KING'S CHURCH EDINBURGH (http://kingschurchedinburgh.co.uk/)

Resting and Rejoicing

Read Mark 2:23-3:6

Jesus tells us that the Sabbath isn't a burden to be carried but a gift to be received (Mark 2:27, Exodus 16:29). We're first told about it when God rests after His work of creation, which is also the first full day of human existence (Genesis 2:2-3) and it is one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:9-11, Deuteronomy 5:15). He is not like Pharoah (and our culture), always demanding more from us: He doesn't need or want us to work seven days a week. After being mentioned as major source of controversy in the gospels, Sabbath isn't a subject that receives much attention in the rest of the New Testament (Matthew 12:1-14, Mark 2:23-3:6, Luke 6:1-11, 13:10-17, John 5:1-18, Acts 20:7, Romans 14:5-6, Colossians 2:16-17, Hebrews 4:9-10, Revelation 1:10).

I think this makes keeping the Sabbath not a matter of necessity but of wisdom. It's also a way that God's people show themselves distinct in an always-on culture, and how we can show what God is like. Two principles summarise how we should practice it: rest and rejoicing.

Sunday is the best day because it's when our church worships God together – that gives definition and shape to the rest of your Sabbath. Some of us have to work on a Sunday and what matters most is the rhythm of one day in seven, though having the same day each week will help you build a habit.

Rest

This means to stop from most things, especially what you do for provision and what you do for significance. Abraham Heschel suggested that the person who works with their mind should Sabbath with their hands, the person who works with their hands

should Sabbath with their mind. The point is that the needs and wants of life are put on hold.

Don't swap a work to-do list for a home to-do list: the Commandment says, "six days shall you labour and do all your work". God is asking us to believe not only that there are enough hours in the day, but there are enough hours in six days of the week! I think this is a similar faith step to believing that you're better off giving away some of the money you have.

This requires preparation, using the other six days wisely and fruitfully, and being disciplined about not going near work – especially if you work in the home and you have a smartphone with apps for work, rest, and other things!

Rejoice

Psalm 92 is "A song for the Sabbath" and starts with praise to God for what He has done. We should spend this day rejoicing in God. By not doing loads of the things we do the rest of the week, we have time to focus on Him. We can read His word more attentively and really meditate on it. We can sing songs about Him. We can talk with Him, setting aside the request prayers that fill the rest of the week for more conversational questions and reflections.

God has given us so many other ways to see and experience Him through His creation, or His creatures' creativity. Other people should be involved in this. Don't just do nice things: this day is about increasing our awareness of God and our affection for Him.

Remember that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). He launched public ministry on Sabbath, declaring freedom for captives – which is what we all are without Him (Luke 4:16-19). After doing His great work on the cross, He "rested" in the tomb on Easter Saturday, the Sabbath. So He says to us in Matthew 11:28-30, The Message: "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Resources for further exploration

- Timothy Keller, "Wisdom and Sabbath Rest (https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/wisdom-and-sabbath-rest)".
- The Bible Project have produced a video (and a series of podcasts) aboutSabbath (https://thebibleproject.com/explore/what-is-the-sabbath/).
- Newspaper article (https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/dec/22/the-entertainer-tough-year-ruin-toy-chains-christmas-gary-grant) about The Entertainer toyshop being closed on Sundays.
- Sabbath As Resistance by Walter Brueggemann (I don't agree with everything Brueggemann writes but I find his provocations really helpful)
- The Rest of God by Mark Buchanan (slightly too much about doing nice things but still very helpful)
- There are sections about the Sabbath in The Common Rule by Justin Whitmel Earley, and The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry and Garden City, both by John Mark Comer.

Questions for small group discussion

- What was your practice of Sabbath like prior to Luke's preach?
- What does it tell us about God that He gives us a Sabbath?
- Why do you think Sabbath-keeping isn't given much prominence in the New Testament, apart from in the gospels?
- What aspects of your personality and what aspects of your life situation will make it a challenge for you to have a Sabbath rest?
- What practical steps do you want to take to start having a Sabbath?
- What do you think about not causing anyone else to work on the Sabbath (as per Exodus 20:10, even though it isn't observed by most people in our nation)?
- How can you as a small group encourage one another to Sabbath?
- How would you explain Sabbath to someone who wasn't a Christian?

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