

God's Promise Of Rest

Our Daily, Weekly, and Eternal Rest

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We are going to start today near the beginning of the Book, so you can start turning back to Genesis 2. I do not know if it is just me, but it seems with each week that passes almost, life becomes just a bit more difficult, and I cannot help but wonder, is this what God intended?

At the end of the Creation account, Adam and Eve are in a peaceful, beautiful, bountiful garden, and we read,

Genesis 1:31 Then God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

And then we read,

Genesis 2:3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Now soon after we see Adam and Eve's rebellion and sin and we are going to pick up God's judgment on Adam, which is to males in particular because of our leadership role, but really applies to all of mankind as a result of being cut off from contact with God, the result of sin. So we are going to pick up in Genesis 3, verse 17 and we will read through verse 19.

Genesis 3:17-19 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and

you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

Instead of being united in a productive labor in harmony with nature, we now have this incredible battle on our hands where we must use all of our strength—physical and mental—just to survive and put food on the table. God explains, all the days of your life now are going to be filled with labor, and we must work hard for food as we battle the earth and the many challenges of weather, weeds, insects, and disease. And the battle is not just for food, it is for our health as well because our food just is not as productive as it could have been. We are under a constant pressure to work long and hard, to sweat in our work, to sweat in our worry as we try to make ends meet for our families. And all this work, all this worry takes a toll on us day by day until one day we all die and return back to the dust that we have been battling all our life.

I know what you are thinking. That sure is a downer, Bill. Over to Ecclesiastes 2, verse 22. And unfortunately it does not get better quite yet. Here we will pick up a few scriptures from a wise guy.

Ecclesiastes 2:22-24 For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are sorrowful and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This is also vanity. Nothing is better for man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

What do we have for all this toil in this world, Solomon says. And hold on to this: he says, "all of our days are sorrowful, our work is burdensome, and we will find no rest, not even in the night." Under the sun, that is the key phrase here, here on earth, we find nothing but sorrow, burdensome work, and no rest. Are we struggling, brethren, to find rest, struggling to even sleep at night? Solomon in his wisdom could see the vanity of everything under the sun, everything without God in focus. No matter how hard we work, all material achievements are nothing but vanity. The fruit of physical labor

does not fulfill God's purpose for man, but it does bring a very valuable lesson each and every day. When we combine our hard work with a relationship with God, we can achieve growth in character.

Let us read now Ecclesiastes 3, verse 9 as things get just a little better here as we go on. We will read through verse 13.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.

And so we can start to see here the curse of that burdensome work and toil is, in the end, a gift and a blessing from God, but to find true satisfaction and fulfillment, we must look above the sun to the Almighty Creator God, who knows the beginning and the end, and who is working from the beginning to the end to create us in His image. We must live daily by faith, spending our time each day with Him, building that relationship with Him so that we could come to know Him and His way of life. We must trust Him through the many struggles and difficulties in this life. We will find no rest under the sun, but there is a promise of rest, here and now into the future.

Let us turn over to Exodus 31 now. Just before God gives Moses the two tablets written with His finger, He repeats one command. Do you know what it is?

Exodus 31:16-17 "Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."

On the seventh day, God rested and was refreshed. And we can tie this back to Genesis 2:2-3. Now immediately after, I find this interesting, in Exodus

32, we read of Israel's almost unimaginable sin of the Golden Calf. And God commands Moses, saying in verse 7, "Go, get down! For your people have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them." Moses then pleads for mercy to God and the Lord relents. Let us pick up now Moses' intercession for Israel in Exodus 33:13.

Exodus 33:13 "Now therefore, I pray [this is Moses], if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people."

As Moses humbly approaches and pleads on behalf of the sinful Israelites, God responds with His undeserved mercy in verse 14. Let us read this one.

Exodus 33:14 And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Literally, God says, "My face will go and I shall give you rest. I will bring you and all these people into the land where you will find rest." Just like us, every single one of them deserved to be dead, but because God is God, He would continue on through with His mercy and His purpose to bring them to the rest in the Land of Promise. God provides Moses and us a vision of His majesty, His power, His mercy, and His love. And we see a common expression here of rest used to denote the possession of the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 3:20 Until the Lord has given rest to your brethren as to you, and they also possess the land which the Lord your God has given them beyond the Jordan.

Joshua 1:13 "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, 'The Lord your God is giving you rest, is giving you this land.'"

Let us roll forward now on to Romans and let us see Paul building on this blessing and future glory of the firstfruits as we enter the rest in the Promised Land. We are going to read Romans 8:18 through 23. Some of my favorite scriptures.

Romans 8:18-23 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

So God in His abundant mercy designed mankind's curse of physical and mental struggles in this world to end in a blessing of rest, and eternal life that starts with His firstfruits. The creation actually groans and travails in pain together, waiting earnestly to be delivered from the bondage of sin and corruption in the manifestation of the sons of God. There is a reason why we feel so way down here on earth, brethren. We are travailing together in pain with the creation as a result of mankind's sin. We are waiting for our transformation into God beings, and we will never find rest here under the sun in the toil of hard work in this burdensome world.

Let us turn back to Matthew 11. And remember, while you are turning, Exodus 33 and the great promise from God, the awesome merciful promise of rest from God. That is when He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." This promise of rest is both a promise of relief from our daily physical struggles and a promise of the ultimate rest in the eternal life with God in His Kingdom.

In Matthew 11, verses 28 through 30 we have Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, repeating a message to us in back-to-back scriptures. Is He trying to get our attention? I think so. He is giving us a promise of how we can have rest in this chaotic, burdensome world.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to Me, all you who labor 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."

Let us first note the back-to-back promises in two scriptures, 28 and 29. "I will give you rest" and "you will find rest." Now, I want us to look before both of these promises. And what word do you see before both of these promises? You see that little word "and" which connects the promise to the action just before it. Jesus is telling us, here is how we can have that rest.

In verse 28, we have an invitation first from Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God. He says, Come to Me at the beginning of each day, throughout the day, at the end of the day. Come to Me and put your focus above the sun. He is telling us we will never find rest in this physical world, but when we come to Jesus with our thoughts and prayers continually, He will give us rest.

Again, in verse 29, Jesus promises, we will find rest for our souls if we do our parts. What is our part? To take Jesus' yoke on us and learn from Him how to develop a heart that is like God, a heart that is gentle and lowly, meek. There is a choice here. Jesus is telling us you have got two yokes. You have got to pick one or you are by default going to have the other. And He says, take *My* yoke so that you are not overcome from the heavy burdensome yoke of Satan and sin in this world. And when we take His yoke, we are actually hitched to Him and we have the opportunity side-by-side with Him throughout the day as He helps us pull the load.

When we come to Him and take His yoke, then and only then does He provide us rest. When we choose to take Jesus Christ's yoke each day, we gradually learn to overcome our carnal, evil heart that is so self-focused in this dog-eat-dog world. When we take Jesus Christ's yoke, we are keeping our focus above the sun, to trust in God and ask for His help to lead us to the rest from the burden and toils in this world.

As Paul admonishes in Philippians 4, when we bring our requests to God each day, His peace actually guards our hearts and our minds, he says. In Psalm 62, verses 1 and 8 (ESV), we read, "For God alone my soul waits in silence; from [H]im comes my salvation. . . . Trust in [H]im at all times; pour out your heart before [H]im; God is a refuge for us." And in Isaiah 30:15

(ESV), "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

Brethren, it is our self-focused hearts that become heavy and weighed down with the cares of this world. When our heart is meek and lowly like Jesus Christ, we are always trusting, seeking, and doing the will of God the Father. We are always focused above the sun. When our heart is like Jesus Christ, meek and lowly, our heart is not focused on our troubles. Our heart is focused on praying and seeking to serve others and to help them just as Jesus did good when He was here on earth.

In verse 30, Jesus explains that contrasted to the burdensome yoke of Satan and sin in this world, He says, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." His yoke is gracious, kind, merciful, not harsh, overbearing, and oppressive. His laws are not only reasonable and easy to obey, they are designed for our own good. His burden is light.

Hold your finger there (we are going to come back), but let us go over to I John 5:3. His burden is light, He tells us.

I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

God's commandments are not burdensome or heavy, brethren. They are all designed for our own good because they bring us peace and refuge in our relationship with God. They bring us peace in our relationships with each other. When we take the yoke of Jesus Christ and walk alongside Him each day, we are walking in His Spirit and thereby we are always obeying God's commandments.

Back to Matthew 11:30 now. We are going to read on here as we pick up where we left off and Jesus' promise of rest. And I know what you are thinking. Bill, the chapter ends with verse 30. But we must remember, when the Bible was written, there were no chapter breaks, so right after this promise of rest, we are going to read on here in Matthew 12, verses 1 through 8.

Matthew 12:1-8 At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck the heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would have not condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

In John Ritenbaugh's sermon, "The Fourth Commandment (Part Two)", he explains,

Jesus drew attention to one of the Sabbath's main purposes: It is a day of mercy. The overall lesson is that God does not intend His law to deprive, but to actually ensure life. In this case, they were blameless because a larger obligation overruled the letter of the law. In this circumstance, mercy is more important than a sacrificing a meal. Christ takes advantage of the situation to teach another connected lesson. He draws attention to the extent of the priest's Sabbath labors in the Temple. Their work actually doubled on the Sabbath because the number of sacrifices God required, yet they were guiltless. Why? They were involved in God's creative redemptive work. [John finishes this section.] From this we can understand that loving service is greater than ritual fulfillment.

Now in Mark's account, he had something important that Jesus said that is left out here in Matthew's account. You do not have to turn there, but in Mark 2:27, he adds, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." So, he tells us the Sabbath was made on account of man with the specific purpose of being a service to mankind. The Sabbath is the promised,

thoughtful gift of rest from the Creator to His created beings. The Sabbath's purpose goes far beyond just a physical rest from burdensome work. God ties the Sabbath to His spiritual creation which does not stop on the Sabbath but rather is put into a higher gear on the Sabbath with even more spiritual work and focus on the Sabbath than on the other days of the week. The Sabbath is intended to ensure both mankind's physical and spiritual well-being.

If we read on in Matthew 12:9, we would find one of seven different instances where Jesus actually heals on the Sabbath to teach a lesson. As the Pharisees asked if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus responds here.

Matthew 12:11-12 Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay a hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

If you want to look at the other six, they are: Mark 1:21 and 28, that is the man with the demon; Mark 1:29-30, that is where we see the healing of Peter's mother-in-law; John 5:1-18, the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda; John 9:1-16, the healing of the blind man; Luke 13:10-17, the healing of the crippled woman; and finally in Luke 14:1-6, we see the healing of the man with dropsy.

So from the beginning, God rested from physical work on the Sabbath, and so must we, brethren. But from the beginning, God's spiritual work on the Sabbath never ceases, and so must our spiritual work on the Sabbath never cease. It is lawful for the priests to serve in the Tabernacle and it is always lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

As a result of Adam and Eve's sins, we are in this daily battle. A daily battle that requires all of our physical and mental strength just to survive in this dog-eat-dog world. It is tiring. It is burdensome. But God in His mercy has promised to give us rest. His promise of both physical rest here on earth and ultimate spiritual rest in God's Kingdom requires our action of obedience in response to His calling. We must heed Christ's calling to come to Him and take His yoke, as we learn to develop a heart that is God-like, a heart that is like His, meek, lowly, merciful, a heart that is always focused above the sun

on God's will so that we can become like Him, God-focused, always obeying His commandments, including the commandment to properly keep the Sabbath holy.

And we must develop a heart that is like His, others focused, always seeking to do good, to produce good spiritual fruit from God's field, fruit that brings glory to God and shows that we are becoming transformed just like Him, to become others focused. When we are self-focused, we are focused on our woes, our worries, the toils of the never-ending trials that we have which are very severe. But as we turn our heart above the sun, we trust God. We know that He knows what is best for each and every one of us. He has a perfect plan that He is working out to the intricate most detail so that we can learn to become like Him and develop a heart that is meek and lowly and not self-focused.

Please turn with me to Hebrews 4 as we start to wind down here. So we have a promise from Jesus to give us rest from this burdensome world throughout the day as we come to Him and choose His yoke, putting all our burdens before Him in prayer. So this is an opportunity for rest each day. Prayer is an opportunity for us to have rest with God, peace with God. Trust and rest and peace all go hand-in-hand, and each day as we come to Him, come to Jesus, and choose His yoke and we go before Him in prayer, we put our burdens before Him, He gives us rest and relief from the anxieties and the struggles that are never-ending in this world.

And then He connects that daily rest with our weekly Sabbath, a gift from God that provides us 24 hours of rest from our physical work and trials. That is a gift in and of itself, but the Sabbath is not just a day to sleep in and not have to do any physical work. No, it is a weekly gift of 24 hours to focus solely on our sole purpose for living, which is to become like God. To be focused solely on our spiritual work, side-by-side with Jesus Christ, right? Working just like the priests who are in a higher gear on the Sabbath to do good works, to produce good fruit that brings glory to our great God.

We should be in a high gear on the Sabbath, not a slow, thoughtful, sleepy self, but an energized, excited spiritual being taking this time to study, pray, meditate, and focus on our incredible but undeserved future. Taking time to reflect and thank our great God for His mercy and sacrifice, our awesome

calling, His unmerited forgiveness, and His great work of transformation each day, creating us in His image so that He can bring us to that ultimate rest in our Promised Land. And each day we must focus on the Sabbath, on following Jesus Christ's example, seeking to find others that need help, seeking to do good for others so that we can produce an abundant crop of good works, good spiritual fruit that brings glory to God and brings peace—rest, peace—in our relationships with each other.

As we conclude here in Hebrews, we are reminded of both the future eternal rest for those who not just believe but who obey. We can tie back to Richard's message a few weeks ago. Belief does nothing without obedience, and we are reminded of the weekly blessing of rest and fellowship with God by keeping His Sabbath holy.

Hebrews 3:18-19 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:1-11 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 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. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said, "So I swore in My wrath, 'they shall not enter My rest,'" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this place, "They shall not enter My rest." Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. 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.

