

A Day of Rest

Pako Evening Service: 5/05/2017

Readings: Jn 5:1-17; Heb 10:19-25; Exo 20:8-11; Sermon: A day of Rest

Congregation, this evening we look at the fourth commandment, “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” Now before you start thinking that this is a message about coming to church twice on the Lord’s Day, let me just set you straight. Coming to church twice on Sunday has very little to do with this command.

Let me also tell you of some other ideas that were drummed into us in our younger days which I think hasn’t got all that much to do with this command either. I can remember that doing ‘work’ on the Sunday was almost considered the unforgivable sin. But since we were dairy farmers, it was OK to milk the cows or to be a nurse or doctor. But almost everything else was viewed with suspicion.

Having washing on the clothes line was a “no no.’ Weeding your garden was out. However, you could change a flat tyre on your car if it meant you could come to church. To buy some milk on the way home for unexpected coffee drinkers after church was frowned upon, and to tank petrol was terrible unless of course you needed to get to church.

They say that the Jews were full of legalism, but when I start thinking of some of things we were and weren’t allowed to do, I don’t think we were all that far behind. Congregation, the question should never be about what we are or not allowed to do on the Sabbath. Rather, ask the more positive question, “How can I delight in my Saviour God, on this special day, which He in His wisdom has set aside as a rest day for His glory?” That should be our mindset.

By the way, some people believe that Saturday is the day of rest because Gen 2:3 records that when God finished creation, “He blessed the seventh day and made it holy, ...because on it He rested.”

However, the seventh day Sabbath is not a creation ordinance. In fact, we see no sign of the Sabbath rest outside of Israel. And even today, some countries have Friday for their Sabbath day, particularly in Islamic countries. But don’t throw out the baby with the water! God’s creation pattern is a good biblical reason for a Sabbath rest, not least to remember our redemption.

By the way, nobody mentioned that Sunday might replace the Jewish Sabbath until the time of Chrysostom at the end of the fourth century. In fact, Paul’s letters contain only three sentences that may have a bearing on the Sabbath day issue.

Rom 14:5 “One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.”

Gal 4:10 “You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!”

Col 2:16 “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.”

Congregation, we need to be careful about what demands we make about the day of rest. What we do say is that God ordained one day in every seven to be set apart, to be “other focused”. God did not rest on the seventh day because he was tired, rather, He desisted from work and entered the enjoyment of what he created. We share in that Sabbath rest when we enter the enjoyment of God. The ultimate rest is not that we get hung up about do’s and don’ts but that we enjoy God and what he has done particularly in Christ. That is when we can really begin to focus and delight in him. And what’s more, that is I suggest, the beginning of paradise.

Unfortunately, this ultimate rest eludes us this side of the grave, for sin has robbed us of that rest. Adam sweated between the thorns and thistles. Eve produced life amongst tears. One son was murdered and the other became a killer. And that eternal rest escaped from mankind.

But God promised to do something about the poison that robs us from our rest. And in this process, God chose a people for himself. He saved them from slavery, and made a covenant with them. And God said to them, “Count your days” Six days you must your work but then you must stop and I will teach you the meaning of the six days.

God was strict and insistent that the Sabbath be kept holy and pure. Whoever broke the Sabbath broke the covenant and must be put to death [Exo 35:2]. God taught the people to count their days to give them a heart of wisdom [Psalm 90:12]. Just rest! Don’t be greedy, don’t be worried; don’t be self-indulgent, let me feed you says the Lord.

A Day of Rest

The OT people had to learn to rest in the goodness of God and I today people need to learn that lesson all over again. Was there anything more precious for these OT people than to rest in and worship the Lord for all his goodness every seventh day? Was that too much to ask? Surely not! It wasn't over-taxing or burdensome. It was to be their joy! The goal of all living is in knowing the rest that only God can give. This is the lesson that God wanted all his people to learn. Sadly, the OT people disobeyed and kept carrying their loads through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day and eventually God destroyed the gates of Jerusalem by fire [Jeremiah 17:21-27].

The seven had more significance, for God also taught that in the seventh year the land must rest and after seven times seven God wanted all the chains of bondage broken so that all could rest. Consecrate the whole year as the year of Jubilee.

Of course, living in NT times the fourth commandment, just like the three before it, must be reinterpreted by God's revelation to us in Christ. Keeping the Sabbath Day of rest in New Covenant times also means delighting in God. Jesus set the example.

Our Saviour was born under law to redeem those under law. He kept the Sabbath day laws, and He fulfilled the Sabbath. On the Sabbath day, He went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And He taught that the Sabbath law should not be quoted against the well being of human beings. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27).

That is why the Sabbath was an appropriate day to set free a daughter of Abraham who had been bent over for eighteen years (Lk 13:10-16). It was an appropriate day to proclaim freedom to a man in Bethesda who had been a paralytic for 38 years (Jn 5:1-10). And if the Sabbath laws could not be quoted against the well being of human beings, then far less can they be used against the Son of Man, for the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

It is interesting to note that in the Gospel of John, Jesus makes even stronger claims. **"My Father is always at work, to this very day, and I too, am working"** (John 5:17). And the work the Father and Son are busy with is not just the healing of the paralytic man, but the healing of humanity. Jesus came to heal what has been wrong and broken for centuries.

He came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour that was the message of his first sermon (Lk 4:18-19). And although it is never fully spelled out in the NT, Jesus inaugurated the Year of Jubilee that will no know end. And that year started when Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished." The new era has begun. And the Sabbath day is now a foretaste of the great Sabbath day to come, when the entire world will be free of sin and the final healing has taken place.

And that is why the early church moved from Sabbath to Sunday. We already see that tradition developing in Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor 16:2. It is Jesus' death and resurrection on that first day of the week that dramatically altered the course of the universe. That's why Christians gathered on the first day of the week. They didn't call it a day of rest, nor did they think of it as their Sabbath. They came together because on the first day of the week the Lord had risen. And it is in that wonderful knowledge they rested and worshipped.

It wasn't prescribed by the law but it was the believer's response to the gospel. Believers delight to begin each week with Jesus worshipped and glorified. That is why we lay aside the other things that keep us so busy during the week. This day of rest sets the tone for the entire week. To know that as you go to work on Monday that Jesus has risen from the dead and that your sins are forgiven makes life worth living. Resurrection Sunday is our new birthday, a day we were born to a new hope and new life.

And that is why there is this need for the people of God to assemble, to come together. Christ gathers and preserves his church as a community. Jesus gathers and we must congregate. Since that first Sunday after Easter, this has been the pattern. I just wonder whether we haven't lost something. In fact, I wonder sometimes in our busy world and busy church lives, whether we will have time to enjoy heaven?

Oh, I understand things need to be organised. The data screen needs to work, the music needs to be done and fellowship over coffee and I am thankful for those who do this week in and week out. It means supporting gospel ministry and identifying with God's people. It means sharing in the sacraments, setting aside time to pray, and bringing offerings for the poor and singing God's praises. But delighting in our God means more than just being flat out with all of that!

Sometimes, the Day of rest shouldn't be one of the busiest days. The Day of rest means we stop our usually work, not to take up other work and even be busier, but that we just delight and bathe in God's goodness to us, not least our salvation. Just rest and delight in that. When we learn to do that on a regular basis, we begin to enjoy and experience what our

A Day of Rest

eternal rest will be like. The survival of the church doesn't depend on a day, or even a place, but the church cannot exist without assembling. That is why Hebrews 10:25 emphasises the need for faithful attendance, especially as we see with certainty the day of Jesus' return approaching. Jesus says something special in Matthew 18:20; the secret power of its assembly is stated, "Where you come together, there am I." No child of God lives apart from the people of God. No member of Christ lives apart from the body of Christ. No one who is indwelt by God's Spirit lives apart from God's temple (1 Cor 3:16).

The meeting of God's people, the mutual exhortation and encouragement, the participating in the Lord's Supper, are essentials of Christian faith and practice. To forsake meeting together of God's people is to forsake Christ. For it is in our assembling that the living Christ himself makes us share in what he has accomplished, while at the same time leads us to the promised rest.

People have said that I have offended them by praying for people to attend a worship service, let alone a second service. But where would you rather be? What could be better than to rest and dwell in the knowledge of our Saviour and worship him with other like-minded believers? For those saved by Christ there is nothing in this world that can give such joy, such satisfaction, such relief then to know that our Redeemer lives.

Now I could list a whole lot of things that people seem to do instead, yet it is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will make them appreciate Christ more over time so that they will want to come to worship and enjoy the day of rest. But this also says something about worship. I am sometimes concerned that we worry far too much about how we worship and forget to focus on why we worship. I spoke to someone yesterday who was in tears to me on the phone, for she was so busy with organising the music in her church and dealing with the complaints, that she no longer could worship.

Some people, ministers included are just flat out trying to keep the peace as far as worship styles are concerned. This group of people wants more music. This group wants more reverence. That group wants more rejoicing songs, and the minister is expected to keep everyone happy so that the day of rest is meaningful for all. If our attention on the day of rest is about the music or the songs, or how little Freddy played his guitar, then I think we have lost the plot. Jesus says, rest in me, in my goodness. The hope of the world is Christ's church. That is why we plan Sunday on Saturday.

And that is why we fight the tyranny of materialism, of work, of the mighty dollar, and of anything else we would rather do than rest in the assembly of the saints. The Lord has given us one free day a week to rest in the Lord. Sunday is the day that the church has chosen to assemble. On Sundays, we get a taste of the eternal Sabbath. We share in the Holy Spirit and we taste the goodness of the Word of God and powers of the coming age.

On Sundays is the day we learn ever better to rest from our evil ways. On Sundays, we hear that through Jesus we are freed from the death penalty of the law. On Sundays, we are told that if know Jesus as our Lord Saviour, that we have begun the eternal Sabbath, the eternal day of rest.

I trust you have had a restful day delighting in our Saviour God. If you haven't, may next Sunday be better! Amen.