

Finding Rest God's Way.

(Exodus 20: 8 - 11)

III. Stress - good news or bad news.

Recap on series thus far

1. THE SABBATH - A BUTTON HOLE PRINCIPLE

Exodus 20 : 8-11 *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁰ 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 animals, nor the alien within your gates.¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

Of the 10 commandments, this 4th commandment is the longest and probably one of the best known; and yet one of the most ignored! Did you know that of all the commandments, only 2 are given and also explained? "You shall not murder" is in the commandments but no explanation is given! "You shall not commit adultery" - no explanation! "You shall not covert" - no explanation. Only 2 are explained - "You shall not make an Idol for yourself..." and "You shall keep the Sabbath..." Only 2 - why? I don't know but I like to imagine that God know that these are the 2 that would dog us the most because the consequences of breaking them are not as clear as murder. He knew that these are the ones his children would most likely ignore, because having an idol or painting to help you pray seems so helpful; and working hard, even on the seventh day seems so spiritual, and so he explained them. But even then, of all the 10 commandments, the Sabbath commandment is the only one that God went even further and actually demonstrated - not because he needed to rest, but so that he could set a model for us; and so that at the very least, when

we couldn't find reason enough to rest we could say "Well Lord, you rested, so I'll rest too, that's reason enough for me." And yet sadly, the Sabbath command is the one most ignored . . .

But the Sabbath Commandment is what I call a button hole principle. What is a button hole principle?

Illustrate

The Sabbath is one of the few button hole principles in Life, and it is here that you begin to usher in peace into your life - keep the Sabbath.

Now why is the Sabbath so important; why did God establish the Sabbath? Allow me to share 4 reasons, 3 of which I first came across in the writings of an author called Max Lucado.

(i) The Sanity Of The Sabbath : Ex 20:8 - 11 - (rest) it's simply common sense - you cannot work for ever. If you try, you are surely heading for a breakdown. Just as in each hour we take a couple of minutes to rest our minds, and in each day we set aside and our body demands a couple of hours of sleep to refresh our body, mind and spirit; so too in each week God has ordained that we take a day off and rest totally and completely.

(ii) The Sanctity Of The Sabbath : (remember)

Ex 31:16 The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.

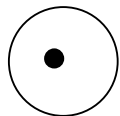
Ps 92 - A song. For the Sabbath day.

It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High,² to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night,³ to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.

- ⁴ For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands.
- ⁵ How great are your works, O LORD, how profound your thoughts!
- ⁶ The senseless man does not know, fools do not understand, ⁷ that though the wicked spring up like grass and all evildoers flourish, they will be forever destroyed.
- ⁸ But you, O LORD, are exalted forever.
- ⁹ For surely your enemies, O LORD, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered.
- ¹⁰ You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox; fine oils have been poured upon me.
- ¹¹ My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries; my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.
- ¹² The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; ¹³ planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.
- ¹⁴ They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, ¹⁵ proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

One of the central purposes of the Sabbath was to **remember and celebrate the Lord** our maker and defender - to worship God. Why worship on the Sabbath? Because worship is restful. How many times have you come for a service anxious, thinking about all your problems, and gone away after being in the presence of God reassured that all is OK, God has not forgotten you? Worship is restful because it helps us put our crazy world back in perspective.

Illustrate



Worship puts that centre - God - back in the middle, and the music then sounds right!

(iii) The Submission Of The Sabbath :

Ex 16:23 - 29 He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: `Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'"

²⁴ So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. ²⁵ "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. ²⁶ Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any."

²⁷ Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. ²⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? ²⁹ Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

What did going out to collect on the Sabbath day show? It showed lack of faith. It showed that they did not trust the Lord to look after them on the day of rest. Now this was silly because even on the other days it was God providing for them. To work at gathering on all the other days was a matter of obedience, but to work on the seventh at the same task was a matter of disobedience and lack of faith in God. I think the same is true for us today - working in the time that has been assigned for work or study is right, but when we eat into the Sabbath day - then it is a sign of lack of faith. Maybe we study or work because we fear for our job, or our income, or our deals; but in effect what we are saying is that we don't trust the Lord to look after things in our absence; he might mess up and we don't want to live with the consequences.

Another reason we may work on the Sabbath day is given us by Jesus in Lk 14:3 - 5 *Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?"⁴ But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.⁵ Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well*

on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?¹⁶ And they had nothing to say.

What Jesus was seeking to teach the Pharisees is that there are times, emergency situations where it is right to work on the Sabbath, eg - if my donkey were to fall into a pit on the Sabbath. Then I should do the compassionate thing and pull it out. The only thing is - if your donkey keeps falling into a pit on the Sabbath day - then something is very wrong!

(iv) The Sanctuary Of The Sabbath :

Deut 5:13 - 15; Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.

The Sabbath was the sanctuary where the alien, the manservant, the maidservant, the donkeys and the land who could not speak for themselves. It is the sanctuary where we too, our minds, our bodies, our hands, our feet, find refuge from this work of ours that never ends. But it's also the sanctuary where our computers, our TV's, our Stereos, our jembes, our land, our cars receive the rest that we do not give them otherwise. In case you think I'm going overboard here, turn with me to Lev 26: 33 - 35. God warned that if the Israelites did not obey his commands . . . *"I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins.³⁴ Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its*

sabbaths.³⁵ All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it."

And you thought your computer crashed because it was a poor model, maybe God was giving it it's due Sabbath since you never will. If God is so concerned that the Land should have it's Sabbath, how much more concerned is he for you & I?

2. THE SABBATH - A PROMISE OF BLESSING (Isa 58: 13,14)

If you want peace in your life, then honor Gods Sabbath. Listen to the promise that God gives for those that will honor his Sabbath - Isa 58 : 13,14 *"If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,¹⁴ then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

The Lord requires 2 things in this conditional promise :

1. Do not break the Sabbath
2. Have the right attitude towards it - one of joy, not frustration that you can't work; or even one of itching to get it over and done with - have an attitude of joy towards it.

Then . . . you will find your joy in the Lord!

. . . you will ride the heights of the land

. . . you will feast on the inheritance of Jacob.

The imagery here is one of blessing. I will bless you . . .

THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HAS SPOKEN! In other words *I GIVE MY SOLEMN VOW!* This is why I call the Sabbath a button hole principle.

3. THE SABBATH Vs THE LORD'S DAY

But you know, there is a real question as to whether the Sabbath was just for the old testament Israel, or whether it applies today - especially as the 7th day of the week is Saturday, not Sunday. Those are 2 questions in one, so let me deal with each one separately and briefly :

Firstly, why should all this still apply to us today? It's for the reasons stated earlier - God called his children to keep a sabbath because

- He himself rested on the 7th day and we too need to rest.
- It was to be a day to remember him.
- Resting shows our trust in him.
- It was to allow rest for those who serve us.

These reasons are still valid even today, and therefore we too should rest.

But is the Sabbath day Saturday or Sunday? In actual fact, the early church kept both days sacred - Saturday because it was the Jewish O.T. day, and Sunday because it was the day the Lord rose from the dead. Both days were therefore special. As the church moved from the Jewish world to the Gentile world, the Lord's Day became more and more prominent, so that in Acts 20:7, we read about the church on Troas *On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul also (preached) spoke to the people . . .*

And in I Cor 16:2, Paul urged people to set aside their contributions on . . . *the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.*

But on top of this, when Paul writes to the church in Colossae, he says **(Col 2:16 - 17)** *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

And in Rom 14:5 *"One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be*

fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord."

So that whether it is a Saturday or a Sunday is not the issue - *Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord."* In some Islamic countries in fact - Friday is the official day off, and many Christians take that as their Sabbath Day.

4. KEEPING THE SABBATH

Why is the Sabbath so difficult to keep? 3 reasons

- (i) We have a poor understanding of it - so we don't treasure it and call it a delight.
- (ii) We have a poor definition of it - we define Sabbath rest as doing something different from what our normal occupation is, and our definition gives us license to do anything we please as long as it is not office work. So we shop, we run errands, we go visit friends we haven't seen in months, we catch up on reading reports, we catch up on our baking and cooking and a hundred other things we didn't have time for, and we try and pretend we are resting.

Now many of these things are quote-unquote "Christian activities" and we think this therefore makes it all right, but we don't fool God. I have come to define Sabbath as *doing only those things that give me joy and rest my mind, heart and soul.* I'll take a walk, I'll read a novel, I'll listen to music, but no shopping, or homework and no housework or odd jobs around the house.

- (iii) The third reason why the Sabbath is so hard to honor is because we lack a plan.

Illustration - Sabbath meal, worship & rest.

Look up the following verses on the Sabbath . What promises or lessons are contained in each one?

Exodus 31:14 - 16;

Lev 25:1 - 12;

Num 15:32 - 36;

Neh 13:15 - 22;

Is 58:13 - 14;

Heb 4:9 - 11 encourages us to "make every effort" to experience God's rest. What effort, and in what areas will you need to make?

Along the line of Ex 20: 8 - 11, how can you organise your day so that you do not do any work at all (including household chores like preparing meals, etc). List down as many creative ways as possible as are workable in your situation.

"On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant . . ." How faithful have you been to honour this command and ensure that your house-help (and others who serve you) get a full Sabbath rest?

What "boundaries" could/should you establish as guidelines to help you remember to honor your "Sabbath rest"?

Technological gadgets (fax machines, cellular phones, telephones, computers, etc) can quickly crowd out any hope of rest because they bring the office to the home. How do we ensure they do not intrude on our Sabbath rest?

Many of the actual examples of Sabbath rest given in the Bible revolve around the farming community (eg. Lev 25: 2 - 4 `When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to the LORD. ³ For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops.") . Not many of us actually live in such farming communities, but how can we give our gadgets of income generation a Sabbath rest?