

First Things

Genesis 2:1-3

"God Rested, So You Can Too."

1. WE CAN LEARN FROM A PRACTICAL REST

- A. God exhibited the principle of work
- B. God established the pause from work

2. WE CAN LIVE IN A PRESENT REST

- A. The source of this rest
- B. The substance of this rest

3. WE CAN LOOK TO A PROMISED REST

- A. It is an eternal rest
- B. It is an encouraging rest

1. During one of his fights, legendary boxer, Joe Louis was caught by a left hook that landed him on the mat. Before the referee could even begin the count, Louis jumped back to his feet.
2. From the corner, Louis' trainer yelled at him, saying, "I keep teaching you to take a count when you're down! Why didn't you stay down for nine like I've taught you?" Louis fired back at his corner, "What? And let him get all that rest?!"
3. For some people, rest is almost a four-letter word. They are constantly going, doing, and working at something, without ever pausing to take a rest.
4. People often justify their ceaseless work by pointing to all there is to be done, and all they are able to *get* done by not pausing and resting.
5. Regardless of how much you may accomplish by all labor and no leisure, to live that way is to disregard one of the first principles revealed in the Bible.
6. After the flurry of creative activity that brought the world into existence in only six, short days, the Bible tells us in Genesis 2:2, "*And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.*"
7. The old preacher from North Carolina, Vance Havner once said, "It is true that the devil never takes a vacation, but we are not to follow the devil, but the Lord."ⁱ
8. In the opening verses of Genesis 2, we are pointed to the simple principle of the human need for rest. God's rest at the close of the first week, points us to the rest we should all take every week that God gives us to live.

9. That's not all that we see here, however. When we think about the concept of rest, not just as a physical need, but also a spiritual one, we are pointed by the Holy Spirit to some even greater truths.

10. Think with me about what we can take away from God's original rest in Genesis 2 and the kind of rest He wants us to enjoy as well. First of all, looking at this text, notice that:

I. WE CAN LEARN FROM A PRACTICAL REST

1. Sitting right on the surface of this passage is a very practical truth. God demonstrated at the very beginning the priorities of both work and rest.

2. It seems that men tend to err toward one or the other. Some men only want to rest, and therefore fall into the sin of laziness and slothfulness.

3. Others, as we have mentioned, only want to work, and they tend fall into the temptation of forgetting what God established for us after the creation.

4. Both of those failures are countered by this passage of Scripture. Notice this with me. We see here that at the close of creation:

A. God exhibited the principle of work

1. Genesis chapter one describes how over the course of six consecutive days, God created the heavens, the earth, and all that exists within them.

2. Genesis 2:1 says, "*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.*"

3. Have you ever considered the fact that God did not really *need* six days to do all of this? In reality, God could have done all of it in an instant, with one single command.

4. A.W. Pink says, "Had He so pleased, all could have been done in one day, yea, in a moment!" He goes on to explain why God did not do it that way. Pink says, "Obviously it was for the purpose of teaching *us*."ⁱⁱⁱ

5. In other words, God was exhibiting for us what we were to do with the lives He had given us. We were to work - to employ ourselves in useful and creative things.

6. In Exodus 20, where the Ten Commandments are given, verse 9 says, "*Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work.*" Verse 11 then says, "*For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is...*"

7. In the New Testament, the importance of work and labor is restated. The Apostle Paul told the believers in the city of Thessalonica, "...if any would not work, neither should he eat." (II Thessalonians 3:10)
8. Contrary to how you may feel on some Monday mornings, work is not a part of the curse that came from Adam and Eve's sin.
9. God Himself exhibited the principle of work for us by His work in the creation. Notice also, however, God not only worked, He also rested.
10. Consider not only that God exhibited the principle of work, but we see also that:

B. God established the pause from work

1. Look again at verse 2. It says that God, "...rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made." Take note of that word "rested".
2. It is translated from the Hebrew word *shabat*, and gives us our English word "Sabbath". The word simply means to cease, or to pause.
3. The idea is *not* that God was tired or worn out from his busy week. Isaiah 40:28 says, "...the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?"
4. God's rest on the seventh day was not because He needed rest. No, it was a pause from His work because He had completed it and it was sufficient.
5. Even though your work and mine may never seem like it is totally finished, we still must follow the example God has set for us. Therefore, each week there ought to be a pause - a rest from our physical work.
6. This rest in Genesis 2 was not for God's benefit; it was for ours. God established for us the principle of the Sabbath so that we could get the rest that we need to continue our work in the week that is to come.
7. An ancient Greek proverb says, "You will break the bow if you keep it always bent." Likewise, your body was not designed to work indefinitely, without any pause or rest.
8. A little girl asked her mother why her father had to bring home a briefcase full of papers each night. The mother explained that the father just had so much to do that he couldn't get it all done at the office.
9. The little girl thought for a moment, and then she asked, "Well then, why don't they just put him in a slower group?"

10. Some folks would benefit from being put in a slower group, and learning how to rest when it is time to rest.

11. God did not need the rest, but He knew that we would, and so He took a rest in order to establish the concept of the pause from work.

12. That is the simplest and clearest lesson we draw from this passage at the opening of Genesis chapter 2. However, there is another truth that arises as we consider this idea of rest.

13. As we look at this text, we see not only that *we can learn from a practical rest*, but consider also secondly that:

II. WE CAN LIVE IN A PRESENT REST

1. The Old Testament is incomplete without the New Testament. The New Testament serves to interpret the truth of the Old Testament for those who are followers of Christ.

2. In Hebrews chapter 4, we find a sort of commentary on this idea of rest. In the fourth verse of that chapter, the writer even refers to our text in Genesis 2.

3. Hebrews 4:4 says, *"For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works."*

4. In Hebrews 4, the Word of God talks about a rest that is available to the people of God; a rest that is something more than just a break on the weekend.

5. There is a sense in which those who have believed the gospel are brought into a rest that is not just on Saturday or Sunday, but *everyday*.

6. Let me show you what I mean. Considering Genesis 2, in light of what is taught in Hebrews chapter 4, we are pointed to another rest, and specifically:

A. The source of this rest

1. Genesis 2 tells us that after six days of work, God rested on the seventh day. Verse 3 says, *"And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."*

2. Further on in the Old Testament, as God began to call out His people, Israel, He called upon them to remember this Sabbath, and to keep it holy, by honoring the principle of resting from labor.

3. When we come to Hebrews 4, the writer contends that there is a *greater* rest that God wants to give His people, and it is not just a particular day.
4. He contends that the true rest is not found in observing and keeping a certain day. He says in Hebrews 4:3, "*For we which have believed do enter into rest...*"
5. In other words, by believing and exercising faith, we can enter to a real, spiritual rest, a rest that is merely pictured and typified by the Sabbath rest.
6. To understand this, remember what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28. He said, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"
7. The real source of real rest is Jesus Christ. The Sabbath day points us to Him who was the Lord of the Sabbath.
8. There is a physical, practical rest that every human being needs. While that physical rest is important for our bodies, it is nothing compared to the spiritual rest that is needed for our souls.
9. Some of you are spiritually tired and weary. You are working hard to try to make things right in your heart and soul, but it is a work you will never finish.
10. The good news is, hanging on the cross 2,000 years ago, while dying for your sins, the Lord Jesus lifted His voice and cried, "It is finished!"
11. The rest your soul needs is found in Him and what He has already done, not in six days, but in six hours, one day, so many years ago.
12. We can live in a present spiritual rest when we come to Jesus, the source of this rest. Understanding that, consider also:

B. The substance of this rest

1. When we recognize that Jesus offers us a rest, one that surpasses even the weekly rest God has prescribed for us, the question then arises, what is the rest *from*? What kind of rest is it?
2. Look again at the text in Genesis 2. Verse 2 says that God, "*...rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.*"
3. In Hebrews 4:10, we are told that those who enter into the spiritual rest that God offers through Christ, have also ceased from their own works.

4. There is a sense in which that verse applies to eternity and the glory of heaven, as we will see in a moment, but it also describes what happens to a person who comes to faith in Christ.

5. Think about what we learn in the book of Romans. In the fourth chapter, Paul is talking about the fact that Abraham was justified by his faith and not by his works.

6. He says in Romans 4:4-5, "*Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*"

7. There are billions of people in the world, many of them in false religions, and many of them who think they are Christians, who live every day trying to do enough good works to get them into heaven.

8. The reality is that all the good works of all the people in the world combined would not be enough to save a single man from the punishment for sin that he deserves.

9. According to the prophet Isaiah, man's righteousness is nothing but dirty, filthy rags compared to the holiness of God. (Isaiah 64:6)

10. The gospel says that Jesus Christ alone was righteous and good, and yet He offered His good works to us who didn't have any of our own, when He gave up His life on the cross.

11. When we believe the gospel and receive Christ's righteousness in the place of our sinfulness, all of sudden, we no longer have to work to try to earn our salvation.

12. In other words, we are given *a rest* from the work of trying to save ourselves. We can rest in our acceptance with God because of Jesus Christ.

In 1891, a woman by the name of Eliza Hewitt penned the words of a hymn. It says:

*My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device or creed;
I trust the ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead*

*I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me,*

13. There is a present rest in which we can live every single day. We enter that rest when we rest our faith upon Jesus, and what He did for us on the cross.

14. There is one more aspect of this rest that we should consider when we look at God's rest in Genesis 2. We are mindful not only that *we can learn from a practical rest, and we can live in a present rest*, but consider also that:

III. WE CAN LOOK TO A PROMISED REST

1. In Genesis 2, we are told that God set aside a certain day as a day of rest. He "sanctified" it, as verse 3 says.

2. When we come to the book of Hebrews, in the fourth chapter, the writer indicates that the Sabbath day was not the ultimate rest that God intended to give His people. It was just a picture and prediction of that ultimate rest.

3. Then, in verse 9 of Hebrews 4, it makes an important statement. It says, "*There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*"

4. In that verse, the writer of Hebrews uses the specific word for "Sabbath" to refer to the rest that is still to come for God's people.

5. That is why the *ESV* translates verse 9 this way: "...there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God."

6. Just as God took a Sabbath rest at the end of Creation, and ceased from His works, there is also a rest that is yet to come for those of us who are His people in Christ.

7. In Revelation 14:13, we read, "*And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours...*"

8. There is a sense in which Jesus gives us a rest in this present life. However, the ultimate and final rest will come in eternity, in the glory that God has prepared for those who love Him.

9. Think about this promised rest to which we look forward today. First of all:

A. It is an eternal rest

1. Back in Genesis 2, verse 3 says that God blessed the seventh day, "*...because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.*"

2. The writer of Hebrews says in chapter 4, verse 3, that God's works "*...were finished from the foundation of the world.*"
3. The idea is that God's work was truly and completely finished at the foundation of the world. We talk of God's work in this day and at this hour, but there is a sense in which in the plan and foreknowledge of God, it is already done.
4. You could say that God is *still* resting from His original work. His Sabbath has not ended.
5. If we compare God's Sabbath rest in Genesis 2, with the Sabbath rest He has promised for His people, we are reminded that it will be an eternal, unending rest.
6. Heaven will not be a mere break in the action. We will not go there just on a sort of extended vacation.
7. When we get to heaven, we will spend eternity with Christ, and our labors and efforts in this life will be over forever.
8. Recently, I overheard someone asking a retired fellow what he did with all his time since he had retired.
9. With a sort of exhausted reply, he said, "Oh, my wife seems to find plenty for me to do."
10. We may never, truly retire from our labors in this life. However, there is coming a day when we *will* rest completely from all our toil and labor.
11. The rest that is to come will not only be an eternal rest, but consider also that:

B. It is an encouraging rest

1. There are times as we seek to serve the Lord and live for Him in these days that we grow weary of the struggle and weak from the battle.
2. I am sure that there have been points in the journey that you wondered if you were going to make it, and thought you might give up before you got home.
3. In those moments of weariness and weakness, the thought of heaven and eternal rest serves as a sort of motivation for us to carry on.
4. In Romans 8:18, Paul had eternal rest in mind when he said, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*"

5. Likewise, I imagine he was thinking about heaven when He wrote in II Corinthians 4:17, *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."*

6. I had a grandmother who died when she was only 57 years-old. She was a godly woman who loved Jesus, and talked about the things of God incessantly.

7. Looking back, I remember that the last few years of her life, she talked about heaven *all* the time. It seemed to always be on her mind.

8. As a teenager, all that talk about heaven seemed a little spooky and mystical to me. I believed in heaven too, but it wasn't as real to me as it was to her.

9. I now know the reason why. To carry over the analogy of Genesis 2, she was a lot closer to her Sabbath rest than I was. I was still on the first day of my work. She was closer to her last.

10. The further we go in our work for the Lord, the more heaven becomes an encouragement to keep going until we get the rest God has promised to us.

1. God rested on the seventh day, not because He needed it, but because He knew we would.

2. His rest points us to the practical need we all have for a pause and rest in our weekly lives. The law of the Sabbath may not be binding for us, but the principle of it still applies.

3. Even more than a weekly, physical rest, this passage, and its counterpart in Hebrews 4, points us to the spiritual and eternal rest we can have through Jesus Christ.

4. Some of you are physically tired. Some of you are spiritually tired. Either way, you need to know that God rested, so you can too.

5. Again, I point you to the words of Jesus. *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."*

ⁱ Hester, Dennis J., The Vance Havner Quotebook, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1986), p. 247

ⁱⁱ Pink, A.W., An Exposition of Hebrews, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003), p. 204