreshadowed a greater rest and deliverance from our spiritual oppressors which would be given when the promises Christ would come. These Old Testament people needed these reminders. They needed symbol after symbol to keep the coming Savior in front of their eyes. We have the privilege of looking back on his completed work of salvation... and yet we still forget sometimes. They were looking forward to what had not yet come, and needed the reminders. The Sabbath day was one such reminder... the day of mandatory physical rest which looked forward to the true spiritual rest the Messiah would bring.

We don't need that shadow... that symbol which was the Sabbath. In our second lesson we heard from Colossians 2 **"Do not let anyone judge you... with regard to a religious festival... or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found**

**in Christ.**” If someone approaches you from around the corner of a building, and the sun is at their back, you see their shadow before you see them. From that shadow, you can tell a few things about that person... but certainly no details. When they come around the corner, you stop looking at the shadow, for you see the reality.

So also, the Sabbath was a shadow of the true rest that is ours in Christ Jesus. The reality, though, is found in Christ Jesus. We have the reality, Christ. Why would we keep the shadow, the Sabbath? Jesus himself declared how he was the fulfillment of the Sabbath: **Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, I will give you rest.**” (Matthew 11:28.) And rest is what he truly does give. The sin which disturbs us. The conscience which troubles us and keeps us from sleeping at night. The terror that runs through our body when we know we messed up big and we know we’ve been caught. Are you weary? Are you burdened? Come to Jesus for true rest. For the perfect and holy Son of God... the one who own true rest... invites you. And he removes your burdens. He takes the load off. He takes the sin and guilt and all that disturbs and troubles us. He takes it all to the cross where all is paid for. His work is completely finished and he now rests. And that means you do too. You have real and eternal peace with God. Relax! You are at rest.

God gave rest to man in paradise in Eden. That rest was lost because of sin. That rest is restored in Christ Jesus. That rest is given to you and guaranteed and refreshed in the Bible. In God’s Word you find rest for you souls, for that is where you find Jesus. God’s rest is yours for the taking... in every sermon that’s preached from this pulpit. It’s offered in Communion. He offers you rest every time we gather here in Bible study. It’s offered when you read the Bible at home and have devotions.

Every night we all go to bed... eventually. Some of us sleep longer than others, but we all need that rest. Any of you who have pulled all nighters know what a lack of rest will do to your body. Every time we go to God’s Word we are getting much needed rest that is essential for our spiritual health. Don’t pull any all nighters from God’s Word. When you lack the rest he offers in Christ Jesus, you will suffer. God doesn’t want to see it. Enjoy the rest he gives.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” Are we breaking this commandment when we don’t cease from our labors on Saturday? Hardly. We keep this commandment and enjoy the blessings it brings when we come to Jesus through God’s Word and receive his promise of forgiveness, life and salvation. Right now we are keeping the Sabbath. Not because of the day of the week... but because God has once again granted us rest for our souls through his Word and promises. Rejoice! Relax. Rest. Enjoy this Sabbath. You are loved by God and forgiven through Christ. Amen.