

Walking with Jesus in Rest

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 July 2020

Preacher: Neil MacMillan

[0 : 00] Mark 2 verse 23. So Mark chapter 2 is where we're going.

We read earlier about Sabbath. I've got some book recommendations again. I'll be talking about these books as we go through.

This is called The Common Rule by Justin Early. Disruptive Practice by Alan Noble. Keep plugging these books here. They've both got really helpful sections in them on the idea of Sabbath.

And today I want to talk about why Sabbath is such a great thing for us because it helps us walk with God. As we learn to rest, rest offers us the opportunity to walk with God.

So I would say that, you know, I used to be a man and a missionary. That would be a really good way of talking about me. That for 20 years of my life as an adult, I was working as hard as I possibly could to rescue myself and to rescue as many other people as I could.

[2 : 01] So I worked very, very long hours. I took little time off. And one day I ended up in a hospital with chest pains.

And I was lying there getting heart traces done. And I was 40 years old. And there was nothing wrong with me apart from the fact that I was absolutely knackered.

And I burnt myself out. For the next six months, I went home and I probably slept an average of about 18 hours a day or 16 hours a day for six months.

And my body just took that time to heal and to correct itself. And what that experience taught me, this is, there's really hard work pretending to be God.

It's really hard work pretending that I can save myself and save the people around me. And the whole idea of Sabbath and of rest is this, that we don't have to pretend.

[3 : 04] That we don't have to act like we are God in our own world. But actually we can trust and rest in the true God to save us and to bless and care for the people around us.

Overwork is an epidemic in our culture. In 2018, something like 15.4 million days were lost to work-related stress.

Over half a million people reported that work-related stress was making them feel physically ill. So Sabbath helps us to see the world differently.

That busyness is not blessedness. And we want church to be a place that really encourages you to rest.

A place where we don't add to your burdens, but where you can come and be blessed and refreshed. And as God invites you into the habit of observing or keeping the Sabbath, what he's doing is he's inviting you to join a rebellion.

[4 : 18] A rebellion against a world that says that my worth and your worth are measured by how hard you work, by how busy you are, and how much you spend.

How many of our conversations do we start with people saying, how are you? And our default response is, oh yeah, really busy. Certainly that's the way it was up until pandemic.

Pandemic might have changed how we think about busyness and how we use our time and the value of rest. But resting is a rebellion against a world and a philosophy that says, earn your own way, earn your own salvation.

God said, here's just one day out of seven where you don't need to work, where you don't need to spend money and consume, but rather that you just rest and trust in what God has done for you.

So it's a habit. It's a habit of rest that the Sabbath encourages in our lives. And there's a little slide that just says spiritual habits are life-giving.

[5 : 31] So we've talked about the habit of reading the Bible, the habit of prayer, the habit of learning to walk in fellowship with Jesus. Spiritual habits are life-giving. They help us to pay attention to the presence of God in our world and in our lives.

Jesus is the one who gives life to us. We flourish when we live nearer to him. So that's what I want to just say about Sabbath today is Sabbath helps us live nearer God.

And the nearer we live to God, the nearer or the more we will flourish as human beings, the more we'll feel alive and rested and whole.

So on Thursday morning, when you jump out of bed, you race around thinking, what have I got to do? Slow down and remember, Jesus never said, blessed are the busy.

Busyness is not a measure of worth. And busyness is not the way to the good life. So let's think about that a bit more. Just going to speak about two things. First of all, the way that the Sabbath speaks about our humanity.

[6 : 40] And secondly, the way that the Sabbath speaks about our salvation. In these verses in Mark chapter 2, as this dispute comes up about how do you keep the Sabbath?

What should you do in the Sabbath and not do? Jesus just moves away from that debate really and says, Listen, I'm the Lord of the Sabbath.

This is my day. And that's a really important concept for us because it reminds us of our humanity. When he's saying that he's Lord of the Sabbath, he's reminding us we're not Lord.

We're humans. We're creatures. Because life is often a struggle to establish our own control or lordship over life. We feel we have to be in control of everything so that things will go well for us.

The men Jesus was speaking to are Pharisees. And they were wrestling for control in their own culture. And they were using religion to establish control in their culture.

[7 : 44] And for good reasons, because they thought the more religious and devout our society is, the more we will win back God's favor. And our people, Israel, will flourish.

So they wanted to observe the Sabbath in a really careful way so that God's blessing would come. We might want to take control of our lives, our time, our productivity, our spending habits, because we think that's how we will flourish as people.

The more we work, the more we consume, the happier we will be. The more we work, the more we can have. Money, cars, holidays, houses, clothes, food.

If we have that, the happier we'll be. That's the myth we tell ourselves, isn't it? But it doesn't work. Yesterday I was walking past probably one of the largest houses in Edinburgh. I saw somebody driving out from this very large house in their very nice car, and they looked miserable.

Consuming, spending, working hard isn't how we flourish. And if you live by that illusion, or if you live by that practice, if what your life, what you actually do in your life reveals that that's how you function, then the Sabbath sabotages this illusion.

[9 : 06] Because the Sabbath is saying, I'm Lord. Lord of your schedule. Lord of your week. Lord of your working time. I don't know how many time management courses you've been on, but I've been on a few.

And here's God saying, you don't manage your own time. You don't own time. You're not in charge. Justin Early says this. He says, the weekly pattern of Sabbath is to remind us that God is God, and we are not.

The weekly pattern of Sabbath is to remind us that God is God, and we are not. The Sabbath is a holy day. That means it belongs to the Lord. The Christian Sabbath is on the first day of the week, Sunday.

So the Jewish community, the Jewish religion celebrates Sabbath on a Saturday, because God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh.

So that was a celebration of creation. Christians changed their Sabbath to the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, to remember the resurrection, the new creation.

[10 : 16] But the fact that the Lord's Day is a holy day reminds us that it's God's. It doesn't belong to us. Sabbath tells us we can't manage time or its movement.

Often what we try and do, I think, is to flatten our days, to make them all the same, so that each day is no different from the other. We live in a culture now where no day is holy, where every day belongs to us, to do what we want, to work, to consume, to play.

And what Sabbath does is it disrupts that idea and it dismantles that notion and says, listen, this day is God's, it's not yours. You don't get to decide on this day.

He determines what we do. We think that we decide what hours we might grant to God. But Sabbath says, no, here's a whole day that belongs especially to God.

We think that every hour is about self-fulfillment and pursuing our goals. But Sabbath comes along as a day and says, do you know what? You're not the end of everything. God is.

[11 : 31] And this day is for his glory. You know, we do live in a world where we never want to stop or rest because of FOMO. We're afraid of missing out.

And in a culture like that, it's such a great thing to protest by stopping for a day and ceasing productivity.

It's an act of witness to say that our fulfillment is not found in always being busy. Our fulfillment is in stopping and resting in the presence of God.

So in our culture, to take a Sabbath is to say that you follow another God. We've got a friend at Cornerstone, Lolita Jackson, who works in the office of the mayor of New York and has a very busy, responsible job.

But she Sabbaths every week and she tells her colleagues that she's going to do this. And it's a really powerful witness. That work is not what defines us.

[12 : 40] It's not what justifies our existence. An impactful life doesn't come from being busy or productivity. An impactful life comes from resting, abiding, remaining in Christ and in his word.

Because it's God who gets things done in this world, not us. So how do we keep the Sabbath? If you grew up like me in a Scottish Presbyterian home, you might have found the Sabbath a total nightmare when you were a kid.

Well, Jesus says the Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Sabbath is for our benefit. It's good for us. It fits as well. So it shouldn't become another crushing burden. Another set of rules and regulations that we have to struggle and work hard to keep.

But our bodies do need a rest. We are creatures. We're not superhuman. We're not gods. As God rested from his work, he says to you and me, you have a rest as well.

Work is good. It's a way to glorify God and bless our community and our neighbors. But rest is good as well. That maybe the pandemic has taught us that. That less is more sometimes.

[13 : 57] That we don't need to be out every evening. We don't need to be rushing around. That you don't have to have so many meetings every day. Or maybe you've actually been busier over the last few months and had less rest.

And you're reminded of how important it is to stop. So let's rest in our Sabbath days. Not by trying to fit into a straitjacket of rules to prove how devout we are.

But just to find ways to stop and be restored physically and spiritually. I'm going to give you some ideas of how we might spend the Sabbath.

You've got to figure this out for yourself, don't you? Some of us have to work on a Sunday for whatever reason. Lots of jobs involve Sunday work. And if that happens, then you still need a day off.

A day of rest. So take your Sabbath rest another day. But a couple of slides just with things to think about for Sabbath. So these are ideas. Avoid the shops and work so that you know they're not the center of your life.

[15 : 02] Don't do your side gig on the Sunday. We live in such a hyperproductive culture now that we feel that not only do we have to have a job, but we've got to have a job on the side of our job just to keep making lots of money and give ourselves the lives we want.

So don't pursue your side gig on the Sunday. How about resting from smartphones, screens and computers for a few hours? The long lie.

The Sunday nap. What a great idea. Sunday is, of course, a day of worship for Christians. Gathering with other believers to praise and learn from God's word.

I think, too, it's a time for community. How about having a meal with people regularly on a Sunday and sharing food with them? And you organize ahead of time so that everybody understands we're going to prepare food, bring food together, and we're all going to clean up together so that somebody doesn't end up doing lots of work while everybody else puts their feet up.

Invite your believing and your unbelieving friends to share life together. Take time to reflect, to read, to pray, to walk, to wonder, to meditate.

[16 : 19] Take time to serve because our life is lived for God and others. Time to serve at church or to serve somebody who's in need. Sabbath is such an important idea then, isn't it?

And it's an idea that speaks of our salvation. Justin Erley hears this quote. Sabbath is the essence of our salvation. We can rest because God has done all that needs to be done.

It's not just our bodies that need a rest. It's also our souls, our inner beings.

Our inner person needs rest and restoration. But as Erley says in his book, our souls aren't looking for a nap.

What our souls need a rest from is the idea that we have something to prove. What we need to rest from spiritually is the work of covering our shame.

[17 : 27] The work of proving that we matter. The work of atoning for past mess, past badness.

We need rest from the work of pretending that we're better than we really are. And the Sabbath is a reminder of our salvation. That we have rest in Jesus Christ.

From all these spiritual struggles. Every Sunday when we stop working and gather as a church, we gather to hear the gospel again to be renewed in the power and the life of the gospel.

That says our salvation is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. In Hebrews chapter 4, it tells us that Jesus has done our work for us.

Our work of salvation isn't done by us, but by Jesus on the cross. In Hebrews 4, it says God has entered his eternal rest because he has finished his work.

[18 : 31] God has entered his eternal rest because he has finished his work. The work of creation was complete after six days. And the work of salvation was complete when Jesus died on the cross and rose again.

On the cross, Jesus cried out, it is finished. The work of salvation is done. Jesus has done everything that needs to happen to restore us to relationship with our Father in heaven, to take away our guilt, our sin, and the penalty of our sin.

So Sunday, Sabbath is a day to remember that we can rest from trying to save ourselves and clean ourselves up enough to appear before God.

We rest in Jesus and what he has done for us on the cross. Sabbath is the essence of our salvation. Sabbath is also a day of promise.

A day that looks ahead to that eternal rest that Hebrews 4 speaks about. That day of final restoration. Sabbath is the Sabbath. The Sabbath foreshadows the new creation when we will rest from the curse of toil, when we will rest from struggle, from sorrow, and from every burden, when we will rest from tears.

[20 : 05] The Sabbath speaks of our eternal rest in God, the peace that we'll find in him, the feast that we'll have with him in the kingdom to come.

Now, I'm going to do something a bit annoying for you. I'm going to read you a really long quote from Justin Early, just as we finish off. I thought, I find it personally a really helpful quote, and I wanted to read it to you.

So pay attention. I'll read it quite slowly and try and not get too distracted. So here's the quote. If you've lived your life believing that you can earn your worth, that you can earn your salvation by outweighing the bad with the good, that you can justify your place in this world through the money you can earn or status you can achieve, come and rest.

Come and Sabbath with Jesus. Here is peace that no amount of effort can buy. He came to you first.

He lived the good life we're all trying to live. He did it all. He sacrificed everything. He always said the right thing.

[21 : 27] He always knew what to do and where to go. And where did it get him? It got him killed. People hated him. They stripped him naked and killed him.

He lived the life of light we are all trying to live. And he was answered with death. But it was all for love.

It was all for you. He stayed up in the garden of Gethsemane so you could sleep. He finished his work on the cross so that you could rest.

He let the world break him so it doesn't have to break you. He rose from the grave so that all your aspirations won't end in the grave.

The life of flourishing we want comes from Jesus. It doesn't come from better habits. It doesn't come from striving harder.

[22 : 33] It comes from him. He is life. He brings life to us. And we respond by living in his presence. We respond by living in his presence.

And everything we do, all the habits we seek to cultivate, are done out of love for the life that he's granted to us through his death and resurrection. So St. Augustine, or Augustine the Hippo, African thinker, believer of the fourth century said this, Thou hast made us by thyself a word, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.

I really do hope that you can set aside your striving. Set aside. Try to prove yourself good enough for the people around you, good enough for this world, or good enough for God.

Because God loves you as you are, and that's enough. God accepts you as you are, because Christ has done everything necessary for you to be forgiven and saved.

So let's rest today in all that Jesus has done. I'm going to say a short prayer, hand over to Fergus, and then Louise will join us for a quick Q&A; on anxiety. Lord Jesus, thank you so much for the rest that you offer us.

[24 : 02] Please help us to receive it, to enter into it, and to walk with you through it. Amen.