

## Word #4: Rest Assured

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Preacher: Brian King

[0:00] Let's ready our hearts. Let's prepare ourselves to hear from God's word.! Let's pray. Heavenly Father, if right now we are feeling a little bit distracted, a little bit unfocused, maybe even a little bit restless, would you calm down our hearts now?

Would you steady it? Would you help us to come to the Lord Jesus knowing that he is strong and kind, he is good and faithful, and so let us, as his sheep, hear the voice of our shepherd now. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now you know and I know that we live in an exhausting world. We rush our kids to tuition on Monday, piano lessons on Tuesday, basketball on Wednesday, steal more tuition on Thursday.

We rush through notification after notification on our phones, trying to sort out the latest email from our boss or the latest requests from our client.

We might even rush through a dinner with family or friends, consumed with the next item on our to-do list. And if you're a Christian, things might feel even worse, not better.

[1:28] Because now there's also the Bible devotional to finish, the church meeting to attend, the prayer partner to meet up with. But why can't we seem to stop?

Maybe because subconsciously, we fear we'll fall behind if we do. Somehow, we'll lose out. Maybe we won't get that exam result or promotion which will secure that pay raise, which will help raise the living standards of my family, and then maybe my children won't do as well as those other kids, and then they won't get into the good university, and then they won't get a good job, and then they'll fall further behind, and on it goes.

Or maybe if we're not busy doing that side hustle or doing all that socializing, we won't really be able to be part of that circle of friends. And that means as we get older, we'll get that little bit lonelier, and we're going to get sadder, and that means we will die earlier.

All because we didn't work hard enough on the friendship. Or to flip to the other side of the coin, maybe we tire ourselves out because we believe that if we do just that one more thing, we'll get that rest we finally hoped for.

So if we can just finish one more project, we'll finally be able to relax. Or if we can even just find that one perfect TV show or that perfect holiday, we can finally switch off.

[3:09] Basically, if we can work hard enough to accomplish that one thing we've identified as worth doing, we'll finally have rest.

That's our conviction. And yet, rest seems so elusive. But today, God wants to break that cycle. That's why He has given us the fourth word. Not because He wants to burden us with another rule, but because He wants to give us a good gift.

The gift of Sabbath. Now, some of you might smile at that because, ironically, this gift has sometimes caused unrest amongst Bible-believing Christians.

We have sometimes argued quite vigorously about how to observe the Sabbath. Which day are we talking about? What exactly is allowed or not allowed?

[4:16] How you answer depends on how you connect the whole Bible together. And as we work through the fourth word, you'll see where I basically land.

But at the end of the day, what I don't want is simply to give you notes for a theological debate. I don't even want to give you some technique to achieve work-life balance.

Instead, my hope is much bigger. That you leave knowing our good God delights in giving you the rest only He can give.

That's my goal today. So let us start with this simple question. What is the Sabbath? You see, contrary to popular perception, Sabbath is more than just a day off.

Listen to how God describes the Sabbath later on to Moses in Exodus 31, verses 12 to 13. Then the Lord said to Moses, Say to the Israelites, you must observe my Sabbaths.

[5:30] This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come so that you may know I am the Lord who makes you holy. Centuries later, God says it again through Ezekiel.

Also, I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us so they would know that I, the Lord, made them holy. So here is what's interesting.

Of all the ten words, this is the only one God ever calls a sign. So that means the Sabbath isn't first and foremost a rule to obey.

Rather, it is a signpost to read. And what do you do with a sign? You follow it. That's obvious, isn't it?

If you are heading to Kuching from Sri Amman and you see a sign that says, Kuching, 20 kilometers this way, you don't pull over, take a selfie with it, and say, we've arrived.

[6:36] Neither do you ignore it and keep driving in the opposite direction. Of course not. Instead, you follow where the sign is pointing to all the way to its destination.

That's what signs are for. And the Sabbath is a sign. When we forget that, we end up debating its boundaries and arguing over the fine print.

And we'll miss the point because we've forgotten to look at where it's pointing. So naturally, our next question is, where does it point to?

Well, it actually points to three things. Although, if you look closer, those three things are really different aspects of the same big picture.

First of all, Sabbath will point us right back to the beginning where we will discover we are made for rest. Then second of all, it will point us to the first Exodus where we will discover we are free to rest.

[7:50] And as we keep following the sign all the way to its destination, we are going to arrive third of all at Christ himself who is our rest.

And only then are we ready to know how to live out this rest that the Sabbath is pointing us to. So let's follow the sign back to the beginning and discover firstly that we were made for rest.

Let me read Exodus 20 verse 8 to 10 again. 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. Now notice how the fourth word begins. God doesn't begin with a brand new idea. Instead, he says, remember. You see, before God's people ever came to Sinai, they had already tasted the Sabbath. The first time Sabbath is explicitly mentioned in the Bible is back in Exodus 16. Israel is traveling through the wilderness. There are no farms to cultivate, no markets to visit, no food to gather.

[9:12] humanly speaking, they have no way of surviving. So what does God do? He rains down manna from heaven.

Each day, they were to collect just enough for the day. But on the sixth day, they had to collect twice as much. Why? Because God says, the seventh day is to be, and I quote, a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.

It was a day to cease from gathering and to trust that God would provide everything they needed. That's what Israel is meant to remember.

But this raises another question. why is the Sabbath shaped like this? Why this rhythm of six days work and one day rest?

Well, that's exactly where Exodus 20 verse 11 takes us. Let me read it. 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.

[10:30] So we have our answer. In short, Sabbath is like this to point you all the way back to creation. So let me take you right back to the beginning.

Do you remember how God made everything? For six days, God worked. He spoke light into the darkness. He gathered the seas and raised up the dry land.

He filled the skies with birds and the waters with fish and the fields with every living being. And it was good. And then he made human beings in his own image, male and female, and look at everything he had made and behold, it was very good.

And then on the seventh day, God rested. But why? Was God tired? Isaiah 40, verse 28 rules that out.

The prophet makes clear the God of Israel never grows tired or weary. So why did he rest? Genesis 2, verse 2 gives us the answer.

[11:46] By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing. So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. God rests not out of sheer exhaustion, but because his work has reached completion.

So picture with me a king who has finished building his palace. Every stone is in place, every detail is exactly as he wanted, and now he takes great pleasure walking through it and taking his seat on the throne.

He is thoroughly satisfied with what he has done. That is God's rest. It is the deep contentment of someone who is delighting in the work of his hands.

Indeed, if you read the creation account closely, you will notice something fascinating. Each of the first six days ends with the same refrain.

And there was evening and there was morning the first day, the second day, the third day. But when we reach the seventh day, that refrain disappears.

[13:09] There is no and there was evening and there was morning the seventh day. Why? Because the whole week has been building towards this moment.

This is the goal. This is the climax. There is nothing better to aim for. And here's the thing. God doesn't enjoy that climactic moment of rest alone, but with Adam and Eve.

You see, God has always intended to share his delight with human beings. Think about it. God created Adam and Eve on the sixth day, which means their very first food day is the seventh day.

And what does God put on their schedule? Not the work of clearing weeds or building houses or naming animals. Their first food day is spent enjoying a finished world with their creator.

It's spent being secure in his presence and enjoying time with him. Later on in Israel's history, they would sing Psalm 92 during the Sabbath.

[14:31] Here's one of the lines from that psalm. We read it this morning. For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord. I sing for joy at what your hands have done.

And if Adam and Eve had a song for that first day, that would exactly be the kind of line they would have sung.

So at this point, let's hit the pause button. And let's ask, how should knowing this reshape our idea of rest?

You see, we tend to think of rest as an absence. Don't we? It's the absence of work, the absence of noise, the absence of demands.

Rest is simply what is left over when everything else finally stops. But God's rest is not an absence at all. It is the presence of something.

[15:34] It is the settled, unhurried joy of someone who is fully at home in a world he has made and loves. That's the rest the Bible is talking about.

That's the rest we were made for. Not emptiness, but fullness. Not merely recovering from work, but delighting in God.

Not the exhausted collapse at the end of the week, but the joyful falling into the arms of the one who loves us. So my brothers and sisters, let me ask, what's the shape of your life?

Is it dominated by activity? Because Genesis makes clear there is more to life than work. Now, don't misunderstand me.

Work is good. The fourth word even says so. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. God work, and so should we.

[16:48] But you and I were never made to produce continuously. We were created instead to enjoy God endlessly. That's why Exodus 20 verse 11 reminds us that God has made this day holy.

The word holy means set apart. And God now calls on Israel to set apart one day, not simply for catching up on sleep, but to remember who we are and whose we are.

That's the purpose of Sabbath. As Jan Wilkin puts it, being well rested and taking care of ourselves are good things, but they are at best a thin obedience to the fourth command.

She's right. Because Sabbath isn't ultimately about God's strategy for stress management, rather it is God's weekly reminder that we are not God.

He is. So let me ask you another question. Does your life contain a seventh day? By that I mean, is there a regular, set apart time in your life where you intentionally stop to remember and delight in God?

[18:16] Or has life quietly become six days of work stretched across all seven? And if so, why?

Perhaps your answer is, Pastor, you don't understand. The bills need paying, the house needs fixing, the children need raising, the church needs serving, the neighbourhood needs reaching. How can I possibly stop? But perhaps underneath all of that is another belief we hardly notice. If I stop, everything will fall apart.

Do you see what we're actually saying? The world depends on me. My family depends on me. My ministry depends on me. My business depends on me.

Everything rests on my shoulders. That isn't simply busyness. It's believing, however softly, that we are carrying a wig that only God can carry.

[19:27] In other words, we have taken God's place. But listen to what God says through Ezekiel. Keep my sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us.

Then you will know that I am the Lord your God. Do you hear that? You see, every time God's people stop, they are making a declaration.

They are saying, Lord, I know you are God and I am not. You can govern this world without me.

You can care for my family without me.

You can build your church without me. And every time we stop, we are also saying, Lord, you are my God.

So everything I have, I ultimately entrust into your hands. That's what Sabbath is really all about. But that brings us to the second thing the Sabbath points us to.

[20:38] Not only were we made for rest, we are free to rest. You see, live long enough in this world and we have to face this question.

If rest is what we were made for, why does it constantly slip through my fingers? Answer, because we have abandoned God.

We no longer inhabit the place of rest. And outside that place, Genesis 3, verse 17 to 19 tells us what life is like.

Cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil, you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken, for thus you are and to thus you were written.

[21:39] That's and thistles. We can't rest, not because our calendars are too full, but because our world is too broken.

And so all our attempts to rest in achievement, in possessions, in entertainment, run into a dead end. We cannot restore what has been lost.

But what we can't do, God can. You see, did you know that the God who made us for rest also restores us to it?

That's exactly what we discover when we come to the ten words a second time. Because the ten words don't just appear once in the Bible, they are repeated in the book of Deuteronomy.

But this time, something fascinating happens. This time, when God commands his people to keep the Sabbath, he gives a different reason.

[22:55] Listen to Deuteronomy 5, verse 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. Did you notice the shift? Earlier, the reason was creation.

God made you for rest. But here, the reason is redemption. You were slaves, but God has freed you, and Sabbath pictures that freedom.

Now, to help us understand this, I want you to think about what life was like in Egypt. Pharaoh's entire system was built around toil.

Make bricks, meet quotas, produce more. Because you see, Pharaoh is actually a deeply anxious man. His storehouses are never full enough.

[24:00] His building projects are never big enough. He always needs more. And so under him, people are merely units of production, not those made in the image of God.

And when they cry out, what does he tell them? You are lazy. Make more. In Pharaoh's world, there is no such thing as rest, because there is no such thing as enough.

In that sense, Egypt is a picture of our world. But then God rescues them from Egypt. And what is one of the first gifts he gives them?

A Sabbath, a day when they stop, a day when they cease striving. Do you see how radical this was? Indeed, every time Israel laid down their tools and rested every seventh day, they were declaring something to Pharaoh and to every Pharaoh's sins.

God is not slaves anymore. We belong to the Lord. In fact, our lives do not depend on our production anymore.

[25 : 16] They depend on our Redeemer. We are free. That's why they rest now. It's a sign of their redemption.

redemption. And it is for everyone. You might have noticed in Exodus 20 verse 10, it didn't really matter who you were.

You could be a household head, a son, a daughter, a slave, a refugee. But regardless of who you are, this rest is for you.

Because this redemption is for you. And it's meant to be a blessing to all around you. And Sabbath is not only a sign of what you were saved from, but what you are saved for.

You see, when God repeats the fourth word to Israel, where are they? They're on the very edge of the promised land. And God says to them, do you know what is this place I'm leading you towards?

[26 : 27] Deuteronomy 12, verse 10 tells us, God says it's a place of rest, a place of safety. And that verse 11, he continues by saying, it's the place where I will dwell with you.

Now, what does that sound like? Is that not a description of Eden? God is essentially saying, I am freeing you to bring you back to your roots.

Or as he puts it in 12, verse 9, this is your inheritance. And every time you celebrate Sabbath, you are being reminded of the place you call home.

You are being reminded of where you are going, where you will finally be safe, finally be at peace, finally be with God. That is what the Sabbath sign is pointing to.

It is not just a break from work, it is a celebration of salvation. So my brothers and sisters, how do you rest?

[27 : 42] Is rest for you just a refueling stop? Is it just topping up the tank so that we can get back to the grind on Monday? Is it just rest in order to work?

Or is your rest, as one scholar puts it, an act of resistance? Is it an act of faith where you say, I will not live as my society demands, but as my saviour desires?

I will not find my worth by how much I get done, but live by God's grace instead. I will not live as if this present grind is all there is, but look forward to that day when all my striving stops for good.

That's what God has freed us for, to rest in this way. But of course, that is still not the whole story. because in the Old Testament, while Israel came out of Egypt, Egypt remained in the hearts of Israel.

[28 : 55] And so they remained trapped in a never-ending cycle, one that Nehemiah captures well. Listen to how he puts it, Nehemiah chapter 9 verses 26 to 28.

But they were disobedient and rebelled against you. They turned their backs on your law. They killed your prophets who had warned them in order to turn them back to you.

They committed awful blasphemies. So you delivered them into the hands of your enemies who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed, they cried out to you.

From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers who rescued them from the hand of your enemies. But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight.

Then you abandoned them to the hand of your enemies so that they ruled over them, and when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time.

[29 : 59] You see, while the promised land could give them a taste of true rest, it could never in itself be the true rest. And neither could the weekly Sabbath.

Now, every seventh day was a real gift from God, a genuine foretaste of the rest he intended, but it was never the final destination.

It could only be the pointer, because the cycle of sin needed to be broken by someone bigger. So, year after year, the Sabbath kept pointing and pointing until one ordinary day in Galilee, a carpenter's son stood up and said something extraordinary.

Matthew 11, verse 28. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

which brings us to what the Sabbath is finally pointing us to, Christ, our rest. You see, given everything we've seen so far, I hope you now feel the wake of what Jesus is offering.  
[31:17] Because Jesus is not promising us better sleep. Rather, he is putting himself in the very place the sign has been pointing to all along. he's saying, do you want to be safe and secure with God?

I can give you that. Do you want to dwell with him forever? I can give you that. And if you come to Jesus, you will find he is no Pharaoh.

In fact, he is the opposite. For he is gentle and humble in heart, and his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

Because who is Jesus? The very next chapter shows us. Right after inviting the weary to come to him for rest, Matthew gives us two Sabbath stories.

In the first story, in Matthew 12, verses 1 to 8, Jesus and his disciples walk through a grain field. The Pharisees accuse them of breaking the Sabbath, and Jesus responds with a staggering claim.

[32:30] The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. In other words, the Sabbath belongs to him. He, of all people, knows what Sabbath is about.

And he shows us the true meaning of Sabbath in the very next story, in Matthew 12, verse 9 to 14. Jesus enters a synagogue where there is a man with a shriveled hand.

So what does Jesus do? He heals him. Put another way, he does what Sabbath has always pictured. Remember what we have already seen?

When God rested on the seventh day, creation was whole. There was no disease, no disability, no death. humanity enjoyed life with God in a world that was very good.

So contrary to the Pharisees' protestations, Jesus isn't breaking the Sabbath. He's simply bringing it to fulfillment, bringing to fulfillment what it was always pointing to.

[33:40] Like the Sabbaths of the Old Testament, he's giving a glimpse of God's new creation when God's people will once again enjoy perfect rest.

And he is saying it is in him and him alone that such Sabbath rest is found. And because he is so committed to giving us this precious gift, he will endure restless agony for us.

Did you notice what the Pharisees do in verse 14? They begin plotting how to kill him. On the day made for life, they plot death.

But in the hands of God, even their evil schemes bring about good. For on that sixth day, as Jesus was crucified, he cried out, it is finished.

His work is done. And then he rested in a tomb through the Sabbath. just as God finished his work of creation and rested on the seventh day, so the son finished his work of redemption and rested before rising as the first fruits of the new creation.

[35:03] And with that, true rest has been secured for us. And because Christ is our rest, that's why actually, the Sabbath day as prescribed in the Old Testament is no longer binding on us.

Because remember what the Sabbath is? It is a sign. And if we've arrived at the destination the sign is pointing to, the sign has done its job.

That's why in Colossians 2, verse 16 to 17, Paul says this, therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon, or a Sabbath day, these are a shadow of the things that were to come.

The reality, however, is found in Christ. Now, shadows aren't negative things. If you can see a shadow, that means something real is casting it.

But once the person himself walks into the room, you stop staring at the shape on the wall and focus on the person himself. That's how we are to regard the Sabbath.

[36:18] Now that the person has stepped into the room, we look to him, not the shadow. That's probably why the Sabbath command is the only one of the ten words not to be repeated in some form in the New Testament.

But if Christ is our rest, does that mean we simply do nothing? Not at all. Listen to Hebrews 4 9-11. There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. so what is the writer talking about?

Once again he is saying what we've been saying all along, that the creation rest wasn't so much a day to copy as it was a destination to enter.

And how do we enter it? By no longer trying to justify ourselves through our own efforts. by no longer carrying the burden of making ourselves acceptable to God.

[37 : 41] Instead, we actively trust Jesus and listen to both his word of grace and exhortation. So what does that look like?

Well, as we finish, let me suggest three things the practice of rest looks like. Firstly, come to Jesus. You see, in Christ, every day, in a sense, is now a Sabbath day.

Every day is a day where you can turn away from sin to Jesus, knowing there is freedom from guilt, freedom from shame, freedom from powerlessness. Perhaps there are one or two of you today in this hall who have never ever done that.

If so, the invitation is there. Come to Jesus. But even if we've been Christians for decades, this gift remains one we continue unwrapping every single day.

As 1 John 1 verse 9 reminds us, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

[38 : 58] So today, are you trying to rest without Christ? are you trying to make up for your own sin and remove your burdens yourself? There is no rest there.

Come to Jesus instead. Secondly, keep the rhythm as wisdom, not as law.

In Genesis 1 to 2, I don't think we find any universal mandate for Sabbath observance. But I do think we find a pattern God commands as wise.

At various points in history, people have experimented with different rhythms, such as a 10-day week. But eventually, we always seem to revert back to 6 plus 1.

It seems to be a rhythm woven into the fabric of our world. So in that sense, Sabbath is still relevant. It is the rhythm God has set.

[40 : 00] So design your life in tune with that rhythm. And if Christ is the true Sabbath rest, center it on Jesus. As one writer recently put it, true rest is a life properly ordered around Jesus.

And what better way to do that than by gathering with God's people to hear his voice on the Lord's day. Not because Sunday is the Sabbath renamed, but because from the very beginning, that's what the early church did.

They gathered on the day Jesus rose again because in a sense, that's when our resurrection life begins. And just like the Sabbath, when we gather together, we can point one another to our future home so that we won't be discouraged, but keep going.

Thirdly and finally, refuse to be feral. Parents, I have a question for you. Are you over-scheduling your kids?

Have you so filled them with activities that there is no time for them to be still and know the Lord or to spend time with other Christians? others? Or perhaps you are an employer.

[41 : 25] I also have a question for you. Are you building rest into the lives of your staff and employees? Are you treating them as God does or merely as instruments of output?

Consider those questions and refuse to be feral, refuse to be a tyrant whose restless heart overflows negatively to others.

Instead, hear Jesus' words one more time. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Give your all to Jesus, let him be your Lord, and you will have rest. assured. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, I pray now that as we hear your words, as we drink it in, I pray that your Holy Spirit will be helping us now to consider the shape of our lives, the rhythm of our days, and Lord, if we indeed have failed, Lord, sometimes to unwrap the gift that you have given us, that we have not set apart that opportunity to delight in you, to celebrate your salvation, I pray, Lord, that you help us to repent of that and indeed be delighted to open up that gift that you have given us, to spend time with you, not just individually, but as a community, to worship you, to praise you for all that you have done, and to trust that you provide for us in every need, big or small.

[43 : 29] We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.