Isaiah 58:13-14

An Astonishing Command

Sermon final

This morning we begin our new series, Rest for the Restless, and we come to an "Astonishing command" – that God commands that His people rest and find delight IN HIM. God commands Sabbath rest to His people…that is an astonishing command. Our world is filled with unrest! We are constantly going, on our phones, on the television, at work, driving to our next destination, anxious about the past, anxious about the future…we are saturated with busyness and duties and worries and by the time we lay our heads down to rest…our minds can't stop turning and we toss and turn in our beds struggling just to get to sleep and stay asleep.

When I read that God commands rest, all sorts of questions come to mind: **Why rest God?** Couldn't you just create us without the need to rest? I mean who needs it…we could get so much more done and our lives could be so much more effective. Have you ever thought, "If I just had another few hours in a day!" **Another question: God why are you so serious about this?** There is a punishment of death under the law for those who fail to remember and observe the Sabbath. Why such a strict penalty?! **Another question: What does Sabbath teach us about ourselves as Creatures and God as our Creator?** As we'll see, the observance of Sabbath has changed and progressed…so the main point that God is teaching to us is not about the *observance* of Sabbath, rather, God is teaching to us something about *Himself and our relationship with Him*. What is it God is teaching us? **Finally, How are we to observe Sabbath today?** Should we set apart a day of the week? How do we view Sabbath as New Covenant Christians who are no longer under the law? What does the Sabbath teach us about Jesus and "Christian rest"? These are some of the questions I want to ask and answer as we go through this series…and I'm hoping that through the answers and through exploring the Sabbath, you and I will walk away with a greater appreciation of "the God who commands that we rest".

There is an episode in a sitcom Everybody Loves Raymond where Ray goes to the doctor, he's been having some issues with his health related to anxiety, and the doctor asks him, "What is it that gives you rest?" to which Ray replies, "Golf". The doctor then prescribes golf to Ray. Ray knows that his wife hates the amount of time he spends golfing, so he asks the doctor, "Doc, can you write a prescription for me on this and sign it so that my wife will know I'm not lying to her?"

When we were kids our parents forced us to take a nap…now we WISH someone would tell us to take a nap! Sabbath, we'll see, is more than simply taking a nap…although Sabbath is intended to be refreshing and restoring.

This brings us to a question and our first point this morning…

Why must we rest?

Have you ever wondered why God created rest? God never rests…He creates rest. God gives rest, He doesn't rest. Therefore rest is something *created*. Jesus said, **"My Father is working until now, and I am working." (John 5:17).** God never rests…He is totally self-sufficient, His power and energy are endless, He does not run out of supply. He simply IS. He doesn't change, He doesn't need to be restored. **Psalm 121:3-4 – "He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. [4] Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."** When you are tucked away in bed at night…God is awake…and He "keeps you"…He is working and watching over you! That is a very comforting thought…the Shepherd watches over His flock by night. So rest is not something inherent to God…rest is something created by God and mandated for His creatures. **Gen. 2:1-3** is the key text from which rest comes from. If someone were to ask the question, "When did God CREATE rest? Here is when:

> **Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. [2] And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. [3] So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Gen. 2:1-3)**

When it says, "God rested" don't mistake this to mean GOD WENT TO SLEEP, or GOD WAS DEPLETED FROM ALL HIS HARD WORK. This passage isn't about GOD RESTING…this passage is about GOD CREATING REST as a *new part of existence and new type of time*. He set a day apart to "cease from working" and in doing so a ***"new type of time***" was created in God's order…there is now a time to work (6 days) and a time to rest (seventh day). Rest became a part of God's creation. Everything needs rest - the earth needs rest, the seasons rest, everything moves in a cycle of production and restoration, animals need rest, and humans, created in the image of God, need rest.

Why make us this way? Couldn't God have created us to never need rest! One third of our lives are spent doing nothing – what a profound waste of time. It's not a waste of time…rest is good for us and rest is for the glory of God. But there you are O proud man, lying in your bed, totally helpless, totally dependent, depleted of your strength. Even the manliest of men have to sleep like a little baby at night. Why rest God? There is a simple answer, but it's profound if you take the time to meditate on it – "You need to rest because you are NOT GOD!" God is infinite, and self-sustaining. You are finite and needy. A quality of being human is to be dependent and to run out…or be depleted. Do you think that's something important for us to know? You are NOT self-sustaining. You are a creature who is DEPENDENT upon your Creator for everything.

Sabbath teaches us – You are NOT God…you are needy, God is sufficient, you need rest, God provides rest.

AND YET…some of us function in life as though we never run out! A football player scores a touchdown and beats on his chest – "I'm the man!" Well later O man you will be cuddling your wittle piwwo like a wittle baby…because you ARE NOTHING WITHOUT THE GOD WHO NEVER SLEEPS…and if it weren't for Him holding together the universe and every atom in existence, including the ones in your body you would CEASE TO BE.

Some of us function as though spiritually we never run out. Some of us need to learn to REST, not only physically, but spiritually in the Lord. God is the sustainer, you need to be sustained. God is the provider, you are needy and need His provision. God is your strength, because you are weak. Now at this point in our study of Sabbath, Genesis 2 is about "physical" or "material" rest that God creates…but what we learn about "physical" rest here we'll see becomes what we learn about "spiritual" rest as Scripture unfolds. We physically and spiritually are TOTALLY reliant on God. Sabbath teaches you this – YOU ARE NOT GOD…and you are "physically" and "spiritually" reliant upon God.

Why is God so serious about rest?

Because we don't take the time to rest. Spiritually we often don't find rest IN GOD but in other things (we call them idols). God must command us to rest and even provided rules for His people Israel regarding how to rest. Thus, the Sabbath was born.

A bit of background on the Sabbath: **The word Sabbath means "day of rest".** The first mention of Sabbath is during the time of Israel in the wilderness before entering Canaan. It was in the wilderness that God taught His people about finding rest in Him. They had worked and worked and slaved under Pharaoh…and God rescued them and brought them into His rest with the hope of a future rest, the land of Canaan, which becomes very significant, we'll see, as a future LOCATION of rest for God's people.

How did they observe Sabbath: Every Friday evening at sundown they were to gather together for a time of feasting, rest, restoration, and God was at the center of the entire event. A time to feast, enjoy, rest, and celebrate the God who rescued them from Egypt. Think about that: One day a week was set apart to remind the people of Yahweh, the God who rescued them from their work and slavery in Egypt and was now bringing them into a land of rest. This day distinguished God's people from all other people as His Covenant children.

Sabbath was to be holy – a day set apart. A new type of time – work, work, work – rest. The 4th commandment given to Moses in the wilderness was to ***remember and observe*** the Sabbath and keep it as holy. There is a unique way the Jewish people *remember and observe* the Sabbath. 18 minutes before sundown, every observant Jew celebrates the start of the

Sabbath day by the woman of the home lighting two candles (remember and observe) and she covers her eyes so that she doesn't look at the light of the Sabbath candles until she has first recited the blessing: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the Sabbath candles." This is the way to remind them, "we are now entering into a special, distinct, holy time…a time where we are resting and a time where we are remembering the God who has redeemed us." This is the beginning of celebrating rest in God in Scripture…but it evolves from the day of rest prescribed in the wilderness, to a mark of God's Covenant with His people, to the land of Canaan as the place of rest, and ultimately it is fulfilled, as we'll see, in Jesus who is now our Sabbath rest.

God was serious about this! In **Exodus 31:14 we read – "You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death".** God is serious about you finding rest in Him. Keeping the Sabbath very quickly became associated with maintaining a righteous standing before God – the land and their victory/prosperity was intimately connected to Sabbath. In the law there are specific details that are all designed to command the people to rest in God. Also, the land itself that they entered into needed rest…again, all God's creation here on earth needs rest. The land rest (Lev. 25:1-7) would become an entire year of the land itself resting and God's people trusting and relying upon God to provide enough to meet their needs for the year. Sabbath then became not only about resting, but also about trusting, and relying upon God! But as the story goes, the people failed to observe and remember Sabbath. Some didn't observe it at all. Some observed it, while at the same time worshipping the false gods of Canaan.

Here is why God is so serious about Sabbath rest – Finding rest and restoration in anything or anyone other than God will NEVER WORK! That is not how you are made. You are not designed to find rest and restoration in anything or anyone else. Until you learn that, you will continue to be depleted and inch your way through a wasted life. God loves you, wants what is best for you…and knows you need rest and restoration…so He commands you to find it IN HIM.

Are you finding your rest in God? Or are you just going and going and living on without Him?

Now what I want to do with the remainder of our time is look at our passage. In each passage we look at in this series I want to point out something unique about Sabbath and rest…

This morning we see that in Sabbath, God is inviting us into something astonishing…

What is God inviting us into?

The people entered the land of rest, but they failed to let the land rest, furthermore, they failed to keep the Sabbath. They were observing the ritual of Sabbath, but they were

worshipping idols…they trying to find their rest and delight in other things. God sent Isaiah to the people:

> **If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; [14] then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." (Isaiah 58:13-14)**

They were observing…but it wasn't the right way, and they needed to turn back their foot from the Sabbath observance that they were keeping. They were observing, while worshipping idols. They were going through the motions. Many Christians do this – Sunday service, but the rest of the week they stiff arm God. God doesn't want religion, He wants relationship!

There are some important things we learn from this passage: First, when we are not finding rest in God we must repent. Isaiah says, "turn back your foot". This is a great way to describe repentance. Repentance is moving in one direction, then turning and moving the total opposite direction. Notice the "if"/ "then" structure of this passage. If the condition of repentance is met (v.13), then God promises certain positive results (v.14). They will flourish again, ***"ride on the heights of the earth",*** be fed with the "***heritage of Jacob***" (Jacob was Israel). Second, the people of Israel were treating God's appointed time of rest as unimportant/uneventful. They were "***talking idly***"…this means that God was no longer the subject of discussion on the Sabbath day. They were pursuing ***"their own pleasures***" – instead of pursuing God, they were filling the day with trivial matters. Their hunger for God had diminished…and they were finding satisfaction in other things.

But, finally, notice that God calls the people TO DELIGHT- ***"if…you call the Sabbath a delight" (v.13)… "then…you shall delight in the Lord" (v.14).*** This is an astonishing command. God is calling, commanding the people to DELIGHT! Who needs to be commanded enjoyment? We do! Because we don't find our enjoyment in God! The word for delight means "enjoyment, pleasure" it is even used of being "pampered and spoiled". In fact, Jeremiah uses the same word to rebuke Israel for being "pampered and spoiled" by selfish and sinful pleasures and the gods of Canaan. Here Isaiah says you are to find your enjoyment IN GOD. They were to spend a day…glutting themselves on God in fellowship with one another.

Be honest…do you think of time with God in this way – as a time of pursuing enjoyment? Do you think of spending time with God as entering a time of delight? Isaiah here is showing us that "***IF we delight***" in the appointed time with God… ***"THEN we will delight in***

God". God is calling us into delight. God wants us to find delight. But God wants for us to find delight IN HIM. But so often, sadly, we don't see time with God as a time of delight and rest. We see it as a time of duty and drudgery. God's Word tells us the EXACT OPPOSITE. God is not a killjoy…He wants to fill your life with meaning, and purpose, and the joy of the Holy Spirit, and delight in who He is as He takes you deeper with Him and reminds you of the God who redeemed you on the cross of Calvary. Consider some of the ways God is described in Scripture: God is described as **satisfying (Ps. 90;14**), as one who has pleasures forevermore…in His **presence (Ps. 16:11**), as **bread and water (Jn. 6:35**), as the **doorway into eternal life (Jn. 10**), as **loving, forgiving, merciful, gracious (Ex. 32-34**), as the one who gives **good gifts** to His children (**Jam. 1:17**), as the **provider and the one who gives peace and rest (Gen. 2:1-3**). Do you believe these descriptions about God?

God is a GIVER, and even when God takes something away it is ALWAYS to GIVE YOU SOMETHING MORE…AND THAT SOMETHING MORE IS ALMOST ALWAYS MORE OF HIM. Even the suffering and pain God may allow in our lives is intended to take us deeper with God…and those who have walked through the fire of suffering WITH GOD will tell you there is a delight in God that is to be found in the midst of suffering that you will not find apart from it. If God were to give you the greatest gift in all the universe what would He give to you? He would have to give you HIMSELF. That's exactly what God gives to you, but you have to receive the gift! God is so serious about this that He sent His Son to die on a cross to create a way into rest and eternal fellowship with Him! God wants you…and you need God.

So how then can we find delight and rest in God, when maybe (if we were to be honest) we do not see time with God as a delight? A few things that hopefully will be helpful:

1. **Make delight in God a daily pursuit** – "God, I am coming to you right now, but to be honest, I would rather watch television, I would rather do something else…but you say in Scripture that I am to find my delight ultimately in you. Here I am God…change my affections to find their delight in you." **There is a part of you, the Bible calls it "the flesh",** who does not want to delight in God. Who forgets all that God has done to redeem you and bless you. Who actually thinks that he/she can make it without God. If you want to know if this is true…ask yourself how you start your day? Do you begin totally dependent on God, or you do you roll out of bed and just get going – "I've got this!" You have no idea how you do NOT have this! So this is a pursuit, a fight against the flesh…you must make war with the part of you that says, "I don't HAVE to spend time with God." You not only have to…you get to, because time with God is a daily pursuit of delight and all you need to be restored, refreshed, and equipped to face all this wicked world will bring your way. THE FIGHT AGAINST THE FLESH IS A FIGHT FOR JOY, AND A FIGHT FOR GOD'S GLORY, BECAUSE GOD IS GLORIFIED WHEN WE FIND OUR

JOY IN HIM. IT IS A FIGHT FOR DELIGHT…IN GOD. So you open the VOICE OF GOD…His Word…and you wipe the sleep out of your eyes, and you sip your coffee…and you BEG GOD – God help me find my delight in you! When you read the word you can pray this glorious prayer found in **Psalm 119:18 – "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law."** God wants you to find delight and enjoyment and rest in fellowship with Him…even more than you do. Pursue God…go hard after Him. It might not be a delight right away, but that's only because you have trained yourself to find delight in lesser things. Keep pursuing and don't give up. Listen to this prayer in **Psalm 90:14 – "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."** This is a prayer – "God help me to find my satisfaction IN YOU." Don't miss it! You were created by God to find rest and delight IN HIM.

2. **Find delight in God *through* His gifts** – "Ok Brian, what about enjoying a piece of pizza, or a game with family, or watching a movie with my loved ones, or even sex with my spouse?" If I am to find my delight IN GOD, is it sinful or wrong to enjoy these things? No! ***IF (this is a big "if") it is a gift from God, it is to be enjoyed and He is to be glorified through it.*** God has given us glorious gifts…and He wants for us to enjoy them…but if your ***ultimate enjoyment terminates on the gift*** be careful, you could be in danger of turning the gift into an idol. James tells us - **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17).** All of God's gifts are meant to point us to the giver and to give thanks for His good gifts. When we enjoy God's gifts…be sure to give Him praise for the gifts and be thankful.
3. **Find your ultimate delight in Jesus** – As we'll see, Jesus is our Sabbath rest. The Sabbath finds its fulfillment IN HIM. Rest for God's people is no longer centered on a day of the week, but it is found IN A PERSON. Jesus wants to give you rest and Jesus wants to be your delight. Consider the way that Jesus describes Himself (no man could say this of himself0 in **John 6:35 - I am the bread of life** [who doesn't like bread? We just recently tried gluten free – Lorrie says, Jesus calls Himself bread that's good enough for me**]; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Notice the parallel between "coming" to Jesus and "believing" in Jesus (whoever comes…whoever believes). Notice also that the one who comes is the one who is hungry, and Jesus is likened to bread; the one who believes is thirsty and Jesus is likened then to water. To believe and come to Jesus, is to be hungry and thirsty for bread and water, and to find your soul's satisfaction fulfilled in Him.**

Church, this morning we come to an astonishing command…we are hungry and thirsty, and Jesus commands us to find our soul's satisfaction in Him. Therefore…come to Him, believe

upon Him this morning, and find Him to be your soul's delight. Don't settle for anything less! PRAY

Connection Group

1. What are some things you love to do that bring you rest? What are some things that bring you anxiety?
2. **Read Genesis 2:1-3** - God created rest. What does that teach us about God and about His creation?
3. Do you ever wish that you had more time in a day? What might you do with your time if God gave us 29 hours instead of 24?
4. What are some reasons that we must rest physically? What are some reasons that we must rest spiritually?
5. **Read Exodus 31:14** - Why is God so serious about rest? What happens to us if we do not rest in Him?
6. **Read Isaiah 58:13-14** – What are some observations you make in these verses?
7. Does it surprise you that God commands that we pursue delight, joy, and pleasure?
8. Read the following verses about God: **Ps. 90;14; Ps. 16:11; Ex. 34:6,7; Jam. 1:17; Jn. 10:9-11; Jn. 6:35**. What do we learn about God in these verses that ought to bring us joy and delight?
9. Pray for our hearts to find delight and joy IN GOD and not in other things.