

## **Finding Sabbath**

*Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast  
Celebration Fellowship, Ionia, Michigan  
July 30 & 31, 2018*

### **Scripture: Leviticus 25:1-7**

*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*

Exodus 20:8

### **Sermon**

I know all of you have been moving along without me for the last couple of weeks. Last week you looked at the fifth commandment. And during tonight's study time, depending on how far you got, you looked at the next two or three or four commandments.

So I hope you don't mind if I throw things into reverse with this sermon. Because I want to take us back to the fourth commandment. I want to take us back to the Sabbath. And the question is, What are we Christians supposed to do about the Sabbath?

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT SAYS, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God." (That's Exodus 20.) So every seven days, there is a day of rest.

But that's not all. Because Scripture also says, "In the seventh year, the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord." (That's Leviticus 25.) So every seven years, there is a year of rest.

But that's not all. Because Scripture also says, "Count off seven sabbath years [and] consecrate the fiftieth year . . . [It] shall be a jubilee . . . and is to be holy for you." (That's also Leviticus 25.) So every fifty years, in fulfillment of the Sabbath, there is a year of restoration.

IN LIGHT OF ALL THAT, what are we Christians supposed to do about the Sabbath? Well, the short answer is nothing. That's right. Nothing. Why? Because the Sabbath commandments were not given to us. No; they were given to Israel. They were given to Israel as part of the Law of Moses.

But we are not under Moses. And we are not under the Law with its commandments. No, we are in Jesus Christ. And we are under the Spirit. Because we are not Israel; we are the church.

NOW, THAT DOESN'T MEAN that the church is lawless. Not at all. In fact, most of the Ten Commandments were given to the church again as part of the New Covenant, as part of the covenant God made with us through the blood of Jesus Christ.

But those renewed commandments were not given to us as a simple list. So in the church, we don't have Ten Rules that stand apart from every other code of conduct. No; the renewed commandments, if I can call them that—the renewed commandments are woven into the fabric of Christian moral life.

THE NEW TESTAMENT HAS LOTS OF INSTRUCTIONS about how to live as Christians. Mostly those instructions are about faith and hope and love. But here and there, the New Testament also tells us not to murder, not to steal, not to commit adultery. And here and there, it warns us against coveting and against idolatry.

Probably more than anything, the New Testament tells us to worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the one true God. Probably more than anything, the New Testament tells us to honor Jesus Christ alone as the perfect image of the invisible God.

BUT THERE IS ONE THING the New Testament does not tell us. It does not tell us to keep the Sabbath. Not only that, the New Testament actually diminishes the Sabbath. Paul the Apostle says the Sabbath is “a shadow” and that “the reality . . . is found in Christ.” (That's Colossians 2.)

Paul also says it doesn't matter if a Christian observes a sacred day or not, as long as our goal is to honor the Lord whatever we do. (That's in Romans 14.) And all that brings us back to the original question. What are we Christians supposed to do about the Sabbath?

We are the church, not Israel. We are in Christ, not under Moses. So, what are we supposed to do about the Sabbath? If the short answer is nothing, then what's the longer answer?

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE SABBATH is all about trust. By the Sabbath commandments—and I mean all of them: Sabbath day, Sabbath year, and Jubilee—by the Sabbath commandments, God was asking Israel, Do you trust me?

Do you trust me to provide for you day by day? Do trust me enough to take one day off from your work, one day out of seven?

Do you trust me to be the source of your abundant life as a nation? Do you trust me enough to take one year off from the basic activity of your economy, one year out of seven?

And do you trust me to be enough for you? Do you trust me to be your life and your joy and your hope? Do you trust me enough to let go of all the stuff you piled up for forty-nine years? Do you trust me enough not to pile that stuff up in the first place?

Sabbath is about trust. So if the question is about the Sabbath, then the answer must be about trust. Do we trust God? Do we trust God to be enough for us? And if we do, what does that trust look like?

I KNOW MORE ABOUT LIFE on the outside than I do about life on the inside. And on the outside, many of us organize our lives around the work we do. And there's no wonder about that. We have homes and families, after all. And we need to get them set up. We need to keep them going. And that takes time. That takes money. That takes work.

The trouble is, we can get so busy with all the work that it takes to have a home and a family, we can get so busy with our work, that we wind up trusting in ourselves and in the economy more than we trust in the Lord. Some of you probably know there's a psalm for that. Here's how it starts off:

*Unless the Lord builds the house,  
the builders labor in vain.  
Unless the Lord watches over the city,  
the guards stand watch in vain.*

(That's Psalm 127.)

But that's not all the psalm says. After those opening words, the psalm gets right to the heart of what the Sabbath was all about for Israel. And it gets right to the heart of what matters most of all for us. Because it gets to the question of trust. It gets to the question of trusting God. And it gets to the blessing and peace we find when we do trust God. This is what it says:

*In vain you rise early  
and stay up late,  
toiling for food to eat—  
for he grants sleep to those he loves.*

"He grants sleep to those he loves." But all we seem to know is work, work, work, especially in this so-called 24/7 world. We even turn our rest into work. On the outside, we'll go on a vacation that's so busy we need a week off when we get back! But the psalm invites us to trust God. And the Sabbath commandments invite us to trust God.

AND WHAT DOES TRUSTING GOD LOOK LIKE? Well, the short answer is nothing. (You knew that was coming, didn't you?) Here's what I mean.

A while back, I listened to an interview with Mimi Fox. She is a jazz guitarist. Some years ago, she met the great Joe Pass. She was hoping to have a few lessons from him. Well, first, he listened to her play. Next, he asked her what she wanted to learn. And last, he told her to stop practicing so much.

Now, that went against everything Mimi Fox knew about being a decent guitar player, never mind about being an excellent one. It was all about practicing. Practicing was the only way to make it happen. She knew that in her bones.

But she also had great respect for Joe Pass. So she listened to him. And she stopped practicing so much. Instead she rested more. She learned to relax more. And her playing only got better.

PSALM 127 IS OUR JOE PASS. And the Sabbath commandments, even if we don't have to keep them—and in Christ, we do not have to keep them—the Sabbath commandments are our Joe Pass. Because together they tell us it's not about us. It's not about how hard we work. It's not about the wealth and the power and the prestige we can pile up in this life, even if our life is on the inside. No; none of that will bring us to the joy and the peace of the Kingdom. None of that will bring us to the love and the rest of the Gospel. But Jesus will. And Jesus does.

It's all about trusting Jesus. Trusting Jesus, even when that goes against everything the world has been telling us forever. Trusting Jesus, even when that goes against all the ways of the world outside. Trusting Jesus, even when that goes against all the ways of the world here on the inside.

Faith means we trust God enough to take a break from all that. Faith means we trust God enough to follow another way, a better way. Because we're confident that God is enough for us, for now and forever.

Trusting God. That's where we find Sabbath. That's where we find true rest.

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Glory and thanks be to God:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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