Exodus 20:8-11

A Restless People

Sermon final

This morning we come to one of the key defining marks of the people of Israel – ***Israel was a people called to rest in God.*** Think of the privilege! Out of all the peoples of the earth, God chose Israel to be His people and gave them this sign that set them apart – Sabbath. The 4th commandment, which we just read, is the longest of all other commandments. God was serious about this command with the punishment ranging from exile in some cases, to the death penalty in other cases depending upon the severity of the infraction. Sadly, Israel failed to honor the Sabbath and they failed to find rest in God – they were "A Restless People". But the Sabbath, along with all other commandments, finds its TRUE fulfillment in Jesus. ***Here is my question this morning: What was the purpose of God giving the law knowing that His people would fail to keep it?***

Imagine a father establishing the following rule for his kids: Every evening, while you are doing your homework, you are to ***stop your homework*** and you are to have a time of rest with God. You will open your Bible, read two verses, write about what you read, and pray. This is non-negotiable, and if you fail to do this there will be consequences. ***Why set a standard he knows they will fail to keep? He knows they need to find rest in God, and he also knows they probably won't use this time of rest as he intends it for them.***

He shuts the door behind him and walks away. He comes back during the appointed time, walks in slowly and quietly, only to find his kids playing with toys. They realize they're caught. They have the, "the deer caught in the headlights", look. The father now is going to teach the kids a very important lesson…***listen carefully parents because this is how we can show our kids that they need Jesus:***

The father knows how desperately they need to find rest in Jesus. But the kids don't yet realize this. They have "transgressed" their father's command: to transgress is to "know the commandment" and "willingly break the commandment". The father wisely set the standard for several reasons: first, they need to learn that they can only find rest in God. Second, even more they need to learn that they are sinners who transgress. Finally, apart from knowing they are sinners they won't find the ***rest in Jesus*** that they truly need. The father isn't surprised they've broken His command. God wasn't surprised when the people of Israel failed to keep His command to rest!

THROUGH the <u>command</u> to rest the father points his children to TRUE rest in Jesus. (repeat)

The conversation might go something like this: "Kids, you have to understand something about yourself. You need to find rest…but in God. I know you don't understand this yet, but you will never truly find rest from toys, as refreshing as that may be…your little soul is longing to connect with God. God made you that way – remember the 4th commandment to honor the Sabbath? You also need to know that God has given you a daddy, that's me. God commands you to obey your daddy – remember the 5th commandment to honor your father and mother? Kids, you failed to honor your daddy when you willingly disobeyed my rule to set apart an hour and find rest in God! I love you so much, and I will never stop loving you…but you need to know that's called "transgression" - willingly disobeying a command that was given to you. Now we'll talk about a punishment for this in a moment…but FIRST I want to tell you that your transgression makes you guilty before God…and that's an even bigger problem than being guilty before daddy. The penalty before God is eternal separation in a place called hell (DON'T BE AFRAID TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT HELL PARENTS! IT'S THE WRATH OF GOD THAT POINTS OUR KIDS TO THE MERCY, GRACE, AND LOVE OF GOD!). But here is the good news….God sent His Son Jesus to pay the penalty that you deserve for your sin by dying on the cross and rising again in your place so that you no longer have to be separated from God – but you have to trust this and follow Him. If you are willing to trust and follow Jesus as your Lord, you will be forgiven…and only then will you truly know what TRUE rest looks like - Jesus will be your rest! Do you know why daddy spends time with Jesus every morning? Because I also need to find rest in Him. Because I also need His forgiveness. I also have broken God's commandments, and I have found that Jesus is a source of love and forgiveness and rest and mercy and grace…and I also have found that I long for Him – His Holy Spirit has produced this in me. Do you want to receive Jesus and find forgiveness and rest in Him the way that I have?

How can your kids know they need a Savior unless they first know they have broken God's law?

So they bow their little heads and they confess their sin to God and they thank God for forgiving them through Jesus who died on the cross for their transgressions. This is how we use the law to point our kids to Jesus. Sometimes we do this over and over and over again…but ***if you want your kids to put their faith in Jesus and be saved, they must know they're a sinner in need of a Savior!***

Through the command to rest, the father points His children to find TRUE rest in Jesus. Through the command to honor the Sabbath, the Father pointed Israel to find TRUE rest in Jesus. That is the ULTIMATE purpose of the Sabbath - God uses the law as a means to point us to faith in Jesus Christ. Now I could end the sermon right now…because that's really all I want to say, but I want to show you how the law worked in this way in the life of Israel.

Two points this morning: **1) Israel was commanded to rest, but failed to rest in God; 2) Jesus is our Sabbath rest**

1. **Israel was commanded to rest, but failed to rest**

There is something sinful about us that hears a commandment, and immediately wants to break it. If you're a parent, you discover this very quickly! (Bill Cosby – cookie jar) Israel in our passage is in their "infancy stage". They are children learning to receive bread and water…they are grumbling like little kids. God brings them to Sinai where they receive the 10 commandments from God to obey along with an entire civil and ceremonial law to guide them in the land they were journeying to.

What did Sabbath look like under the law:

The Sabbath was a "holy" day – look at **v.8 – "keep it holy"** or "set apart" or "special". Six days of work, then a day set apart to find rest in God. They were to stop their normal routine, and rest. Now when Jesus finally comes, we'll see that they took this so literally that they added onto this command several more commands to ensure that "nothing" was to be done. The focus isn't on "doing nothing", rather, it was to "stop their normal routines". They still had to feed their animals, cook food, leave their tents to go use the restroom. ***The law is broad enough that the people could make wise decisions as to how to keep it, and at times specific enough to guard them from breaking it***. ***The specifics of the commandment are not as important as the heart of obedience and faith.*** "stop what you're doing and find your rest in me!"

The Sabbath was given to find rest in God – look at the end of **v.10 – "to the Lord your God".** So Sabbath doesn't mean, "do nothing" or "take a long nap". It's active. It's stopping one thing to pursue something greater – rest in God. It was a day of leisure, for they stopped working, but it was more than leisure, it was a time to remember the God who rescued them from Egypt. God created us with a desire to work, and to produce, and to have purpose – ***Sabbath teaches us that we were not only created to work, but to worship!***

Sabbath was for the entire household including foreigners – **v.10 – "On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates."** God cares for every member of the home – not just the breadwinner. The kids, the servants, the livestock, and the foreigners are included. ***Rest in God is a family pursuit! Men, as leaders in your home you must establish a regular pattern of time with God that is "set apart" from all other times so that your home will be a dwelling of rest.***

It's interesting that God includes the foreigners. This would be to prevent Israel from taking their normal work and forcing the foreigners to do the work for them. That's how Egypt

treated them – they were redeemed from slavery. God saved them, not to place harsh conditions on others, but to bring others into God's rest as well. In this way, the people of Israel became a witness to the nations around them of the God who brings us into rest and craves fellowship with His people. ***When we as Christians set apart time with God and show others around us that we find our rest in God it attracts people to God.***

What about Sabbath and Sundays? It would be a mistake to view Sundays as the replacement for Sabbath…the early church didn't see it that way – ***rest in Jesus is a lifestyle, not a day.*** But certainly we have set apart Sundays as a day, not for sports, not for golf, not for sleeping in, not for other activities but, as a family, to pursue our rest in Jesus. We gather with God's people regularly with our families and we celebrate the God who has redeemed us, not from Egypt, but from our sins when He died and rose again. The church celebrated on Sundays not to replace Sabbath but because it was the LORD's day – the day when redemption was secured through the resurrection. We no longer observe the Sabbath because Jesus is our Sabbath, and every Sunday w***e are a witness to the world around us when we gather our households together!***

Sabbath was a celebration of redemption – In **Leviticus 23:3** we learn that the Sabbath was a "**holy convocation"** or "assembly". So the people were to gather together and ***celebrate***! It was a day to feast, a day to laugh together, a day to dance and worship. There is nothing somber or depressing about this…***this isn't library time…this is a feast and a dance, it's fun, it's celebratory!*** They would recite Torah. They would recount the Exodus when God redeemed them from slavery. They would look forward to the promises of God – the land of rest in Canaan and the promised seed to come, the Messiah who would bring them into their eternal rest.

All of the festivals of Israel have Sabbath embedded into them. Every single festival had a calendar numeric of "seven". The seventh day they were to rest, the seventh year they were to let the land rest (**Lev. 25:1-7)**, after seven, seven-year periods they were to celebrate the year of Jubilee which was a one year celebration – during the seventh month of the seventh seven year of Jubilee, they recited the entire law to the congregation! ***Rest and celebration is foundational in the mind of the Jew.***

> **You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut. 5:15)**

Where the focus at Sinai was to remember God's creation rest, on Mt. Nebo the focus is on "remembering" that God had redeemed them from slavery. They were about to enter into the land of rest, and they were set apart a day every week to remember what God had done for

them. ***The Jews were a celebratory people… how much more should we be a celebratory people when we gather to celebrate an even GREATER redemption in Jesus!!***

The people failed to rest - They failed to keep the commandment to rest given to them by their Father. The land was God's land, it was given to Abraham and his descendants **(Gen. 13:15**) but they were to steward it well. But for 490 years the people failed to let the land have it's seventh year Sabbath rest. So God expelled the people from the land into Babylon until the time of Persia when He regathered them back to the land. This was to punish Israel, but also to give to the land its due rest. They were exiled for 70 years (1 year for every sabbath year they failed to keep – 7X70 = 490) and Jeremiah and the prophets warned the people this would happen. Look at **Leviticus 26:33-34**:

> **And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste. [34] "Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. (Lev. 26:33-34)**

God is SERIOUS about rest! When Jesus came the people had established commands on top of God's commands. They were going to do everything they could to prevent from breaking the Sabbath. The rabbi's interpreted and taught how to keep Sabbath and a common way of describing a certain rabbi's particular interpretation was to call it a "yoke" (halakhah). I'll come back to that in a moment. You can understand why they were so serious about Jesus breaking their yoke, their interpretation and rules for Sabbath – ***Jesus, the rabbi, had His own yoke. Jesus didn't follow their yoke.***

People love to golf – I enjoy golf as well but I rarely go for lack of time and money. But I really do enjoy going because it's fun. For some people it doesn't seem very fun. They've forgotten that golf is supposed to be fun. They take it so seriously…they have built so many adjustments to the swing, their stance, the shift of their weight, the way they keep their eyes down….and when they miss an easy putt you would think the world was over. They have forgotten the true purpose of the game – to have fun! "The game is for the golfer, not the golfer for the game!"

By the time Jesus came Israel was so serious about keeping the law that they lost sight of the true intention of the law! So Jesus trampled ALL OVER their rules…kind of like me and my son…we just hit the golf ball, if it goes far that's all we care about. We take the ball and toss it onto the green…the golf pharisees are pulling out their hairs perhaps – "that's not how the game is played!" So Jesus healed on the Sabbath, allowed His disciples to reap grain on the Sabbath and it drove the religious leaders NUTS…to which Jesus said, "**Sabbath was for man, not man for the Sabbath". (Mk. 2:27).**

2. Jesus is our Sabbath rest

Back to our initial question*: Why did God give to the people of Israel a command that He knew they would disobey? Through the law of Sabbath, the Father points His people to their Sabbath rest in Jesus.* How Jesus fulfills the law is a MASSIVE topic and Paul, the former Pharisee is particularly interested in this topic – especially in Romans and Galatians…to summarize a few things:

First, The law gives us God's perfect standard and it is intended to keep us safe - The problem is not the law. Paul wrote to the Romans - **"the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." (Rom. 7:12).** God's children HAVE TO REST – this is a GOOD command! We aren't wired to go without rest in God. However, because of sin within us, we find rest in other things. The problem is not the law, the problem is sin within us.

Second, The law "arouses" sin within us - Paul says in **Romans 7:5** that our sinful passions are **"aroused by the law".** When we hear "Rest!"… we say, "No!"… and like kids playing with our toys, we seek to find rest in things that will not truly satisfy. In this way, the law points to our transgression. Paul says in **Galatians 3:19** – "**the law was added for the sake of transgression".** The loving Father added the law to the promise of Jesus given to Abraham until Jesus came…knowing that Israel will break the law, so that through their transgression, sin was exposed, and their need for a Jesus as Savior was revealed. The Jewish people of Jesus' day, for the most part, entirely missed this. Paul came to understand it. This is why Paul could say that the **"law brings about wrath" (Rom. 4:15**) and puts us "**under a curse" (Gal. 3:10) but also the law is "holy, just, and good" (Rom. 7:12).** Again, the problem isn't the law it's our own sinfulness that is aroused by the law. **How else could God reveal to Israel their need for salvation?**

Finally, The law finds its fulfillment in Jesus – the ultimate purpose of the law is to point us to faith in Jesus. Paul likens the law in Galatians to a "temporary guardian" – πεδαγογος (Pedagogos). In Greco-Roman culture, every child would go through a process of training where a πεδαγογος would be a temporary guardian. After a certain age, the guardian was taken away. The law is a temporary guardian, and its ultimate purpose was to point Israel to the seed, the seed promised to Abraham. Listen to Galatians 3:24:

> **So then, the law was our guardian [πεδαγογος] until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. (Gal. 3:24)**

The Sabbath was a "temporary guardian" until Jesus came. The law of the Sabbath points us to the reality that:

Rest is found ultimately in Jesus

The people in Jesus' day lost sight of the heart of Sabbath. You and I don't have to! The rabbi's had their yoke, and Jesus has His yoke. And so Jesus said these words:

> **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you** [by the way, Matthew purposefully tells two stories of Jesus on the Sabbath right after saying this – we'll talk about this next week], **and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Mt. 11:28-30)**

Jesus is our Sabbath rest and Jesus is the fulfillment of Torah, the law. We have transgressed God's law, but Jesus obeyed the law perfectly in His life. He died in our place on the cross paying the penalty we deserve. Through faith in Him we receive forgiveness, grace, mercy, and true rest.

Have you received the rest that God offers to you in Jesus?

<u>Communion:</u> We are going to celebrate communion now. On the Sabbath the Jews celebrated their redemption from Egypt. When we take the bread and the cup we celebrate our redemption from sin that is in Jesus our Sabbath rest.

<u>The bread</u> represents His perfect life of righteousness given to us and His body that was broken for you and me on the cross.

<u>The cup</u> represents the wrath of God poured out upon Jesus and the blood that He shed to pay the penalty we deserved.

Communion is for those who have put their faith in Jesus.

Maybe you've been listening and you realize that like Israel, and like me…you too have disobeyed God. Maybe you realize that you don't have rest and you know you need it. Today can be the day that you repent from your sin, and choose to follow (take Jesus' yoke upon you) Jesus as your Savior and as your Lord. You simply need to pray and confess your sin to Him, receive His provision by faith, and turn away from your sinful life and choose to follow Him. He gave His life for you…and now you can choose to give your life to Him.