

God-Given Rest (Part 2)

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Introduction

When will the toil be over?

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹² Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you.

¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁴ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵ 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. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Exposition

As I mentioned last week, it is important to remember that the context of God's commands is God's redemption. If you look back at Deuteronomy 5:6, you will read the LORD's words to the His people: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." It is this redemptive act by the LORD that makes the people His people. It is not their obedience to the law that makes them His people. It is God's grace that makes them His people. We have been made God's children because of God's grace to us in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we obey not as people who are attempting to earn out place in God's family, but rather as those who have been given a place in God's family by God's grace.

In addition to this reminder last week, we also looked at the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy, which instructed us to work hard and rest regularly as those who were no longer slave. As two points of application, I explained how the fourth commandment calls us to hard work in the name of God for His glory, and yet, we are also reminded that we **MUST** rest. The command to rest reminds us that we are not design for endless work. Furthermore, we saw that the command to rest freed us to see that God is ultimately the One who is in control and takes care of us.

Conclusion

The Sabbath was given not as a burden for the people, but as a blessing, to provide space in their week for rest, worship, and reflection upon God's work and their own as His people. It was a regular reminder of redemption, which the people desperately needed, given how prone they were to forgetfulness.

The Sabbath command reminded the people that their work was important, but not ultimate. Their identity was found in their relationship to God as His children, not in their abilities to produce. Contrary to the gospel of work that many have fallen prey to within our society, the gospel hinted at in the Sabbath command of Deuteronomy 5:12-15 is that God provides His people with rest so that they might be reminded of their purpose as His people in light of His redemption.

Application

What else might we apply to our lives from these verses in Deuteronomy 5:12-15?

First, God calls us to reflect His character in our work and rest.

In both instances in which the Sabbath command is given in the Old Testament, the people are told to “keep” or “observe” the Sabbath to reflect the actions of God. At one point, it was the reflect God’s rhythm of work and rest as revealed in creation. Thus, when we work and rest, as God did in creation, we are demonstrating something about character of God. At another point, when we provide rest to others as God has provided rest to us, we are reflecting something of God’s mercy in redemption to those under our care and authority. In both cases, through our own rhythms of work and creation with rest, and the way that we relate to others, we reflect His character.

Do you have the responsibility of managing other people? How are you reflecting the character of God toward those who work under you at your job? Are you a harsh manager? Do you want mercy from God but refuse to show it to others? Would those under your supervision describe you as someone who has not only experienced the mercy of God but longs for others to experience it?

What about your relationship to your spouse? Do your expectations have room for rest? Do you make your spouse feel like they never measure up? Like they never work hard enough? Like their work is not as valuable as your work? Does your spouse know that you love them more than you love your work?

What about your relationship to your children? Do your children have time to rest or are you constantly pushing them in one direction or another? Maybe its school or athletics or housework. Do you encourage them to rest in the LORD? Do you encourage them to trust that He will take care of them? Do they know that they are more important to you than your career?

God calls us to reflect His character in the ways that we work and rest.

Second, God has provided everlasting rest for His people.

The Sabbath ultimately points us to the redemption that we possess in Jesus Christ. When Jesus calls the people to rest from their labors in Matthew 11:28-30, it is important that we see that He does not call the people to the observance of a particular day during the week, but to Himself. All who are weary and heavy laden need to come to Jesus for rest. In Jesus, God has provided us with something greater than one day a week to rest from our labor.

Thus, even when we rightly set aside a day each week for rest and worship, we must realize that it ultimately serving the purpose of granting us a foretaste of our heavenly rest. A rhythm of weekly work and rest ought to remind us that a greater, fuller rest is coming. To paraphrase one scholar, the practice of setting aside a day each week for rest and worship is a “foretaste of heaven on earth.”

The author of Hebrews makes a similar point in Hebrews 3:7-4:13 regarding how we are to “strive to enter God’s rest” by believing in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 3:7-4:13 says,

⁷ So, as the Holy Spirit says:

⁸ “Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion,

during the time of testing in the wilderness,
9 where your ancestors tested and tried me,
 though for forty years they saw what I did.
10 That is why I was angry with that generation;
 I said, "Their hearts are always going astray,
 and they have not known my ways."
11 So I declared on oath in my anger,
 "They shall never enter my rest."

¹² See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. ¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. ¹⁵ As has just been said:

 "Today, if you hear his voice,
 do not harden your hearts
 as you did in the rebellion."

¹⁶ Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷ And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

^{4:1} Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. ³ Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

 "So I declared on oath in my anger,
 'They shall never enter my rest.' "

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "On the seventh day God rested from all his works." ⁵ And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."

⁶ Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, ⁷ God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted:

 "Today, if you hear his voice,
 do not harden your hearts."

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

In Hebrews 3-4, we encounter a warning from the author of Hebrews about the danger of drifting away from God. The author issues the warning by quoting a passage of scripture from the Old Testament, specifically, Psalm 95:7-11, which is addressed to the people of Israel.

In the original context of Psalm 95, David addressed the rebellion of the people against God's Word at Meribah, where they tested the Lord and questioned His ability to provide for them. The sin at Meribah in the wilderness was the sin of unbelief. The people of Israel doubted the power of the LORD, and because of their rebellious unbelief and doubt, God did not allow the wilderness generation to enter into His rest in the promised land.

So, now, in Hebrews 3, the author takes Psalm 95 and uses it to warn His predominantly Jewish audience of the dangers of unbelief. The warning comes in Heb 3:12-14, which states, "See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. ¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end." Let's break this down a little further.

The author addresses his readers as brothers and sisters in Christ. He is not assuming that his audience is full of lost sinners, but rather, professing Christians who claim to follow Jesus. In their attempt to follow Jesus, there is a danger that the author must address – the danger of a being "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" which leads to "an evil, unbelieving heart" that "results in people falling away from the living God." This danger is never more clear or present than when such people fail to hear the voice of God and trust Him. That was the setting of the original Psalm.

The people had just seen the great miracles of God no more than 20 days before that made it to Meribah. God had delivered his people from the Egyptian through incredible miracles, yet the people could hardly make it three weeks before they started doubting the provision of God. They refused to hear the voice of God and trust Him, which led to their exclusion from the Promised Land. Their fundamental sin was unbelief in the Word of God.

The author's solution for his audience was for them to "Take Care" of how they hear and receive God's Word. Furthermore, they were to "Exhort One Another Daily" so that they would not be led astray by the deceitfulness of sin. Do you see the implications of his exhortation? Take care how you receive the Word of God and live in close relationship with others who will hold you accountable to your confession of faith.

Let me ask you this, "Is this real for you this morning? Do you take the Word of God seriously? Do you have people in your life that will hold you accountable to the Word of God?" You need such people in your life. Furthermore, you need to take the Word of God seriously! And I get it, some people here are not avid readers, but taking care to receive God's Word is not a matter of loving to read. There are many people who love to read that do not take care to receive God's Word. Taking care to receive God's Word entails reading for sure, but it also entails meditating on God's Word, memorizing God's Word, listening to God's Word as it is preached, and obeying God's Word. This is not a matter of love for reading, this is a matter of love for living as a follower of Christ! This is food for your soul!

What is at risk when we do not take care to receive God's Word and exhort one another daily? We are at risk of falling into unbelief, and as unbelief grows, our hearts harden, and as our hearts harden, we drift away from God, and if we drift away from God, we prove that we were never really one of His children to begin with, as **1 John 2:19** states, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that is might become plain that they all are not of us."

This means that how you live after you make your initial profession of faith in Christ tells a lot about your faith. If you endure to the end, it was because you belonged to Christ. If you do not become hardened, if you do not become led astray by the deceitfulness of sin, if you persevere, it is because you belonged to God from the beginning. However, those who have initial faith and some signs of spiritual life but eventually fall away from God, these are the one who were hardened, who were led astray by sin, and who were never apart of the household of God to begin with, over which Christ himself reigned as the Son (Heb. 3:6).

The author's point in this passage is that just like the Israelites that started out with some initial faith after their deliverance from Egypt, their unbelieving hearts eventually caused them to be excluded from the Promised Land, that is, the rest of God. "Because of their disobedience, God swore in His wrath that they would not enter His rest." So where does that leave us?

The author is warning us to take God's Word seriously and hold one another accountable that we might finish the race that has been set before us! He does not want to see any of us end up like the unbelieving Israelites from the wilderness generation. He does not want us to be like the rocky ground in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-23), which initially "receives the Word of God with joy, but since it has no root, only last a short time, because trouble and persecution comes, leading us to fall away." He doesn't want us to be like the soil among the thorns, which chokes the word, making it unfruitful. The author of Hebrews wants us to be like the good soil, when the seed falls and bears much fruit! For those that bear fruit are the ones who revealed to be the sons and daughters of God's house! They are the ones that enter God's rest, which is the next point in Hebrews 4:1-13.

The problem with the wilderness generation was not that they did not hear or have God's Word, it was that they did not obey and trust God's Word. They were content to be delivered from Egypt, but they did not want to persist in obedience to God. They wanted deliverance without discipleship. They didn't want to have to change anything about their life to pursue faithfulness to God. They wanted a savior but they didn't want a lord, but that is not how God works. God will be our savior and lord, or He will be nothing to us. We do not get the benefits of his salvation apart from faith and repentance, and repentance involves a reorientation of our whole life to the things of God.

Just like the people of Israel had progress to make after their deliverance from Egypt, so we, as Christians, have progress to make as well. We do not simply begin with God; we also persevere with Him by faith! To teach this, the author of Hebrews draws upon the imagery of the people of Israel entering the promised rest. The promised rest was patterned off of God's own rest that we saw in Genesis 2:1-3, where we are told that God entered into His rest after completing the works of creation. As we have already seen, the Sabbath command is also patterned off God's rest. The point is that there is work to complete, progress to be made before we enter God's rest.

God did not rest before He finished his work, and we should not either. We have progress to make in terms of holiness. We have progress to make in terms of our pursuit of Christ and obedience to His commission. When Christ returns, we want to be found working faithfully, "striving to enter into the promised rest" that is offered to us in Himself. We do not want to be meandering around, tossed to and fro by every wind or doctrine. We don't want to coast into our eternal home. We want to run with endurance and passion the race that is set before us. We want to be like David Brainerd, the missionary who proclaimed, "Oh, that I may never loiter on my heavenly journey." We want to run the race to win the prize, and the prize is God's rest!

I believe the point here in this passage is that we need our perspective changed. If we were passionate about entering into God's rest, into His eternal Sabbath, then we would take care to obey and receive His Word! We need our minds reoriented around these great realities because we are so distracted by other things. We are distracted by the rest of the world, by the leisure of the world, by the trinkets of the world.

It is just easier to pick up our phones and check out Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, or Snapchat, or play to some game on our phone, or easier to turn on the television and watch the news or our favorite shows and movies, or pick up our favorite novel or historian, or turn our attention to the stock market, or window shop for the next gadget or tool that we "really need." It is just so much easier to do these things than to pick up the Word of God, read it, pray through it, meditate on it, or listen to it at church. It's just so much easier to make it a habit to forsake the assembly of God's people in favor of a hundred different things.

It is just so easy to not care about eternal things and to be captivated by the all the trinkets that this world has to offer, and that is why we need our perspective changed! We need to become passionate about entering God's rest, which means, we need to be about the completion of the work that He has given us to complete.

And so, some of you are here this morning and you are convicted as you hear this and you are thinking, but I've already wasted so much time being fascinated by the things of this world. I've already spent so much time meandering through life. I've hardly expended any energy "striving to enter into God's rest," why should I even bother starting now? Because this passage tells you to! That is why! Look at how this passage refers to the present – "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart as those in the rebellion!"

Have you heard His Word today? Yes! Have you fully entered into His rest yet? No! Then the author of Hebrews would tell you this morning – "Strive to enter His rest" by taking care to believe His Word, because "we who have believed have entered that rest!" (Heb. 4:3)

What this means for our passage in Deuteronomy 5:12-15 is that while we enjoy rest in part by faith now, the fullness of God's rest is coming. We call this the Already and Not Yet. There is a sense in which we already enjoy aspects of God's rest through faith in Christ, but there is also a sense in which we have not yet enjoyed the fullness of God's rest, thus we are "striving to enter it" by faith. One day all the toil of our labors will cease. One day all the thorns of the curse over our work will be removed. The pain will be gone. The tears will be wiped away. Because then, the eternal Sabbath will be fully here, fully ours as our inheritance, not because the works of our hands have saved us, but because the works of another's hands, the nail-pierced hands of Jesus will be extended to us and welcome us, saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant, enter into your rest."

Thus, we work and rest in this life with a greater expectation of the day when we will fully enter rest that is ours in Christ.

Invitation

Are sure you that you will enter God's rest?