

Home at Last: Rest for the Journey

WITH MIKE TUCKER

Do you remember your last vacation? Remember the anticipation as the time approached? Counting down the days, making plans for all the things you *weren't* going to do. No alarm clock, no rush hour traffic, no appointments...no anything you didn't want to do, right?

Now, I don't want you to laugh at me, but I'm going to tell you about my best vacation ever. It was in Houston, Texas – in August. Temperatures were 110 in the shade, with humidity of 200%, at least. My wife and I rented a not-very-fancy condo in a not-very-fancy resort on a small lake. So, we had a lake, but no boat, no wave runner, no jet ski. No real access to a swimming area.

Here's how we spent the week. We slept, we walked, we read, we prayed. That's it. Basically, we shut out the entire world and did nothing but rest. It....was....amazing. At the time, we were pastors of a 2,000-member church in addition to our duties at Faith For Today, so there was nothing more welcome than a whole week of rest. It wasn't a very exotic vacation, but even compared with all of our travels, it still rates right at the top for Gayle and me.

Whether or not they realize it, people today need rest more than most anything else. Physical, emotional, spiritual rest. We are simply worn out. Not surprisingly, God had this figured out long ago.

During the very first week of earth's history, God established a weekly appointment – a weekly time of rest. He called it Sabbath. Sabbath is a twenty-four hour block of time every week that is dedicated to knowing and loving God. It is a time when we shut the rest of the world out and focus solely on Him.

God saw that we would be victimized by our busy schedules, so He arranged for us to have a wonderful excuse to take one day a week off. He set aside a day and declared that we could use that day for only one purpose. That day was to be used for the purpose of resting in Him.

You might call it a *sanctuary* – a refuge of time, where we can experience deep, restorative, healing rest. Just as God rested during the Creation week, He now calls His people to rest one day out of seven. And the Sabbath is not only a day for physical rest from work, but also an opportunity for resting in Christ.

Matthew 11:28

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

The antidote for the poison of our hurried lives is rest – rest found only in Jesus.

The word "Sabbath" does not actually mean rest. It means "to desist" – to stop. God says that on at least one day a week, we are to stop our labors and focus on the worship of the One who gives us rest. He actually commands us to do it. He reminds us that renewal and restoration are not luxuries. They are essentials.

So, let's start at the beginning. Let's start at Creation week, because it was there that God established the means for our rest and renewal. God established the Sabbath as a weekly reminder that He is both our Creator and our Redeemer.

Home at Last: Rest for the Journey

WITH MIKE TUCKER

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

God didn't rest because He was weary. He rested because He was satisfied. God rested because He was happy or fulfilled. That was His plan for us. It was His plan that we should be happy, fulfilled, and satisfied with every good thing.

The word "sanctified" simply means "unique" or "distinct." God intended the Sabbath to be a unique place in time where we would be happy, fulfilled and satisfied. We are satisfied because God has created us in His image and given us all that we need to be happy.

But the Sabbath also reminds us of our salvation. Remember, salvation is not a thing we earn or deserve. It is a gift that comes directly from the hand of God through Jesus. Jesus alone earned our salvation, and the Sabbath reminds us of this fact.

God reminds us of the importance of remembering that He alone redeems us by including the Sabbath as one of the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:8-11

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy."

Here in Exodus the Sabbath is again linked to God's creative power. It is a weekly reminder that He alone is the Creator. By the way, God is also rather specific about *which* day we should rest. Notice He declares, "...but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God." The seventh day is the day we call Saturday. If it is to be a memorial of God's creative power it is to be linked to the specific day God rested from His work. God declares that to be the seventh day, Saturday.

So the Sabbath is a memorial of God's creative power. However, the Sabbath is also mentioned as a memorial of God's redemptive power. The Ten Commandments are given twice in the Old Testament. The second listing is found in Deuteronomy, and there the Sabbath is linked with redemption as seen in Israel's deliverance from slavery.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

"Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 'Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your

Home at Last: Rest for the Journey

WITH MIKE TUCKER

female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.'

Creation and redemption (or deliverance) are often linked together in Scripture. Another example of this is found in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

The weekly Sabbath is a reminder of creation, but it is also a weekly reminder that our salvation is not gained through our own effort. It is a gift from the hand of Jesus. Our salvation was won for us through the sacrifice Jesus made on the Cross. We can rest secure in the knowledge that the same God who created us, has also redeemed us. We can rest in Him.

Hebrews 4:9-11

So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience.

Resting for a while is not selfish. Instead, it is Christ-like. Twenty-four hours each week are to be dedicated to knowing God better, restoring your spirit, and growing to be more like Christ. Twenty-four hours to remind you that God created you and redeemed you. You can rest from any attempt to save yourself because God has already done that for you. You can rest from trying to control the world around you. God made the world, and God alone can control it. Sabbath is God's gift to you – a weekly date with God.

My wife and I have been married for over 39 years. We value our relationship and hold it dear. But even after 39 years of marital bliss, we know that we must fight to keep our relationship strong.

That's why we have set aside a special time to be with each other. We have a date night. Even after all these years of marriage, we are dating each other.

I look forward to every date night because it is uninterrupted time with the woman I love. We hold that time sacred because we value each other, and we value our relationship.

God saw the wisdom of this sort of thing long before Gayle and I stumbled on to the idea of a date night. From the very first week of time, God set aside a date day with you.

Home at Last: Rest for the Journey

WITH MIKE TUCKER

He set aside 24 hours every week to spend time with you, enjoy you, have fun with you, and allow you to get to know Him better. Without this time with God you will be at greater risk of losing your love for Him. That's why He calls this time sacred.

Gayle and I refuse to talk about work related items when we are on our date. We focus the attention on each other.

With the break-neck speed of life today, isn't it just a wonderful idea to start life anew with the blessings of Sabbath rest? Stay away from the office – forget the housework for a day – turn the computer off – turn the television off – learn to rest in Christ. Make this your weekly habit for life. Rest your cares and your worries in Christ. Worship Him as your Creator and Redeemer. Experience the renewing, restorative power of Sabbath rest.

Isaiah 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, 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.

Verse 13 tells us to keep our feet from breaking the Sabbath. That means, don't walk on God's day. Don't misuse His precious gift to you.

How do you misuse the day? By acting like it is any other day. By refusing to rest and worship. We misuse the day by allowing the outside world to intrude on that day – our special day with God.

We are, as Isaiah said, to make "the Sabbath a delight." We do that by not doing the things we do every other day.

If we honor the Sabbath, God promises some wonderful things for us. He says that He, "...will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob."

What does it mean to "ride on the heights of the land...?" I believe this is a picture taken from the work of a shepherd.

In the winters, shepherds kept their sheep in the valleys. This was a dangerous time and place for sheep. It was dangerous since the winters meant shorter days and more darkness. Even during the days there were more shadows and more trees and bushes in which predators could hide. Predators lived mainly in the valley where they could hide in darkness and shadows and prey on sheep.

The summers were a different story. The shepherd took his sheep to the high plateaus to escape the heat and to find more grass for the sheep to eat. Days were longer and there were fewer bushes or trees for predators to hide behind. The high plateaus were places of safety, of plenty, of sunlight and pleasant temperatures.

In short, the high plateaus in the summer were sheep paradise.

God, through Isaiah, is saying that when you find your rest in Him through an observance of His Sabbath, he will reveal more of himself to you. This is people paradise –

Home at Last: Rest for the Journey

WITH MIKE TUCKER

to know and experience God. He gives us light and safety, and He feeds us with everything we need. In short, keeping the Sabbath gives us more of God, and that alone is paradise.

The last part of this verse says that if we keep the Sabbath, God will cause us "...to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." What does that mean?

This is taken from a story in the life of Jacob that we find in the Old Testament. Jacob had spent his life doing his best to obtain wealth. He was willing to do so by hook or by crook. He had cheated his brother out of the ancient birthright.

The birthright carried with it a larger share of your father's inheritance, a greater share of spiritual blessings, and made you the acknowledged leader of your family or clan. Jacob was a twin, but was second-born, which meant that the custom was not for him to receive the birthright. That was reserved for his older twin, Esau.

But Jacob lied to his blind father and tricked him into giving him his brother's birthright. Esau wanted revenge. He wanted to kill his brother, so Jacob fled.

He was running to live with an uncle in a distant land, but on his way, Jacob began to realize what he had become. He was a liar and a dishonest man. He had spent all of his time working for things that could not satisfy. Jacob was afraid of what the future held. He began to wonder whether God could actually love a man like him.

One evening during his journey, God gave Jacob a dream. It was a dream of a great ladder reaching from heaven all the way down to earth. Angels were going up and down that ladder. This was to remind Jacob that he was not alone, but that God was there and was sending angels to care for Jacob.

Then, at the top of the ladder he saw God, and God spoke him and made a promise. We find the promise in Genesis 28, beginning with verse 13.

Gen. 28:13-15

There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

God promised Jacob the world! He promised to bless others through his offspring. God also promised that he would never forsake Jacob. And He promised the greatest gift of all – God promised the gift of Himself. He promised to be with Jacob and to know him and to bless him.

This is what the prophet Isaiah was referencing in his prophecy. He said that if we would properly use this marvelous gift of the Sabbath, we would receive the inheritance of Jacob. We would be like sheep living on the high plateaus in the summer with safety, rest, and plenty. And eventually, the entire world would belong to us and be blessed because of us.

Home at Last: Rest for the Journey

WITH MIKE TUCKER

But better yet, Isaiah is telling us that if we use this great tool for getting to know God, then God will reward us with the gift of Himself. He will reveal Himself to us, and we will know Him, and He will know us. He promises that we will be *home at last* with Him – in His refuge, His safe haven.

God's great cathedral in time, the Sabbath, is not a legalistic requirement. It is a precious gift. It is an opportunity to shut the world with all of its pressures and false promises out of our lives for 24 hours. It is an opportunity to focus exclusively on God and family and friends, and to worship and praise for an entire day.

God promises that if we will rest in Him on the Sabbath, we will receive the things that really matter in this life. We will receive the gift of God himself.

God is rest, and God is assurance, and God is salvation. Keeping the Sabbath gives us all of those things. As we spend this day in worship, we will find the One who has loved us all along. We will find him and know him and find our rest in him.

Wouldn't you like to experience all of that today? Couldn't you use a little Sabbath rest about now?

Tell the office to take a hike! Turn the news off – it will be there when you get back from Sabbath rest. Forget the lawn, forget the dishes, and forget your job and your bills. Take a Sabbath rest by focusing on Jesus for twenty-four hours every week and see what a difference it makes in your life.