



God Rested

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #4

Genesis 1:31-2:3

David Sunday

January 25, 2015

“I believe on the name of the Son of God. Therefore, I am in Him, having redemption through His blood and life by His Spirit. He is in me, and all fullness is in Him. To Him I belong by purchase, conquest and self-surrender. To me, He belongs for all my hourly need. There is no cloud between my Lord and me. There is no difficulty, outward or inward, which He is not ready to meet in me today. The Lord is my keeper. Amen.” (*Thoughts On Union With Christ* by Bishop Handley Moule)

I begin many days with that affirmation of faith. The more I say it, the more it helps me to rest and rejoice in the fullness of what it means to be united in Christ. Be encouraged that He is your keeper. He is holding you fast.

Please turn in our Bible to Genesis and let's read 1:31-2:3 together. Let's worship God as we hear His Word together.

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Let's pray for a minute.

O God, You tell us through Your prophet, Isaiah, “In returning and in rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in confidence and trust shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15). Lord, we are often unwilling to return to You, to rest in You or to place our quiet hope and confidence in You. Lord, too often we trust in our own resources, looking to our own strength and letting our

own anxieties and selfish ambition rule us. We ask, Lord, as You are a God Who is exalted and waits on high, have mercy upon us. We ask You to have mercy upon us today and to continue Your work of transformation in us. For those who have not yet rested in Christ, we pray that You would bring them to that rest today. For all of us who have rested in You, we pray that You would transform us more and more, making us a people who rely on Your fullness and trust not in our own strength. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The story is told about a gardener, a management consultant and a politician who got together and had a conversation. It started to get a little heated when they turned to the creation story.

The gardener said, "Genesis tells us God brought forth plants on the third day. That means my profession is the best."

"Well, yes," said the management consultant, "but it also says God brought order out of chaos on the first day. That makes my job as manager the best profession."

"Ah," said the politician with a twinkle in his eye, "but who created the chaos?"

You have to think about that one for a little bit, but I think it's pretty funny. It tells us something about ourselves. We are always trying to prove that we are worth something by what we do through our accomplishments and performances. But every day, we must wake up and do it all over again. Even when the people around us are satisfied that we are doing a good job and even when we have a small sense of accomplishment, we are worried if we are going to drop the ball tomorrow. "Am I going to be able to keep up with the pack? How am I going to sustain this?" We are restless inside.

We cannot rest because we feel like we need to justify our own existence. We are plagued with this eternal murmur of self-reproach that one man has talked about. But God rested. Our God rested at the end of His work and He invites us to enter into His rest. What does it look like to worship a God Who rests?

That is what I want us to think about today by looking at three simple points:

1. God rested.
2. Why are we restless?
3. God invites us to enter into His rest.

God Rested

In Genesis 2:2, we see that God rested on the seventh day. Everything God did in creation built toward this climax, the final day and the grand finale. It is not an afterthought, an accident or blank space. It stands out as unique. If you read the creation story, you will notice that every other day has a corresponding pair. Genesis 1:2 tells us that the earth was formless and without

void when God did His work of creation. So, in days one through three, God created form and structure because He is the Great Architect. On days four through six, God filled the void. He filled the emptiness and the form He had created in parallel patterns:

- On day one, God created form—light and darkness. On day four, God filled that form with the sun, moon and stars.
- On day two, God created land and sea. On day five, He filled them with birds and sea creatures.
- On day three, God created vegetation. On day six, He created humans and animals to be sustained by that vegetation.
- But day seven stands alone. There is no pair with day seven.

The number seven—a symbol of perfection—is repeated three times. We see the number seven twice in verse two and once in verse three. Another interesting and notable fact is that Moses wrote 2:1-3 with seven Hebrew words in each verse. Seven represents completeness.

This is the perfect day. It is a day that has no refrain. Every other day in creation contains what we see at the end of verse 31: *“And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”* But we don’t see that in verse seven. It is as if this is the day that has no end. This is what creation has been heading toward.

Hebrews 4 tells us that God rested from His works, and that rest remains. There are many questions we could ask about day seven of creation, but I want to start with the most important question: What does this passage teach us about God? That is always the most important question when we study the Bible. What are we to learn about God here?

The first thing we learn is that He is a God Who finishes His work. He is not resting because He is tired or needs a vacation. No, we read this word, “finished,” twice in verses one and two. The word translated “rested” in verses two and three also means “ceased.” There is completion here. There is a finished work. This is the kind of rest you take when your project is completed and you can now enjoy the accomplishment.

Verse 1:31 says, *“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”* It’s completed. Everything has been made. Stop for a moment and marvel at the awesome power of God. He has the wisdom to design the universe. He is the Architect of the universe; He has the power and resources to complete the design.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (2:1). God did all of that effortlessly, flawlessly, majestically and gloriously by His powerful Word and without the aid of anyone or anything.

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,

I see the stars; I hear the rolling thunder.
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art!

(How Great Thou Art by Carl Boberg, 1885)

That's what we should be marveling at as we see God's finished work and rest on the seventh day. How great is our God!

Our world is littered with the unfinished projects of humanity. Your work world and your life are probably riddled with lots of work that you have yet to get done. You have projects that have lain dormant. I think I still have a correspondence course from college that I never completed and probably never will. You may have books that you want to read; intentions that have yet to be realized; resolutions that have already been forgotten and set aside just 25 days into this new year. But God completes His work. He finishes everything He begins and we should rejoice in that.

The second thing we learn about God from this passage is that He is a God Who takes delight in His work. He has completed all this work and now He takes a step back to enjoy it. He is like an artist who has painted a great canvas. He has put all the finishing touches on it. He steps back and says, "Now, come and look what I made. Enjoy My creation!"

That is what happens in verse three: "*So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy...*" He set it apart as unique, "*because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*" The word for rested or ceased is the Hebrew word "shavat," which is related to "Shabbat," which is translated in English as "Sabbath."

God set this day apart as unique and special, a time to remember that we have a Lord Who is able to finish all His work and Who delights over all the works He has made. He invites us to share in the enjoyment and delight of His creation. This tells us something very important about God, something the devil wants to obscure from our minds. Satan wants us to think God is a killjoy. The devil wants us to think God is drab, but he knows very well that God is a God of pleasure—and he hates this fact about God.. God is a God of delight; a God of overflowing beauty, goodness, wonder and enjoyment. Indeed, to glorify this God is to enjoy Him forever. We cannot bring glory to God if we will not enjoy Him. Our God is a God Who enjoys His work and takes pleasure in His glory.

In his great work, The Screwtape Letters, C. S. Lewis puts words into the devil's mouth as he describes the pleasure God takes in His creation, which is the pleasure that God invites us to enjoy. Listen to what Screwtape, the senior demon, says about God:

He's a hedonist at heart. All those fasts and vigils and stakes and crosses are only a façade. They are only like foam on the seashore. Out at sea—out in His sea—there is pleasure and more pleasure. He makes no secret of it. At His right hand are pleasures forevermore! He's vulgar, Wormwood. He has a bourgeois mind. He has filled His world with pleasures. There are things for humans to do. All day long, without His minding in the least—sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working. Everything has to be twisted before it's any use to us. We fight under cruel disadvantages. Nothing is naturally on our side.

God is a God Who delights in His work. He sets aside this day to rejoice in what He has made. He created us to share in that enjoyment and in that rest. We weren't created to be anxious people. We weren't created worry about our status—staying up late at night, rising early in the morning, working 24/7 for our security. We were created to rest and rejoice in our Father and in His world.

How many of us can say we are restful? How many of us feel like, “My work is never finished. I cannot rest because I have so much to do!” Do you ever stay away from worship, meditation on God and enjoyment of Him with His people because you have a project to finish, an exam to study for or an account to manage? Do you let work rob you of worship? Do you let work rob you of rest? Are you able to silence that eternal murmur of self-reproach that bases your identity on your work and performance?

Why Are We Restless?

Augustine said something in the form of a prayer that is true of all of us. This is a prayer that I often think about and pray: “Lord, You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.” That is so true.

Mark Twain said the two most important days of your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why. We were born on day six of creation and we find out why we were born on day seven. We were born in God's image to reflect His glory and represent His rule. You can't separate day six from day seven.

Isn't it interesting that, after God created humanity, the next day was a day of rest and enjoyment in God? So on day six we find out that humanity has a mission. Man was created in the *imago dei* (in God's image) to reflect God's glory and represent His rule. But on day seven we find out that we cannot fulfill that mission unless we learn to enter into God's rest—to rest in His glory and rejoice in His rule.

Sharing God's rest was our first activity after creation. That is what we see humanity doing in Genesis 2. Man walked with God in the garden in the cool of the day. There was peace and rest. This is the way it was supposed to be.

God gave us work to do. He gave us a vocation. But the ultimate purpose of creation is not that we would work, but that we would worship and enjoy the God Who created us. Our work is meant to be an expression of that worship and enjoyment. Our work is not supposed to be separated from true rest in Him.

Genesis 3 is the story of how humanity became restless. We stopped delighting in God's Word. We stopped trusting in God's provision. We ceased finding our rest and enjoyment in Him and we tried to take dominion of His world in disobedience to His rule. We were driven out of the garden, out of His restful presence, to be restless wanderers on the earth.

But thank God that He began a *rest-oration* project in Genesis 3. He made a promise of salvation. Throughout the Old Testament, we see God working to restore rest to His people. He worked to bring His people into His presence to live restfully under His gracious rule. He worked to do that, but His people resisted.

We hear words like this in Psalm 95:11: *"Therefore I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"* And now we are a restless lot. Why? Pastor and author, Justin Buzzard, says, "We are afraid to rest because we don't trust God and, instead, trust ourselves to hold the world together." That is insightful.

Think about the existential realities of restlessness. What happens when we are a restless people? When we literally do not rest?

My dad led a business, and one of the things he told me when I was getting a little bit older was he would rather have employees work 50 hours or less than employees who work 50 or more. Once you get to that point of working all the time, your productivity goes way down and so does your morale.

When we don't rest, it is normal human experience to lose enthusiasm and creativity. We have less energy and are more irritable. We are less effective and have less joy. We are miserable people! If you take rest away for a week, you are not going to be reflecting God's glory or representing God's rule in this world very well. We need rest. When we don't rest, we fall apart.

But we know what it's like to fall apart, don't we? I read the testimony of a guy who talked about running into a wall with all the busyness of life. He said:

I felt overwhelmed and driven into the ground. I was a pickup truck with a busted engine and four flat tires. I was stuck. The reason why is that I had taken my eyes off God and put them on myself. I put the duties of family life and work and school and ministry ahead

of glorifying God with my heart. I'd forgotten somehow that I was created by God to be conformed to the image of Jesus. I lost sight that this was the real reason behind everything He calls me to do.

Does that ever happen to you? I wrestle with this frequently. This week, I came here to work and I felt like there was just a fog of, "What am I going to do? How am I going to get through this?" There were two activities that helped that fog lift and enabled me to rest afresh in God. One was praying with a friend here in our church, saying, "This is the way I'm feeling right now. Can we pray together about it?" The way he prayed for me and took me to Isaiah 40 really helped lift my soul. The second exercise was actively affirming to Jesus that I believe that, whatever He has called me to do, He will fill me with the strength I need to do it. I trust Him for that. I trust His fullness. The restlessness settled and there was peace.

So what is our restlessness telling us about our hearts? When we are feeling that anxiety rising, when we cannot rest, what are we learning about ourselves? We are probably learning things like this:

- We are prideful and selfish.
- We are taking matters into our own hands.
- We are not relying on and trusting in the grace, glory and goodness of God.
- We are getting distracted by our own selfish ambition instead of His purposes.
- We need to stop trying to impress people or God with our work and, instead, seek to glorify Him with our service.
- He always finishes and completes His work, so He will give us whatever we need to finish and complete the work He has given us to do.

These are the things we need to remember.

The author of that same testimony ended like this:

In the end, my struggles had more to do with my outlook than my busyness. Instead of looking for a closet to hide in, I should have been looking to the only One Who can give me rest. And when I cried out to Him in despair and fatigue, He reminded me that He's given me responsibilities for a reason. His glory and my good are always His aim. I had forgotten that. He graciously answered my prayer for rest, not with affirmation, but with correction. Rest wasn't release from responsibilities. Rest was release from self-gratification. There is great joy in this.

See, underneath all our restlessness, there is a common source. It is a craving for self-gratification, a hunger for self-righteousness, a resistance or refusal to trust and rely on God, Who is always gracious and full of steadfast love to those who turn from self and find refuge in

Him. In Isaiah 30:15, God says, *“In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.”*

God Invites Us to Enter into His Rest

Finally, let’s consider the good news that God invites us to share in His rest. There are many senses in which God is still working. Jesus said in John 5:17, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” Thank God that He is working in providence to provide rain, snow, sunlight and food, keeping the world in motion. If God stopped His work of providence, we would be dead. He is working in providence.

Thank God that He worked redemption. The minute we stopped resting in God, God started a new work, the work of restoration and redemption. Jesus came into the world to finish that work. So when we hear the Son of God dying on the cross—He Who is fully man so He could stand as our Substitute and take our punishment; He Who is also fully God so He could absorb the infinite wrath that our sins deserve—what do we hear Him cry out from the cross? *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30). He is the God Who finishes His work.

When He cries out, *“It is finished!”* the work of redemption is just as complete and just as delightful to God—even more delightful—than the first work of creation. A new creation has begun and it will be filled with endless peace with God for His people and rest in His presence. This is why Jesus is able to restore rest to the weary. This is why Jesus is able to make that wonderful promise in Matthew 11:28-30:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Do you really believe this promise?

With those who are closest to you—your friends, your family, your spouse or your children—would they be able to say, “Yes, I know that he/she has come to Jesus and found rest. I can see that the effect of trusting in Jesus on his/her life has a calming effect. The fact that Jesus is his/her Savior and Lord causes the restlessness to cease”? Would the people who are closest to you be able to testify that you have come to Jesus and found in Him rest for your soul?

Hudson Taylor was a missionary in China in the late 1800s. His life was so jam-packed with business that, in order to meditate on the Word, he often had to get up in the middle of the night, light a candle and do it. His favorite hymn was a hymn that I first heard as a student at Moody Bible Institute in Fitzwater Hall. When I heard it, I thought it was kind of strange. But now I don’t think it’s strange; I think it’s enticing and exciting. The testimony of his life was this hymn:

Jesus, I am resting, resting,
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.

(Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting by Pigot/Mountain, 1876)

Are you doing that? Are you resting in the joy of all that Jesus is?

To Him I belong, by purchase, conquest and self-surrender.
To me He belongs, for all my hourly need.
There is no cloud between my Lord and me.
There is no difficulty, inward or outward,
Which He is not prepared to meet in me today.
The Lord is my Keeper. Amen.

(I Believe by Handley Moule, 1962)

Thanks be to God! Is that your experience?

Tim Keller says, “If we can experience gospel rest in our hearts, we will have a deep reservoir of refreshment that continually rejuvenates us, restores our perspective and renews our passion.” How? Sin has brought us under God’s wrath and there is no way a human being created in God’s image can rest while you remain under His wrath. We are His image bearers. There is no rest as long as we are estranged from Him.

But Hebrews 4:9 has good words for us: “*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God...*” The promise of entering God’s rest still stands. Thank God there is a way to enter into this rest. The promise still remains. Hebrews 4:3 tells us how: “*For we who have believed enter that rest...*”

So what does it mean to believe? It means that we must stop trying to establish our own righteousness; stop trusting in our own performance; stop craving for our own advancement and status; stop striving to prove that we are worthy, “*for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest*” (Hebrews 4:10-11a).

Weary, working, burdened one,
Wherefore toil you so?
Cease your doing; all was done
Long, long ago.

*“It is finished!” yes, indeed,
Finished, ev’ry jot;
Sinner, this is all you need,
Tell me, is it not?*

Till to Jesus’ work you cling
By a simple faith,
“Doing” is a deadly thing—
“Doing” ends in death.

Cast your deadly “doing” down—
Down at Jesus’ feet;
Stand in Him, in Him alone,
Gloriously complete.
(It Is Finished! by James Proctor/Ira Sankey, 1864)

Strive to enter into His rest by believing in the sufficiency of Jesus. This isn't something you do once at the moment of your conversion. You need to get converted every day. I'm not saying you need to get saved every day; I understand that you are saved forever when you first trust Jesus. But I am saying that you need to experience a mini-conversion every day. You need to daily reaffirm, "In Christ alone my hope is found. My fears are stilled and strivings cease because I am trusting afresh in Him."

So how do we keep coming to Jesus for rest? First, every week, take one day in seven to set aside your work, to enjoy God's creation, to rejoice in God's redemption and to rest. I don't want to argue about how the Sabbath is still applicable to Christians today. We know the Sabbath is fulfilled in Jesus, and so for us the Sabbath is not just one day in seven; it is eternal and is every day. But I find it really hard to believe that any of us could say we are resting in Christ alone. If we don't see the wisdom of taking one day in seven to show that we trust in Him by resting from our labors, if we are so busy and if what we are doing is so important to us that we can't set it down and be children in God's presence, enjoy the world He's made and rejoice in His redemption and rest, then I question if we are really resting in Christ. Take one day in seven to rest in Him.

Second, every day, affirm your confidence that He will finish what He has begun in you and in the world. God finished His work at creation; Jesus finished His work on the cross. God will be faithful to complete the good work He has begun in you. That is the hope of Genesis 2:1-3. Yes, this speaks to us of the world before sin spoiled it, but remember that Genesis was written after the ruins of sin. It was written for people who are longing for hope. It was written for people like us. It is not theoretical, but practical. Trust in this God Who finishes His work.

If you are a Christian, you have pinned your life on God's promises about the life of the world to come. As we look around us, there is much to make us weary, and we wonder if the promised new heavens and new earth will ever come. Will we really need the multitude of Christ's people that no one could number? Will Jesus really wipe every tear? Can it be true that one day death shall be no more? Consider the seventh day and the God we meet there. He is the one Who finishes His work. Just as He finished then, He will finish in the future. He will finish His work in us. He will keep all His promises. It is His nature. (Alasdair Paine)

Thanks be to God!

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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