

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Sunday, June 2, 2024
Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Praise be to the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Amen.

Observe the Sabbath

Dear friends in Christ,

We have heard the word **Sabbath** in every one of our Scripture readings today. The Third Commandment says: **Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy** (Ex 20:8). Moses restates that commandment like this in Deuteronomy: **Observe the Sabbath day** (Dt. 5:12)

Clearly, the **Sabbath** is very important to the Lord and therefore to his faithful people. So we want to see what God is teaching us when He tells us: **Observe the Sabbath.**

Let's start by defining what **Sabbath** is and what it is not. We'll use a multiple-choice question –What does **Sabbath** mean? Is it... Saturday... or Sunday... or a Hebrew word that means “go to church” or... **Rest?**

If you would say *Saturday*, you would be right... IF and *only IF* you lived in the years before Jesus came to keep God's promise of the Savior. But for us living in the New Testament, since Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Law, **Sabbath does not mean Saturday** for Christians.

Sabbath also does not mean **Sunday**. Although the Bible mentions Christians were already worshipping on Sunday mornings in the days of the Apostles, yet nowhere does the Bible declare that Sunday is the New Testament **Sabbath day**.

Sabbath also does not mean “go to church.” Hearing God's Word with fellow believers in worship is indeed one way that we **observe the Sabbath**, but it is not the only way, and it's not what **Sabbath means**.

Sabbath *actually* means: “**REST.**” **Sabbath** is the Hebrew word that means **rest**.

Our lesson from Deuteronomy makes that clear: **Six days you are to serve and perform all of your regular work, but the seventh day is a sabbath rest to the LORD your God. You are not to do any regular work... in order that your male servant and your female servant may rest like you.**

Now if after hearing that you think you can tell your parents or your spouse that there is a specific day you don't have to do any chores around the house, because it's a day of **rest**, then I'm afraid I have to disappoint you.

The physical **rest, do no regular work** portion of this commandment is also part of the Old Testament ceremonial law that only applied from the time of Moses until the time when Jesus came to save us, just as we heard in our second lesson: **These are a shadow of the things that were coming, but the body belongs to Christ.**

This is the same reason we do not kill a lamb during our worship service! Those things were **shadows**. Think of a person coming around the corner of the building with the sun behind their back. You will see their shadow before you see them. And the only way to know about them is to look at their shadow.

But when they turn the corner, you now see the **body** of the person and you are able to see them directly, and you no longer need to stare at their shadow to learn about them.

Sacrificing lambs in the Old Testament temple was a way to teach the people before Jesus how He would be **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**. Now that Christ has come, we look in faith to Christ's sacrifice on the cross to save us, that is the **body** that the pictures and shadows of Old Testament Sacrifice was all about.

The same is the true with the **Sabbath day** in the Old Testament: a specific day to worship and a time of physical **rest** served to teach that true **rest** was to be found only in the Savior.

That's why God said this in Exodus: **'You must observe my Sabbaths... so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy (31:13).** The Sabbath helped teach the Israelites it is only *the Lord* who **makes** them **holy**.

Here is the picture. Here is what Israel did on the **Sabbath**. They did this: (*pastor lays down on chairs*). They did nothing! They did not work. They simply rested!

Compare that to every other false, manmade religion that all say there is something you must do, some work you must perform.

Ancient Canaanite faiths, pagan European religion, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Native American spirits, Shamanism and every false teaching in Christianity, even the Atheistic humanism that is so loud in our culture right now, they all say you need to get to work!

Sacrifice, right paths, 5 pillars, virtue signaling, reducing your carbon footprint, backing certain causes, pilgrimages, just a little more discipline and action and your life won't have any problems. It is all work... work... work... and it's never done, and there will never be any true and eternal peace.

But the True God says: Here's what makes you my special people: **rest**. You do nothing to save yourselves, for you cannot. I the Lord make you **Holy**.

Sabbath rest backs up the truth that God made us without our help. He also saves us without our works, and He brings us to faith in the promised Savior without our efforts.

You do nothing to save yourself. God does the work. Just as Scripture declares: **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast** (Ephesians 2).

So how do you and I **observe the Sabbath** today if we are no longer required to carry out the picture language of physical **rest** on specific day?

We go past the **shadow** and straight to the **body** of what it was all about. We listen to Jesus who says this to you: "**Come to me, all you who are weary and**

burdened, and I will give you rest... I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:28-29).

Jesus gives us **rest**, true **Sabbath**. In Him we have rest for our souls in the forgiveness of every sin, because Jesus did the work to save us – He fulfilled the law, He declared from the cross **“It is finished.”** He has prepared for us in heaven by His love, and His promise to be with us and help us through life’s struggles. **Observe the Sabbath as you rest your soul in Christ.**

But how do we receive this rest? How does the Lord come to us deliver this **rest** He has promised our souls?

The answer is found in what the Israelites were to do during their **Sabbath rest: Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.**

Sabbath wasn’t just a day off for the Israelites, it was a time to hear about, speak about, sing about, and **remember** all God had done to save them from **slavery** in Egypt, and how they could therefore be sure He would keep all His other promises to them.

We too **remember** what God has done for us in Christ and what He will do for us. And it is God’s Word that the Lord reminds us and comes to us, just as Jesus said about the Bible: **the Scriptures that testify about me** (Jn 5:39).

While God has not commanded on which specific day of the week we are to gather with believers, it is clear He commands us to gather with our fellow believers in passage after passage, like this:

Let us not neglect meeting together (Heb 10:25)...

And... **I rejoiced with those who said to me,**
“Let us go to the house of the LORD” (Ps 122:1)...

and **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...** (richly can’t mean once in a while, a few times a year, but regularly, continually)

...as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God (Col 3:16).

This is why Martin Luther summed up the Third Commandment this way in the Catechism: *We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.* So we **observe the Sabbath** as we hear and **remember God's Word.**

Of course, none, of us, preachers included have ever perfectly, *gladly* heard, learned, remembered and lived God's Word as the holy priceless, spiritual rest bringing treasure it truly is. How often by our actual actions, attitudes, and thoughts of our heart do we want to argue with Jesus when He tells us that His Word is the **one thing needed** (Luke 10:42)?

Think how evil our sin is. With this commandment God wants to bless us and give us true **rest** in Christ, which is what we desperately need in this world of stress, chaos, rush, hurry and worry.

In love, the Lord is calling us for much needed **rest**, but like defiant, overtired children our actions are saying to God: *I'm not tired!!!* Oh, how arrogant and ugly our sin against the **Sabbath day** when we push Jesus away by saying we don't have the time or desire to listen to His Word.

So, what shall we do? This: (pastor lay down on chair again). **Rest.** Drop the excuses and objections we like to throw up to defend ourselves. Give that a **rest** and give voice to Spirit worked repentance: let us confess we have sinned, we deserve God's judgment.

And then freely receive the **rest** only Jesus gives. Even now Jesus brings you this **rest** even through the lips of a stumbling preacher, who declares to by the command of Christ, that often repeated, but always needed good news: 'Your sins are forgiven.' Jesus paid your debt of sin. Our perverse and ugly guilt removed by Jesus who did the work that saves you!

Christ, the God-man took our place and fulfilled the third commandment, in both the Old Testament and New Testament sense. He loved every syllable of Scripture and

kept all its commands to save us. On the cross, He did the work of suffering hell's anguish to set us free.

He left the grave empty to guarantee so you will live with Him and even your body will rise to the life with the Savior in that place where no sorrow or stress will ever disturb that glorious rest of God's believing people!

Even as the Lord urgently commands us to **Observe the Sabbath**, He is not really demanding of you, but freely giving to you.

So, with hearts forgiven and renewed by Jesus, let us no longer say it this way: "I *have to* read my Bible, or *We have to* go to church," but in joy and forgiveness let us declare: *I get to rest, I get to come to rest* as Jesus comes to us in Word and Sacrament to give us true and everlasting **rest** in Him. Amen.

Your Savior says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... and you will find rest for your souls. Amen.