



REST AREA

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This morning is our third installment of the Big Picture. We're working our way through the beginning of Genesis, looking at some of the large concepts it presents about God and humanity. So far we've looked at God as creator of the universe and what that means for us today. We've also looked at the idea of the image of God being in each person. That image was interrupted by sin, but Jesus gave us a way to have it restored and put right again.

In both messages, I talked about God having purpose in what he did. There was a reason he made creation and there was a reason he made humanity in his own image. This morning we're going to get a little more insight into that purpose.

We'll pick up right at the end of where we left off in Genesis chapter 1.

Genesis 1:31-2:3

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning -- the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Sometime in the 1200s, a Bible professor in Paris named Stephen Langton first added chapters and verses to the Bible. Prior to that time, each book of the Bible was just one continuous document – there were no divisions. Professor Langton was writing a commentary on the Bible, and he wanted to make it easier for his readers to find their way around the sections of Scripture he was talking about, so he came up with what he thought were the most logical breaks and inserted them. We've kept his system in place ever since. The chapters and verses we see are the same ones you would have seen in a Bible six or seven hundred years ago.

Sometimes the divisions are really helpful, and sometimes they get in the way. Here's one place where I think they get in the way. Chapter one of Genesis ends right after the sixth day. "There was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day." The end, amen.

Because that's the conclusion of God's creative process, it seems like as natural of a break as any. But when you insert a break there, it interrupts the flow of the story. It turns the seventh day into an afterthought. It reads like an epilogue at the end of the book. The plot's all wrapped up and the author adds one final note: "After God made everything, he took a break."

That's how I have usually interpreted the story. But what if that's not the way to read it? What happens if you read this section without that break? Suddenly the seventh day becomes the peak of the story – not the sixth day. All of creation is moving in a crescendo toward God's rest. It makes the seventh day the goal of everything that's come before it.

Now hang with me for a minute. I realize that idea might sound ridiculous at first, that God created in order to rest. And you may think it's exaggerating to make that big of a deal out of a chapter break. BUT -- it's the difference between people being the focus of the story or God being the focus. If we end with the creation of humanity, we're the high point of the universe. If we end with the rest of God the following day, he takes center stage. And since our premise has been that the Bible is primarily about revealing God, that seems a better fit.

It was the seventh day that God blessed. It was the seventh day God called holy. The other days all had "an evening and a morning," but the seventh days just continues on into the future.

If we look at when God gave the 10 commandments, we see this day again singled out as the 4th commandment:

Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 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 manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The whole reason for instituting that particular command was to commemorate what God had done on the seventh day. None of the other days got their own commandment. It was his rest rather than his work that was singled out.

I was in the car on Friday and there was this in-depth interview on the radio with some professor, talking about NASA's Messenger probe that's flying around Mercury. It's a major scientific achievement, but I just could not bring myself to care. And it was on the radio so there weren't even any pictures to help. It was good information that had no bearing whatsoever on my life. Except that I can mention it to you this morning.

And right about now, as you're hearing me talk about God's rest, I might as well be talking about Mars. Some of you are thinking, "Big whoop-dee-doo. What does this have to do with me?" We'll get to that connection, I promise. But in order for this idea to be significant, we first have to look a little more closely at what we mean by God's rest.

In fact, let's start with what we DON'T mean. Saying God rested on the seventh day does not mean

God was worn out. Do you remember Tinkerbell from Peter Pan? Our family recently finished reading the third book in a series that gives the whole back story on Peter Pan and Tinkerbell. So I'm a bit of an expert on her now. Tink had this amazing energy and ability to fly. She was this little glowing light who would sprinkle pixie dust everywhere and create magic. The thing was, though, every time she expended a big burst of energy, every time she put her magic to use, she would fall over in a heap exhausted. It absolutely depleted her.

Have you ever worked on a project that's so physically or mentally taxing that you don't want to stop for a minute and sit down on the couch because you're afraid you'll never get back up? Hard work for us means becoming tired. We NEED rest so our bodies and minds can regain some strength.

We can project our own need on to God and conclude that after working six days straight, he was exhausted. We think of him like Tinkerbell – doing all that magic and wearing himself out. But the Bible says that's not it at all.

Isaiah 40:28

*The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary...*

Creation did not knock him out. If anything, the act of creating generates more energy. Talk to any artistic type person who enjoys painting or writing or working with wood and they will tell you that the creative process is something that feeds them. It's a source of joy and a high rather than a low.

By the time God finished making the universe, he was feeling good about it – not wiped out. God's idea of rest, then, must come from somewhere else, because it wasn't based on need.

Another misconception we can have about God's rest is that

God was punching out for the day. He's put in his time. I was talking with Laura a couple weeks ago about this. The analogy that's sometimes used is that God is a watchmaker and the universe is like a big watch. God put it together and wound it up, then stepped back to let it run.

We can interpret God's rest as him saying to Adam, "Well, my work here is done. You're in charge of the place. Best of luck to you. I'll be napping over in the Milky Way if you need me." Rest then becomes some sort of disengagement, where God steps back from what he's made.

That's not in keeping with Scripture, either. God does not remove himself from creation but is involved in it intimately. He is not only the one who made us, he's the one who sustains us.

Acts 17:27-28

...He is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'

He's right here. If rest meant him stepping away, that would be the end of everything. We would no longer be here. The universe cannot bear to have God punch out.

Those two ideas -- God wearing out and God punching out -- come more from our experience than from God's character. We're the ones who wear out. We're the ones who have to step away from our work and unplug every once in a while. And that's the way we're made. That's healthy for us. But we tend to project our own needs on God, rather than letting his character define what rest looks like for him.

So let's begin to rethink the idea of rest, starting with the Genesis text itself. The word used there for rest is the word we get Sabbath from. It simply means to stop. God's creating work was done, so he stopped. That phase of bringing the universe into existence was over, and so he quit.

God's rest here meant he was at a point of **completion**. He was finished because the project was done. There was a level of satisfaction. Kids understand this concept. When they sit down to draw a picture, there's nobody telling them what it's supposed to look like. They're the only ones who know when it's done, because it has either become what they envisioned or it's not quite there yet. I don't know how many times one of my kids have shown me a drawing and said, "I'm not quite done with it yet." How do they know that? It looks good to me. "Finished" is defined by them.

God had reached a point with creation that it was where he wanted it and there was no need to add more. It was done, so he could stop. Rest meant completion.

That tells us what he stopped doing, but that doesn't tell us what he started doing. We get a glimpse of that from the passage we looked at in Exodus. Let's take a quick look at it again:

Exodus 20:8-11

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Initially it looks just like what we read in Genesis. The English translation is the same – “he rested.” But in the original Hebrew, the author uses a totally different word for rest that has a different connotation. It’s not a “stop working” word like Sabbath – it’s a word for settling in or remaining. It’s a “make yourself at home” or “get comfortable” kind of word. God rested because he had created a space for himself in which he could **settle in** and stay.

I keep thinking about the Parks family. They did a major remodel of their house last year. Major as in moving-out-of-the-house-and-living-in-a-trailer-for-months kind of remodel. Hugely uprooting and unsettling. Talk to any member of their family and they’ll tell you how stressful that was and how glad they are to be back in their own house now. They couldn’t wait for the time they would be able to settle in again. Your home is your place of equilibrium. We have a built in need for that sense of stability and belonging. It’s the idea of sanctuary.

God is certainly not needy for that in the way we are, but I think this sheds some light on why day seven is the goal of the first six days. If it was just a day God could take a break, that wouldn’t make any sense. But if it was the day for God to settle in and enjoy what he had made for himself, then it makes complete sense. In making the universe, God was creating a sanctuary for himself. It is his house, or temple.

Isaiah 66:1-2

*This is what the LORD says:
"Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
Where is the house you will build for me?
Where will my resting place be?
Has not my hand made all these things,
and so they came into being?"
declares the LORD.*

The world is God’s armchair. He is at home, in control and settled in.

The Psalms also describe the entire universe as if it is God’s house or temple.

Psalms 104:2-3

*He wraps himself in light as with a garment;
he stretches out the heavens like a tent
and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.*

God built this place for himself with the desire to inhabit it. His rest includes a sense of completion and a sense of settling in.

When our house is a mess, Karin can’t settle. It’s not restful to her when things are out of order. Personally, I have no problem with clutter. Here’s a classic scenario at our house:

I'll be sitting down with my feet up, ready to relax, and I'll say "Hey sweetie, come sit down." And she'll say, "I just have a few more things to put away." Either laundry needs folding, dishes need to be washed or toys need to be put away. Then I'm not settled because she's not settled. It's not that I don't want to be helpful -- I just don't even see the mess without her pointing it out. Something can be sitting in the middle of the stairs and I will go around the edge of it or skip a stair to step over it. I will even go so far as to push it to one side with my foot. But I still don't see it. It's like some kind of gift I've been given.

Karin can rest easier after a little housekeeping has taken place. I think God shares her heart for order. After creating the world, he knew it would take care to keep it restful. And part of what characterizes his rest is **maintenance**.

The Garden of Eden was Paradise at the heart of creation, the sacred ground where God would walk and talk with the people he had made. It was the epitome of a restful, beautiful place. You could consider it the center of the created order, because that was where God's presence was focused. What did God do there? Listen to some verses from a little later in Genesis 2:

Genesis 2:8-9, 15

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground -- trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food... The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Combine that with what God told Adam and Eve in chapter 1:

Genesis 1:28

Fill the earth and subdue it.

People have been invited into God's rest to join with him in maintaining it. Contrary to what you may have thought, work is not the result of sin getting into the world. God gave us work as a gift. Our role in the world is to help care for it and keep it. Adam and Eve were to "fill" the earth. They were asked to add to what God had already made, contributing life and beauty to the world. They were asked to "subdue it" – bring it under control. That suggests that certain aspects of creation, if left to their own, would grow wild. Then they were told to "work it", which would mean cultivating it and helping it be productive. He was also to "take care of it", and that would include guarding it and keeping it clean. Those are tasks that help life function smoothly.

Those four categories – filling, subduing, working and caring – characterize almost all human efforts. When you think about your job in those terms, you can begin to see how it can be contributing to some small piece of the universe running smoothly. If you're not doing your job well, something breaks down a little – whether you're on an assembly line, on the phone or working at home. All kinds of different tasks battle general deterioration in the world – in relationships, in buildings or society. You're either

contributing something new and good to help fill the world, or you're doing something to bring control and order, or increase productivity or provide care and security.

If the universe is God's temple, than no matter what your work is, as long as it is moral and ethical, it is done in the service of God. He values what you do.

Colossians 3:23-24

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

People will say, "If only I didn't have to work, I could serve God more." That's missing out on this fundamental point. I firmly believe that I am no more important to God now that I'm a pastor than I was when I was in advertising for all those years. Your work has worth, not because it is inherently spiritual but because it was assigned by God as a way to help in some small way toward the general well being of the universe. If you make someone's life easier by doing your job well, it's contributing .

Everything we do has an effect on God's place of rest, his sanctuary. No matter who we are, we can think of ourselves as priests. In fact, if you look at the assignments God gives to Adam in the Garden of Eden – to work it and take care of it – those are the same types of words used later to describe what the priests did in the physical temple. There is no distinction between their holy work and Adam's "hands in the dirt" work.

So as we consider God's rest, we can find three elements within it: God finishing his work, God settling in, and God asking people to join him in maintaining it and preserving it.

Now I need to pause for a minute because I don't want to make God sound like Emperor Cuzco from the Emperor's New Groove. Remember him? He was completely self absorbed and made everyone else work hard so he could have his leisurely life.

You might be thinking this whole notion of God's rest sounds great for God and lousy for us. Like we do all the work so he can take it easy. But God isn't some selfish dictator recruiting us into slave labor. We already said that his rest isn't about him disengaging from the world. And the work we do can really be seen as him offering us a chance to participate in his rest.

Let's expand on that a bit, because it's important for a fuller understanding of what God's rest is all about. I mentioned God giving a priest-like role to Adam. His work in the Garden of Eden was described in similar terms to the jobs the priests had who took care of the temple in Jerusalem. And that's no coincidence, because the Bible talks about the temple building like it's a miniature version of the universe. Just like creation, the temple was seen as where God rests.

John Walton wrote, "...rest is the principal function of a temple, and a temple is always where deity finds rest."

Temple and rest are linked. Psalm 132 highlights this.

Psalm 132:13-16

*For the LORD has chosen Zion,
he has desired it for his dwelling:
"This is my resting place for ever and ever;
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it —
I will bless her with abundant provisions;
her poor will I satisfy with food.
I will clothe her priests with salvation,
and her saints will ever sing for joy."*

The temple is where God rested, and look who benefits from it: God's people. He promises all these blessings that flow out of his rest. Let's break them down quickly:

A promise to be present

"Here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it," God says. God's people reap the benefit of a God who is close at hand, not far away. His rest meant that he was accessible and involved in daily life.

A promise to provide

Then he said, "I will bless her with abundant provisions." Where God rests, God supplies. His people will not be forgotten or left to fend for themselves.

A promise to feed

"Her poor will I satisfy with food." This is along the lines of providing, but it is also nourishing. God feeds into his people so they grow and thrive.

A promise to forgive

"I will clothe her priests with salvation." God's rest is a place to find forgiveness. We're set free. He cleans us up and sets us on a new path.

A promise to bring joy

"Her saints will ever sing for joy." I love that line. When we enter God's rest, we find unending joy. Not that everything in life is now happy, but there's an undercurrent of a song that gives hope a backbone, a deeper level of assurance that things will be okay in the long run.

These are all promises that God himself says are true about his rest.

And here's where it all begins to come home. We've gone from the universe as God's temple to the building as God's temple, but we wouldn't have finished the journey if we didn't get to the fact that you and I are now God's temple. Paul says it straight out:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God himself is present in you? No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple, you can be sure of that. God's temple is sacred -- and you, remember, are the temple.

Get this: **Our hearts are to be God's resting place.** That's what this is really all about. Remember the components we identified as being part of God's rest? First it included a sense of completion, where God was done with his work.

That is absolutely what happened on the cross:

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

The hard work of salvation, of creating a way to make our hearts his home has been done. It's not about us – it's about God achieving what he set out to do. To quote my favorite Scottish preacher, P.T. Forsyth again, "The feeble gospel says 'You may be forgiven.' The mighty gospel says, 'God has redeemed.'" He has finished the job.

Then there is God's settling in. God graciously allows us to choose whether or not want him to make our hearts his resting place.

Revelation 3:20-21

Look at me. I stand at the door. I knock. If you hear me call and open the door, I'll come right in and sit down to supper with you.

When we open the door, he settles in. If you've never opened the door to Christ, he is there knocking and waiting. All it takes is your invitation, your response to his knock, and he'll move in immediately.

The big question then is this: Is my heart a place where God can rest? Just like God invited humanity to be part of caring for the world and caring for the temple building, he asks us to care for the state of our hearts as well. There is maintenance work that needs doing to preserve the order of what's inside us.

Think back to Adam's four tasks in light of your own life and ask:

What am I filling my heart with?

What about my life needs to be subdued, or brought under control?

What needs to be cultivated and grown?

What needs to be guarded and cared for?

As our hearts become more and more of a resting place, all God's promises will begin flooding through: His presence. His provision. His feeding. His forgiveness. And his joy.

His rest spills over to our benefit. When we pursue his rest, we find the rest we've been wanting for ourselves.

Lauren Detrich is a young woman who was born with cystic fibrosis. She goes by Lo, because in one of her many health crises, a friend sent her the verse from Matthew that says, "And LO, I am with you always." So she made it personal and it stuck.

If you don't know much about the disease, cystic fibrosis just destroys your lungs, filling them up with a sticky mucous and making it impossible to breathe. Lo's story has been written up in a book by her parents. She also made headlines when she had a double lung transplant that looked promising. But her body eventually rejected those lungs and Lo had to have a second lung transplant. She's still recovering from that surgery.

Lo's life has been one wave of pain and pills after another. From the time she was an infant, survival has been a struggle. But here's what she wrote at one point in the middle of it all:

I had the most wonderful life of anybody I have ever known, yet God has given me another one. I want to be a sanctuary for Him to shine through. If you see me or my family smiling and it makes you want to give us a hug, it's because God is smiling through us.

"I want to be a sanctuary for him." Most people in Lo's spot would be looking for their own sanctuary, their own safe haven of rest where they could find relief. But it's in God's rest that we find our own. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you." Seek first to be God's resting place, and all his promises will be added to you. His presence. His provision. His feeding. His forgiveness. And his joy.

Do you want to be a sanctuary? Paul wrote these words to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 3:17

And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love.

That's my prayer for us as well – that Christ will be more and more at home, more and more at rest in our hearts, and that we in turn will be more and more at rest in his love.