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License to Chill

Text: Exodus 20:8-11

This text is a call to remember the Sabbath day. That day is unique because of what does *not* happen on it. On the Sabbath work is suspended. Work is both a curse (Genesis 3:17-19) and a blessed privilege which can lead to benevolence and philanthropy (Ephesians 4:28).

We have six days in which to do our work.

**Fact**: Chick-fil-A does more business in six days than McDonald’s does in seven. Founder Truett Cathey wanted to close his restaurants on Sunday so that his workers would at least be free to attend worship. Cathey was both honoring the Sabbath and trying not to encourage a generation of workaholics.

Six days is plenty of time to work, if we manage our time well.

But...the seventh day is to be treated differently.

Note with me:

1. A great temptation

 The temptation is to work excessively. The disease is called workaholism and it’s a real thing.

**Illus.**

Barbara Killinger, Ph.D has defined a workaholic as:

 *a work-obsessed individual who gradually becomes emotionally crippled and addicted to power and control in a compulsive drive to gain approval and public recognition of success. These driven men and women live a Gerbil-wheel, adrenalin-pumping existence rushing from plan A to B, narrowly-fixated on some ambitious goal or accomplishment. Eventually, nothing or no one else really matters. (*[psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com))

On the web site [webmd.com](http://webmd.com), Neil Osterweil writes,

*On the seventh day, even God rested.*

*But for workaholics, the day of rest never comes. There is always one more email to read, one more phone call to take, one more critically important trip to the office that can't wait until Monday.*

In ministry, it might look a little different, but it is no less harmful. There is one more meeting to plan, one more phone call to make, one more lesson plan for Sunday School to write or to read. There is one more song to rehearse, one more Bible study outline, to prepare. Let us take our cue from our Creator. Even *God* rested (v. 11).

2. A great distinction

When I preached through the theme of holiness, I suggested that one way to think of *holy* is to substitute the word *different.* The temple in the first testament was the *holy* temple because it was different from all other buildings. The Bible is called *holy* because it is different from all other books. The people of God are called *holy* because we are to be different from other people (or at least ought to be). The Sabbath is a *holy* day because it is to be treated differently than we treat all other days. From sunset on Friday until an hour after sunset on Saturday (25 hours), no work is to be done. Work could be defined, simply, as any expenditure of energy. It is the reason strict Sabbath-observing Jewish people will not ride an elevator on the Sabbath. To push a button for your desired floor would constitute work. Some Jews use a work round so that they are not, technically, failing to honor the Sabbath. For instance, some Jews have their light set on a timer so that they can have lights on Shabbat, but they don’t have to actually turn the light on. This distinction is to be so clear and pervasive that no creature, human or otherwise, is to violate the Sabbath (v. 10). The word Shabbat derives from a Hebrew word which means “to cease, to end, to rest”. I won’t take on the controversy, here, about which days is the Sabbath. Should it be observed on Saturday (the seventh day of the week) or Sunday? Most Christians use the first day of the week, the day on which our Lord rose from the dead, as our Sabbath. Jesus’ resurrection on the first day of the week, made it the ultimate holy (different) day. That’s good enough for me. I have many friends in the seventh day movement who believe that Saturday is the only true Sabbath. No argument here. Whatever day we count as our Sabbath should be treated differently. For some that means no work. Others pursue no recreation or play on the Sabbath. Friday is my day off and I honor it as a Sabbath day. I do no work-related task. I don’t read theology on that day. I don’t work on my sermon. I don’t visit the sick. I don't return phone calls that have to do with my office. I have six other days on which to do that.

When we chill and observe a sabbath (which may not be Saturday or Sunday for you),

1. We reset our understanding of time. We suspend our concern for deadlines, appointments and schedules. Sabbath is not only a day of cessation of labor. It is a reset button for our week. One writer has said, “a man must enter the Sabbath as if all his work were done”. The Babylonian Talmud advises,” A man must not walk on the Sabbath with hurried gait”. The sabbath resets our calendars. In sabbath-keeping, we move from ordinary time to sacred time. The Apostle Paul, writing about time, comes very close to suggesting that every day is holy, and we don’t need a special day in any week.

Colossians 2:16-17

***16****.So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,* ***17****which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

Romans 14:5-6

*One-person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.* ***6****He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.*

Galatians 4:9-10

**9***But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?* ***10****You observe days and months and seasons and years.*

Sabbath-keeping is a weekly reset button for those of us who are bound to clocks and calendars.

In Deuteronomy 5:15, God puts rest in the context of remembrance. Israel was in bondage to Egypt. As they were delivered, set free, they were to take a moment (a day) to remember, reflect...and rest.

B. Sabbath-keeping is also a foretaste of that day in which we shall rest eternally, with our God. Old preachers in my youth used to describe heaven as a place “where every day will be Sunday and sabbath will have no end.”

When we honor the sabbath, we are, in a sense, rehearsing for the ultimate sabbath in the presence of our God. At its best, sabbath-keeping prepares us for heaven. Warning: Sabbath-keeping can turn into a very legalistic, rules-driven existence. Some of us remember being told we couldn’t ride our bikes on Sunday or go out and play in the park on Sunday or (God forbid) go to the movies on Sunday. Rather than a slavish obedience to a list of prohibitions that kick in every Saturday or Sunday, let us establish a rhythm of six days “on” and (at least) one sabbath day a week. It is the rhythm of creation. If heaven is one long, uninterrupted sabbath, it cannot be observed as a set of rules and a list of prohibitions. It must be something else. Perhaps the sabbath is to be understood as a day on which we take God the Creator more seriously. You say, “Pastor, I take God seriously every day”. Maybe, in preparation for heaven, “where every day will be Sunday and sabbath will have no end”, we should practice *resting in God.* Exodus 16:22-30 speaks of a “Sabbath to the Lord” (23,25) and a Sabbath that was given to the Israelites (29). On our Sabbath day, Sunday, we worship. That’s what we’ll do in heaven, for eternity. Sabbath-keeping is a form of worship and it is the acknowledgement of a gift from God. God has given us *rest*, as part of God’s creation rhythm. Some Christians would argue that the ten commandments are not for today. They would say that in Christ, we have been freed from a moral code of conduct that is not based on Jesus’ model. If that is true, then note that even *Jesus* rested. He did not slavishly observe the Sabbath, but our Lord did take time away, to hit the reset button on His life (Mark 1:35; 14:32ff).

Closing

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| Bradley challenged Josiah to an all-day wood chopping contest. Bradley worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. Josiah had a leisurely lunch and took several breaks during the day. At the end of the day, Bradley was surprised and annoyed to find that Josiah had chopped substantially more wood than he had. "I don't get it," Bradley said. "Every time I checked, you were taking a rest, yet you chopped more wood than I did." "But you didn't notice," said Josiah, the winning woodsman, "that I was sharpening my ax when I sat down to rest." |

Saints, when we honor the Sabbath, it is an opportunity to sharpen our axes, to be reset, restored, renewed. When we return to our work, after that one day that is different, we are sharper, more focused, more committed to the task...and more pleasant to be with.

Amen