

20.07.2019 SABBATH: A DAY OF FREEDOM

“And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath’” Mark 2:27

The Sabbath is a day of freedom. But if we are honest, we will accept that there have been times in our lives when we have not looked upon it as a Day of Freedom. Instead, we have looked upon it as a type of ‘work’ that we need to do to please God. Though it seems like an oxymoron, nevertheless there are Sabbath keepers who look upon this day of rest as ‘drudgery’ and ‘boredom’ – 24 hours to be got through doing nothing (except for going to church on Sabbath morning) and then waiting for sunset, so that they can start doing something they enjoy.

To have the above attitude to the Sabbath is to miss the whole point of it. The Sabbath is a day of celebration and a day to rejoice. To understand why, we must go back to the beginning – to Creation week. Then we must look at Redemption.

The Sabbath Rest: Creation

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Exodus 20:8-11

Rest before Sin. Adam and Eve were created on the 6th day. At the end of the 6th day, God looked upon His creation and declared it ‘very good’. On the 7th day, God rested (as a sign that He had completed a perfect creation). God invited Adam and Eve to rest with Him.

The 7th day was actually Adam and Eve’s FIRST day. So the first thing Adam and Eve did after they were created was to rest. This was a sign that they were resting in the finished perfect work of God, and that they could do nothing to add to the perfection of God’s work.

Note the timeline for God: God works and then rests.

Note the timeline for Man: Man first rests in the finished work of God and then goes forth rested and refreshed to work.

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. Genesis 2:1-3

Every Sabbath is a celebration of the fact that God is our Creator, that He knows each of us personally (Psalm 139). It is a celebration of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of mankind.

The Sabbath Rest: Salvation (Redemption and Restoration to Holiness)

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God... And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. Deuteronomy 5:12-15

After the entrance of sin, mankind lost its rest in God. The consequence of sin was labour and restlessness. Rest is closely allied to peace. It is when we have true peace, the peace of God, that we can have rest for spirit, mind and body. When we live in a relationship with God, we have rest (see Exodus 33:14). Separation from God leads to a loss of peace, and therefore, to a life of restlessness.

Psalm 38:3 is an example of the above. David has sinned and is here describing the heavy burden of his sin. The word 'rest' here also has the meaning of health and peace. Like David, a sinner who is aware of his guilt, loses peace, rest and health. *'There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any rest (health, peace) in my bones because of my sin.'*

God's solution to the problem of sin – Redemption and Restoration.

*"Come unto Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*Matthew 11:28

There remains therefore a rest (keeping of the Sabbath) to the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Hebrews 4:9, 10

The redemption that has been provided for mankind in Christ Jesus is a complete redemption. When He died on the Cross, He said, 'It is finished'. He had completed a perfect redemption. He rested in the tomb on the Sabbath following His work of redemption as a sign that He had finished a perfect work. He calls all mankind to remember and rest in the finished work of God for our redemption.

So, despite the Fall, God still calls mankind to rest. The rest Christ offers is rest for our souls. Christ is telling us that He has taken away the curse of sin – He calls us to accept Him as Saviour, and in doing so, find rest for our souls. Note the emphasis; He wants us to have rest for our souls, not just physical rest. This is the true Sabbath rest, resting in the finished work of God.

We are called to believe that God has completed a perfect redemption in His Son, Christ Jesus. And we are called to accept this perfect Gift in Christ Jesus.

Manna Enough (God our Provider)

If we look at the Creation story, we see that God provided perfectly for Adam and Eve. All they had to do was receive with thanksgiving and praise what God had prepared for them.

After sin entered the world, God still remains our provider. In the story of the provision of manna, 'the bread of angels', God reminds His people of His providence at Creation. Though He completed His creation in 6 days, He sustained the earth on the Sabbath day. He provides for us on the Sabbath day.

All the children of Israel had to do was to receive a double portion on the 6th day and enjoy God's provision on the seventh day.

And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: 'Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.' " Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less. So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need... And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. Exodus 16:15-18, 22

It was also a lesson in stewardship. God provides what we need; there is no need for greed. Both the rich and the poor have this temptation. The latter probably out of fear because of the remembrance of poverty. The rich do it often to make sure 'their barns are overflowing'. In the story of the manna God teaches us that we shall lack nothing if we put our trust in Him.

He had commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven, had rained down manna on them to eat, and given them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full. Psalm 78:23-25

And yet, the Psalmist records that despite all God's providence, the Israelites refused to believe in His providence.

Yes, they spoke against God: They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"

Therefore the Lord heard this and was furious...because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation.

Psalm 78:19, 21, 22

How is it with us? Do we praise God for His providence every Sabbath? Do we live in the confidence that He will provide our every need according to His riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19)? Or do we murmur and complain about our lack as the children of Israel did?

A Day of Equality

Because God is our Creator, He is our Father and every human being our brother and sister. This is Biblical basis of equality. The Sabbath affirms this.

One of the devastating consequences of the Fall was: Separation

- Man is separated from God.
- He is separated from himself – he is no longer at peace with himself.
- He is separated from other human beings.
- The husband- wife relationship is marred.
- The relationship between siblings is marred.
- Man and Nature are separated.

This separation results in inequality and discrimination.

Despite the inequalities that sin has brought, God commands that we never forget that all mankind is equal in the sight of God. He has placed this imperative in the Sabbath commandment... *'The seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle nor your stranger who is within your gates'* Exodus 20:10. Also Exodus 23:12, Leviticus 25:6, Deuteronomy 5:14.

The Sabbath commandment also reflects God's care for animal life; particularly animals that work for man. He commands that they too have a Sabbath rest.

A Day of Healing

And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." Mark 2:27, 28

While here on earth, Jesus confirmed that the Sabbath was made for man. It is a universal gift to mankind. It is not the Jews or the Seventh-day Adventists/Baptists' seventh day. It is God's seventh day and He has gifted it to man.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a sign of God's redemption – restoring to mankind holiness, health and true happiness (joy). Christ demonstrated that His mission, His work of *'preaching the gospel to the poor; healing the broken-hearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed (Luke 4:18)'* was perfectly compatible with true Sabbath-keeping. (Read the stories in Matt 12:9-13, Mark 2:23-26, Luke 13:10-17, John 5:1-7; 9:1-34).

We too can work as Christ did on the Sabbath – not for self-centred reasons, but in self-giving; doing good for others. We are called, like Christ, to break the bonds of Satan wherever we see men and women imprisoned by him.

Thus we too can fulfil the mission of Christ. But our first priority must be to spend time with Christ, before we go to help others on the Sabbath day.

'It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.' Matthew 12:12

'...ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?' Luke 13:16

For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." John 5:16, 17

"The demands upon God are even greater upon the Sabbath than upon other days. His people then leave their usual employment, and spend the time in meditation and worship. They ask more favours of Him on the Sabbath than upon other days. They demand His special attention. They crave His choicest blessings. God does not wait for the Sabbath to pass before He grants these requests. Heaven's work never ceases, and men should never rest from doing good. The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labour on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labour for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labour of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds. The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law. It honoured the Sabbath." *Desire of Ages: p 207*

The Sabbath of the Seventh Year

1. Rest for the Land: Leviticus 25:1-7 – the fields were to lie fallow.

In the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. Leviticus 25:4

2. Freedom for Servants: Exodus 21:1-11

If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. 21:2

3. Freedom from Outstanding Debts: Deuteronomy 15:1-11

"At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts.2 And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbour shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the Lord's release." 15:1, 2

Conclusion:

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, He has spoken to us through His Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son He created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and He sustains everything by the mighty power of His command. Hebrews 1:1-3

The Sabbath is a sign and celebration of God our Creator, our Provider, our Redeemer and our Righteousness. We are called to respond to Him in saving faith, to hear His voice and not harden our hearts (Hebrews 4:7). Every day of our lives we are called to worship Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath – the God who is our perfect Creator, Provider, Redeemer and Righteousness.

God intends that our relationship with Him will lead us to share our share our Sabbath blessings with others. To a restless world, we can point the way to the Saviour who provides rest for all who are weary and heavy laden. In a cruel world our kindness and compassion can reveal to mankind the kindness of God our Saviour.

May it never be said of us that we have departed from the freedom and rest that God has provided for us in His Son, Christ Jesus.

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. Hebrews 4:8-11

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

Additional Note: The Perils of Profaning the Sabbath

Refusing to Rest (the physical workaholic)

The Sabbath does not bring us just spiritual blessings. The physical blessing of pausing weekly from work and having time to spend privately with God, with family and with other believers brings us physical, mental and social blessings.

The Bible appears to be very particular about our taking time to rest and stopping our daily round of physical work (Exodus 16:23-29, Exodus 20:8-11, Amos 8:5). But this is for our benefit and it is to be shared with our entire household.

Another issue in physical abstinence from work is that it is a WITNESS to the world. You may keep the Sabbath in your heart and no-one may know about it. But if your colleagues see you not coming in to work on the Sabbath and going to God's house to worship Him on the Sabbath, you are witnessing to them that you worship a God who you believe is worthy of worship; a God who is your Creator, Redeemer and Friend.

Refusing God's Rest (the spiritual workaholic)

"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." Psalm 95:7

Some of the best Sabbath keepers in Israel never entered into God's rest. They rested according to the letter of the Sabbath commandment; no-one worked in their homes, not even the servants or the livestock. Regarding zeal for the Sabbath day, that it be kept holy, no one could fault them.

The writer of Hebrews, in chapters 3 and 4, tells us that they never really kept the Sabbath as God wanted them to keep it. God wanted them to keep it in the light of the gospel of Christ. He wanted them to enter into His rest, which was primarily a spiritual rest. But they were so busy working for their salvation that they refused to believe the good news of the Saviour who was to come and give them rest.

For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. Hebrews 4:2

"In order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ. When the command was given to Israel, "*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,*" the Lord said also to them, "*Ye shall be holy men unto Me.*" Exodus 20:8; 22:31. Only thus could the Sabbath distinguish Israel as the worshipers of God. As the Jews departed from God, and failed to make the righteousness of Christ their own by faith, the Sabbath lost its significance to them." *Desire of Ages: p 283*

How is it with you today? Are you resting joyfully in Christ, or wearily working out your own salvation? Have you chosen the Rest of God or have you refused it? Your decision has eternal consequences – eternal life or eternal death.

Let us therefore, be diligent to enter into God's rest. Hebrews 4:11
