

The Sabbath: A Blessed-Holy Day

Genesis 2:1-3

Halifax: 25 May 2014

Introduction:

Three weeks ago, we started a new sermon series in Genesis.

- I began with an overview of the first chapter inclusive of chapter 2 verse 3.
- I told you that after the overview, I wanted to focus in on a couple of particular matters that are found in those chapters
 - So last week, we focused in more closed on the creation of man and how he was made in God's image—in Gen 1:26-28...
 - And now, this week, we are going to focus in on the seventh day which God made to be a holy Sabbath.
 - Our scripture reading will be the first three verses of Genesis 2.

Please give careful attention now as I read to you from God's Word—beginning in Genesis 2:1:

Genesis 2:1-3: Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. ² And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

May the Lord bless to us the hearing of His holy Word.

In this passage we are told of the grand way that God finished His work.

- He did not just say, “there” and leave it at that...
 - He did something much more fitting to the occasion than that.
 - He established a perpetual festival on the seventh day to celebrate His wonderful works—He called for a weekly holiday—
 - a holy day—a blessed holy Sabbath—to be kept in remembrance of what He had done!

This is what we are going to look at today.

- Let's begin by considering what a good reason there was to celebrate.

I. The LORD finished His work of creation and that was definitely something to celebrate!

A. In our short text, we are told several times and in several ways that He had completed His work!

1. In verse 1, it mentions that the heavens and the earth and all the hosts of them were finished...

- That includes *everything*—
 - there were no more refinements to be made,
 - no more new trees or flowers to be created,
 - no new species of animals,
 - no more stars to form.
 - Everything was fully functioning and everything was in its proper place.
 - Mechanisms were in place so that everything was able to reproduce and so that everything could keep its orbit without the direct intervention of God—without the bending of the natural laws He had put in place.
 - God no longer needed to provide light without light givers or to stretch out the heavens.
 - All was finished in both heaven and earth and all hung together to fulfill the place in the whole system that God had given it.
- 2. In verse 2, we are told that He “ended His work which He had done”
 - That emphasizes again that He had no plans to create anything else or to modify anything.
- 3. And then in the second half of verse 2 we are told that God rested—or *sabbathed*—in Hebrew it is the verbal form of the word *sabbath*—
 - He *sabbathed* from all the work that He had done...
 - The word *sabbathed* simply means that He ceased or desisted from the work...
 - It is a rest of achievement—the rest of one who has completed a task and is now in a position to contemplate his work—to admire it...
 - It is a rest of enjoyment as well—of satisfaction—as when a person sits down after finishing a great work—
 - as Jesus sat down after He had completed our redemption.
- 4. And for good measure, to make sure the point is not missed,
 - Verse 3 again emphasizes that He rested (or sabbathed) from all His work (not just some of it, but all of it) which He had created and made.
 - Not only was He finished creating of nothing, but also of forming new things from what He had created.

TRANS> So you see that there is a very strong emphasis on this!

- B. This was a very grand and glorious thing because the work that God has finished was so grand and glorious!
- It was a glorious achievement that calls for a response.
 - We need to once again pause and consider what God did—truly a work that ought to be given the highest praise and to draw from us the highest admiration for our God!
 - Just think for a moment with me about all that we learn about God from looking at His work of creation!

1. We see His imagination!
 - He is the One who came up with things like trees and light and rocks and space and oceans and foods that have different tastes and that there should be such a thing as taste...
 - And that there should be creatures that can reproduce after their kind, yet with amazing diversity among themselves...
 - And there should be such a thing as sounds and ears to hear them...
 - And such a thing as touching and smelling...
 - and that there should be all the stars and the galaxies...
 - And that there should be heat and cold and day and night...
2. And to see the wisdom in fitting it all together so that it runs without special intervention...
 - the wisdom in designing the systems of the body and the cells and the DNA...
 - to see all the beauty with flowers and seascapes and night skies and sunsets and bird songs and ocean waves and snowflakes...
 - And that God came up with all of this—all of it out of pure imagination—there was nothing like it until He made it.
3. And to think that God made all this for us in His kindness and His goodness...
 - How He loves us, how well He treats us, how thoughtful of us...
 - And think of all the power that called all of these things into being and that set them in motion by the mere word of His command...
4. And to think that God made us in His own image—
 - sharing with us His communicable attributes—giving us a measure of knowledge so that we can look at the world and understand it—and classify it and figure out how things work and how to make things...
 - and giving us a moral nature so that we know what love is and want to love and be loved—and would perfectly love if we had not fallen...
 - and giving us the power to move about and to see and hear and smell and to do things for each other, to bake bread and to build houses and plant crops and paint and make music and sculpture...

TRANS> What marvellous things God accomplished in creating the world!

- He is truly a God to be praised with awe and admiration!
- C. It is a work that calls for recognition—for celebration—for praise—
- It could not be that such a grand and glorious work could be finished without praise and adoration of its maker!
1. Truly, the Triune God Himself takes delight in it...
 - Eloheem looked upon what He had made and declared that it was very good and then He entered into this rest of satisfaction!
 - A Sabbath of delight in what had been accomplished!

- Surely, the Son delighted in what the Father called Him to do in creating the world—we are told that the Son was the one who actually did it...
 - And surely the Father delighted in the Son's work of creating it...
 - He is always pleased with what the Son does...
 - And the Holy Spirit who energised it all as He was seen hovering over the face of the waters...
 - What a satisfaction God had as He looked upon all that He had made—as He rested in His marvellous accomplishment.
- 2. But now part of that very creation that He had created included angels and men...
 - both which are capable of beholding and—with their abilities—to understand something of the magnitude of what God had done...
 - And it was for man, to live in the world that God created and to use it and to enjoy it and experience it as God's gracious gift just for him!
 - It was God's gift especially to him and for him.
 - It would not do at all for him to be indifferent about God's master work!
 - It is only fitting that he too should enter into the praises of God and of His accomplishment!
 - It is only fitting that he should join God in His rest—
 - that he should come apart and rejoice in what God had done—
 - that he should rest with God in the finished work with a rest of delight and satisfaction in it all.

II. And so we see that God set apart the seventh day to celebrate His finished work of creation

A. Our text emphasizes *the seventh day*

1. In fact it is repeated three times in two verses that it was on the seventh day that He finished His work and that God sabbathed or rested...
 - This repetition is a way of singling out the seventh day from the other six days of the week...
 - of establishing it as a perpetual Sabbath...that the seventh day was to be kept holy each week.
2. This is brought out all the more when we see that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day—
 - I will say more about what that means in a minute—
 - But for now I simply want to point out that God blessing and sanctifying a day indicates that it is more than just a one-time event.
 - When a day is sanctified (or set apart as holy), it indicates that it is to be observed into the future...
 - And as it is *the seventh day* that is sanctified and blessed, it indicates that God intended the seventh day of each week to be observed as a holy Sabbath.

3. That God did indeed intend that the seventh day of every week would be kept is made certain when we look at the fourth commandment.
 - The fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8) calls us to “remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy”—
 - and the commandment points back to the institution of the Sabbath at creation...
 - It points to it as something that God had already instituted at creation that should have been remembered and observed week by week from that first Sabbath until that time...
 - We see God here setting the matter straight with His people and calling them to neglect His holy day no more!
 - In Exodus 20:11, after being commanded to remember the Sabbath day,
 - He gives *this* as the reason...
 - **For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.**
 - God blessed and sanctified the seventh day because He intended the seventh day to be a day set apart and blessed thereafter.
 - This also makes it clear that God’s blessing and sanctifying the Sabbath was not something that God instituted for Israel!
 - It was like the other nine commandments...
 - It had been the duty of all men to keep the Sabbath since the creation of the world just as it was their duty to keep all the other commandments!
 - Of all the commandments, the fourth commandment is the one that expressly states that it goes back to creation...
 - Yet, oddly enough, it is the one commandment out of them all that is often claimed to pertain only to Israel!
 - Perhaps this is because it is in part a positive commandment—
 - Positive commandments are ones that are imposed on us by authority—rather than by the nature of things—
 - like the prohibition of eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—
 - There was nothing morally wrong with eating from the tree—it was only made wrong because God forbade it...
 - That we should spend time worshipping God is a moral obligation that can be understood...
 - But that we are to keep the seventh day or the first day of the week is where our submission to God is tested...
 - We are to do it because He said to do it...
 - That is what we have a hard time with and why the fourth commandment is one that men always tend to chafe at.
 - Israel had a lot of trouble submitting to the day God appointed and so do we.

- B. But now let's look further at what the day was instituted for...
1. We have seen clearly that God rested or sabbathed on this day,
 - and that He also wanted us—all mankind—to Sabbath with Him—to rest with Him.
 - We must understand that this rest is not so much rest in the sense of lounging about, but resting in the way that He did—
 - a cessation of your normal activities to rest in the joy of God's marvellous work...
 - It is a day set apart from work to rejoice in God's masterwork of creation—to consider it—to delight in it—to marvel at it...
 - And to see in it His goodness, His wisdom, His power, His imagination, His love, His purposes, His glory!
 - He wants us to join in the celebration!
 2. That He instituted this day for us to rest with Him is shown by His blessing and sanctifying of the day.
 - a. Think about it—God does not bless and sanctify days for their own sake or for His sake, but with reference to us—for our sake!
 - 1) It would not make sense for a day to be blessed for its own sake...
 - A day does not have an ability to be a blessing to itself...
 - It is not a conscious, intelligent being.
 - It is not able to rejoice or appreciate being blessed...
 - When God blesses your crops or blesses your bank account or your work—you know what that means...
 - It means He makes them a blessing to you—He makes them into something that gives you happiness and that helps you in some way.
 - The crops and the bank account couldn't care less!
 - 2) To sanctify the day means that the day is set apart to God in a special way.
 - In Hebrew, the word sanctify is קָדַשׁ *kaw-dash'* and it is from the same root as the word holy, saint (a holy one), hallow, and consecrate.
 - Whenever God sanctified something or made it holy, it meant that it was set apart *to Him*...
 - For example, in the temple or the tabernacle, there was the holy place—and that was the place that was set apart to God...
 - It wasn't set apart for the king or for an apartment (Nehemiah!)
 - And there was the most holy place and that was especially set apart to God!
 - There were holy vessels that were used in worship—and they were set apart from vessels that were otherwise just like them...
 - showing that they were only to be used in the worship of God.
 - You were not to use them to eat your soup out of—that would be to profane them.

- So again, a day or a vessel or a building or even an animal is not made holy for itself—
 - It is set apart or sanctified with regard to how we use it for God... we are to keep it holy—to use it uniquely for God in a way that we don't use things that are not sanctified.
- b. Now of course every day ought to be for God, and in paradise every day was blessed by God...
 - But by blessing and sanctifying the seventh day,
 - God shows that the seventh day is in a class by itself!
 - It is blessed and sanctified in way that the other six days were not blessed and sanctified.
 - It has a special use—it is uniquely His day—a day for Him in ways that the other days were not.

III. So what are we to do with the Sabbath?

- A. God sanctified it, so that means that we are to keep it holy (just like it says in the fourth commandment).
 - If He made it holy, we are to keep it holy!
 - But what does that mean? How do you keep it holy?
 - It means that we use the day for God in the way that He tells us to use it.
 - Let's flesh this out...
 - There are things we are to do with the day and things we are not to do with it...let's begin with what we are to do...
 - 1. First, we are to use the day to rest joyfully in His finished work!
 - We have seen that, but I want to reiterate it because so often those who want to keep the day focus on the prohibition and forget what we are supposed to do with the day...
 - We become like Pharisees—all prohibition—like a kid who prides himself in obeying his parents in not riding his bike because they told him that they were going to Disney World for his birthday...
 - He doesn't even notice Disney World, but just focuses on abstaining from bike riding.
 - He ought to abstain from the bike riding, but not as if it is a burden!
 - So let's look again at what we are do with the Sabbath Day positively.
 - a. We are to take delight with Him in His finished work of creation.
 - You know; to admire it, to take satisfaction in it, to delight in it with Him—to see His goodness and grace...as we have talked about
 - He invites us to do this with Him!
 - It is a wonderful privilege.

- Our focus is on our Creator and on all that He has done for us!
- b. And I would add that whenever God did more wonderful works for His people in addition to creation,
 - He called them to use the Sabbath day to delight in those works as well!
 - 1) After He brought His people out of Egypt, He told them to celebrate that work of redemption on the Sabbath day...
 - When the Ten Commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy 5, instead of mentioning Creation as the work to rejoice in, He mentions God's sanctifying of Israel as the work to rejoice in...
 - **Deut 5:12-15: 'Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.**
 - 2) And now in the New Testament era, we have an even greater work to rejoice in—the work of our redemption by Jesus Christ!
 - a) This was such a phenomenal work that it warranted a day change.
 - It would be too much to go into all the details and the proof of this today,
 - But suffice it to say that when Jesus went to the cross to atone for our sins—
 - and then rose again on the first day of the week after the Father accepted His sacrifice for us...
 - That weekly day was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week!
 - After all, Jesus arose with the authority to establish a new heavens and a new earth, totally renewed in righteousness!
 - We are to rest in His finished work of redemption even more than we rest in His finished work of original creation!
 - There is more to admire, more glory and beauty to see, more wisdom and power, more love and more grace!
 - that the Son of God should bear the curse for us when we had ruined ourselves...
 - And that He should secure a complete pardon for us...
 - And that He should pour out His Spirit on us to give us a new heart and new way and a new walk...

- All of this cries out for celebration—for admiration!
 - It calls for us to rest with Him in the joyful admiration and blessing of this finished work!
- b) Jesus Himself is the One who calls the church together each Lord’s Day to rejoice in this work...
 - In Psalm 22, we have the account of His suffering on the cross...
 - You know, Psalm 22 opens with His desperate cry, “**My God, My God, why have you forsaken me...**”
 - And then it goes into the details of His suffering—everything from the dividing of His garments to the piercing of His hands and feet...
 - But then in verse 21, at the end of the verse, the Psalm changes its tone when Jesus suddenly announces in triumph,
 - “**You have heard!**”
 - After that, the Psalm is one of rejoicing instead of one of anguish!
 - From then on, Jesus is rejoicing that the Father has accepted His sacrifice for His peoples’ sins!
 - And it is at this point that He declares to us that the Father has accepted His offering, and that He calls us to enter into His rest!
 - In verse 22, He says:
 - **Psa 22:22-24: I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. ²³ You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! ²⁴ For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard.**
 - So you see, Jesus is calling the whole church to enter into the joyful rest of His finished work!
 - This is what we are to do each Lord’s Day!
 - Someone might object and say,
 - “but this was not written by Jesus—it was written by David almost 1000 years before Jesus came!”
 - Indeed it was—but in Hebrews, these words are said to belong to Jesus!
 - David was a prophet, and he wrote what Jesus would say by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - He was able to write about what Jesus would say before Jesus said it.

- So that it is the positive side of the resting that we are called to observe—
 - It is not just resting from something, but resting from something in order to rest to something!
 - It is a day in which we are to take a special delight in what God has done for us—in creation and also—now much more—in redemption!
 - But of course if we are to do this, there are some things we are not to do as well...there things that are not compatible with holy resting.
- 2. Keeping the day holy to the LORD means that we must abstain—rest from—our ordinary activities.
 - If you are going to celebrate a day and keep it holy, you obviously can't go down to the office to get caught up on some work...
 - Nor can you watch the super bowl or go to the movies.
 - At creation, God only had need of mentioning the positive side—
 - He only had to tell them that He had set apart the seventh day to rest in His wonderful finished work of creation—that the day was for that purpose.
 - He did not have to tell them not to work or play tennis on the day!
 - Nobody would want to do those things on the day that was set apart to celebrate what God had done!
 - It was a day of feasting, of assembling with others to talk about God's wonderful works, of praying and giving thanks, of singing praises, of hearing His word.
 - Who wants to play dominos or go mow the grass when God has given you a day like that?
 - But after the fall, men's hearts were corrupted and they let lots of other things crowd into the day...
 - So when God issues the fourth commandment when sin is in the world, He has to say,
 - **Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it, you shall not do any work, you nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant...**
 - because in our fallen estate, we want to do other things on God's holy day.
 - It is very sad that such is our condition—but it is...
 - So the LORD has to restrain us from doing our own thing and command us to keep the day holy!
 - It is not unlike what He had to do with marriage.
 - He instituted it that a man would cleave to his wife and the two would be one flesh...
 - But because of sin, when He gave the commandments, He had to say, "You shall not commit adultery."
 - No one would have dreamed of doing that before the fall, but after it, He had to restrain.

- A lot of people today, even in reformed churches, engage in activities and recreations that are not in keeping with the holiness of the day.
 - This was a problem in Israel too—a problem that Isaiah had to confront...or rather the LORD through Isaiah...
 - In Isaiah 58:13-14 he not only prohibits labour but also doing your own pleasures instead of calling the rest appointed by God a delight...He speaks of doing your own pleasures...
 - **Isa 58:13-14: If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, ¹⁴ then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.**
 - Some actually interpret the prohibition to “do your own ways and find your own pleasures and speak your own words” to refer to sinful ways and sinful pleasures and sinful words...
 - but it would be odd for the LORD to forbid those for the Sabbath Day—as if they were okay on other days???
 - No, He is speaking about words and ways that do not comport with the unique purpose of the day.
 - Not of words and works that are sinful on any day.
 - I will be the first to admit that this is not an easy thing to do,
 - but then, neither is it easy to love God with all my heart or to let no corrupt word proceed out of my mouth or to do all things without grumbling and complaining...
 - But just because a command is hard does not mean we should throw it out or change what it actually says.
 - The church has done that with the Sabbath, and now there are efforts to do it with regard to sexual purity...
 - Yes, it is hard to keep the whole day holy—and it might feel liberating to just change the commandment—
 - but that is not true liberty—that is bondage—
 - just as it is bondage for a person to give in to their lusts for same sex partners, concluding that God can’t mean what it sounds like He says.
- But look! Isaiah 58 has something very positive to say...
 - It encourages us that if we keep the Sabbath holy,
 - Verse 14: **Isa 58:14: Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.**
 - And that brings me to my next point about what we are to do with the Sabbath command...

3. You are to seek God's blessing on the Sabbath day.
 - a. We have already seen in Genesis 3:3 that God not only sanctified the day, He also blessed it!
 - And that He did not bless it for its own sake, but He put a blessing in it for us!
 - It is a day given to us to help us rest in the LORD and in His work for us—to delight in Him and in what He has done—
 - both as our Creator and our Redeemer!
 - Jesus pointed this out to Pharisees, who had such a rotten attitude about the Sabbath that they were offended at Jesus for dispensing the blessing of healing on the Sabbath...
 - **Mark 2:27: The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.**
 - It is for our blessing and benefit to keep this day!
 - So that we might enter into the joy of His works for us.
 - b. It is all wrong to look at the day as a day of bondage!
 - It is a special day that God has given us to seek His blessing!
 - If He has put a blessing in it, you ought to seek His blessing.
 - Well what are some of the ways that He will he bless you?
 - He will reveal His glory to you!
 - He will give you comfort in what He had done for you!
 - He will strengthen you to serve Him more faithfully and to fight against temptation!
 - He will give you a greater assurance of His love and mercy!
 - He will help you to understand His will and give you a heart to do it.
- B. Oh my brothers and sisters—consider how good it is to rest in the Father's work.
1. In Hebrews 4, we read that there remains a rest for the people of God!
 - It speaks of the promise of rest that God has given to His people and it urges us not to come short of attaining that promise by unbelief.
 - It encourages us that there is still a Sabbath rest ahead of us...
 2. This relates to fact that we fell away from the perfect rest that God gave to us at creation...
 - We were truly centered in our Creator at creation—resting fully in Him, delighting in Him—and everything about us was beautifully ordered and complete...
 - but you see, because of the fall, we were severed from that rest in the LORD and His goodness—
 - We became all disordered and out of sorts—corrupt and defiled.
 - But Hebrews 4 calls us to return to God as our rest.

- But now, because of the fall, we cannot simply return to Him as our Creator, but we must also rest in Him as our Redeemer!
 - We must rest in the finished work of Christ on the cross!
 - Each Sabbath day, we are to take joyful delight in that wonderful work!
3. And when we do, we will find our centre in God again so that what is disordered will become ordered again...
- Fix yourselves upon the rest that Jesus gives to us!
 - Set your hope in it!
 - Rest in His wisdom to devise a way to save us...
 - Rest in His power to save us!
 - Rest in His completeness!
 - Rest in His grace and mercy and marvellous love!
 - Rest in His purity and justice—His beauty!
 - Rest in Him and be free from your bitterness, your striving, your anger, your lust, your pride, your fear, your worry, your works...
 - Come into His love, His joy, His peace, His hope, His righteousness, His salvation!
 - Enter into the rest of His finished work and that settles everything for you.
 - This is really what it is all about!
 - We are given a day to re-centre our resting place—to delight in what we have in Him—to refresh ourselves with joy in Him as our Creator and Redeemer.
 - See that none of you come short of this rest!