

## Rest

When you think of rest, what do you think of? Is it a good night's sleep, a long vacation, a good book on a snowy day? There are lots of ways to get some rest and interestingly what provides rest for one may be different or stressful or more like work to another. It's interesting that when the Bible talks about physical rest it uses words like refresh and revive. So, what does the Bible say about rest? What kinds of rest does it talk about?

The idea of this class is to look at biblical themes in God's word. These themes are all parts of Christianity that we need to know but also to live by for the purpose of our sanctification.

I was in church my whole life. My parents took me to Sunday School and I went to VBS and church summer camps. Either I never heard the gospel or I didn't have ears to hear it (though I do know that no preacher ever taught on John 3:3). The words "born again" were never used. Whatever the case I was 38 years old when I heard a sermon teaching on Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." What I hadn't understood before was that I was part of "all". This preacher told me I was a sinner. Now, it took another couple of years before I knew that God had not only pointed out my problem but He had also provided the solution for the problem. The first time I heard about my sin problem no one suggested there was a solution to the problem.

So, for the couple of years where I knew that I was a sinner and God was not happy about that but did not yet understand salvation by faith, I was working my way to heaven! I was the Sunday School Superintendent, the head of VBS, I taught 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday school, served dinner once a month at the homeless shelter, volunteered at

school, belonged to a “Christian” ladies group that helps women go back to school, led a girl scout troop, was a wife and the mother of two children, and worked part time. I was working hard to please God. And it wasn’t like I learned the truth of Christ’s sacrifice for my sin and was able to give some of it up. I prayed the salvation prayer and still worked like a beaver for quite awhile until I clearly understood from scripture that this wasn’t all my work to do. God would divvy it out among His people!

When I started to teach for BSF they had a totally new and refreshing point of view about serving God than any I had heard. They were quick to say if you are going to teach for us you will have to limit your other ministries because we’ve learned that no one can lead everything and still be a good spiritual leader. You’ll need the rest and refreshment that comes from the Word of God. It was for my protection they said.

Of course they were right but clearly this is not the rest that the Bible talks about most often when it talks about rest.

Let’s go to Matthew 11, one of the most quoted verses on rest in the Bible (probably right after the Genesis verse that says that God rested after 6 days of creation). 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."**

Doesn’t that sound absolutely heavenly? Who would not want Jesus to give them rest?

But in order to understand these verses you have to look at the context. These are the words of Christ and He is offering rest after having just pronounced woes on the cities where His miracles were performed and He had taught but the people did not repent and

believe. He said it would be worse for them than for Sodom and Gomorrah on judgment day.

Let's back up and start reading at Matthew 11:20:

Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Do you hear what He's saying? If others had seen the miracles and the mighty works that Jesus had shown them they would have recognized that He was of God. These people were totally rejecting Him and all that He has said and done for them.

He goes on in verse 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You see, heaven was on their minds. They were planning to get into heaven on their good deeds. Still in verse 23 You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. The implication is that the people would have turned to God based on the evidence of Jesus' mighty works. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you." Do you remember that God burned the city of Sodom?

These were people who were busily working their way to heaven. They had no interest in faith in Jesus when they could keep the list of rules that God had set and men had enhanced and added to. They believed they were better than others (as in more religious because of their rule keeping) and therefore first in line for heaven. This had to

grieve Jesus, how disheartening to think that He could perform miracles and teach with authority and not be seen for who He is. These people were blind to the things of God.

But, starting in verse 25 Jesus points to God. **At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.**

He goes there in Thanksgiving that God, for His pleasure – has not revealed these things to the wise and learned but has revealed them to the little children in the faith. God had a remnant that Jesus was thankful for. Isn't Jesus setting an example for us about how to find some relief and some refreshment when we're discouraged? It is not a physical tired that He's demonstrating here. As He looked at those who would not – and in fact He points out could not - believe because God had not revealed the truth to them in their hard hearts, He remembers God and what He had done. Acting for His own pleasure God had given Him a faithful following – though they were still young in their faith – to believe and follow Him and for this Jesus is thankful. It's refreshing to look at God and remember the blessings when we're facing discouraging circumstances, but that's not the rest He's talking about.

In verse 27 He turns to another point that He wants to use to emphasize the truth of God doing these things for His pleasure. He says that **"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him."** So He says here that He can choose who to reveal God the Father to and then look at verse 28 and who are the first to be invited? **"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I**

will give you rest.” He invites the weary and the burdened. What’s the burden? Certainly for those people in the cities of verses 20 – 24 it was the burden of working for salvation. These people were working their way to heaven, traveling a road that doesn’t go there. They were weary and burdened by their endless good works that were empty and futile. This is exactly what I tried to do. Get to church often enough and do enough volunteer and charitable work and hoped the scales would weigh in on my side! Jesus said, “no, leave those empty works, come to me, believe in Me and you can rest from all that emptiness.” This is salvation rest. It’s free, it’s by grace. You don’t have to earn it. He said, Put your faith in Me, I’ll take that intolerable burden of works off of you. That’s salvation rest. Rest from any human effort to earn salvation.

This is that rest to which the writer of Hebrews refers when he says in Hebrews 4:9, "There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works."

So, the first is salvation rest. There is nothing more essential to the Christian faith than salvation! It is Christ, in His sacrifice for us – that we find our only real rest.

When you enter in to the rest of salvation, you rest from your works. You’re fruitless, useless, religious efforts to save yourself, which is a heavy burden, more than anyone can bear, (because the standard is perfection) and when you come to Christ you rest from that.

The only real rest a person can have is to know that they have been forgiven for their sin and to know that they will spend eternity in heaven with the One who gives rest.

If we look at verse 29 we can see that this doesn't mean that we won't work. Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

A yoke would imply work – it's just that when we share Jesus' yoke the work is less of a burden –it fits right. A yoke that doesn't fit makes work harder for the ox, a good fit will take a load off. When we yoke ourselves to Christ in salvation He takes the burden and we work alongside of Him. He is gentle and humble, His expectations are realistic unlike the burden of efforts to earn our salvation through works.

Did you catch earlier that the Biblical standard to get to heaven without Christ is perfection? If we are to work our way to heaven we must abide by God's law that says "Be perfect as I am perfect." One sin and we can't get there. SO, does anyone know anyone -besides Jesus - who has lived without sin? Of course not. Anyone who fails to yoke themselves to Jesus in salvation will spend eternity in hell. That's Biblical truth.

We accomplish kingdom work when we work with Him, NOT like the empty, endless, spinning of wheels that comes when we aren't yoked to Him.

He also says learn from Me so ignorance isn't a rest that He wants for us either. What we learn from Him we are to put to use – for His Kingdom.

So, the rest is for our souls, not bodies or minds. We are to work and to think or learn but not to earn our salvation, from those works we can rest. If, like me, you have ever tried to earn your salvation, you know what a relief this is! So, we benefit from salvation rest now.

But the salvation rest also includes eternal rest.

Revelation 14:13, I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." 'Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest.

Can you imagine what the rest will be like that includes first of all glorified bodies? We'll rest first and foremost from the burden of working toward salvation. Obviously, we'll be there. No more questions, no more doubts or trials or tears or pain or disease. That's a real rest!

The harder part to grasp but just as real for us will be no more sin, no more temptation, no persecution or affliction. It sounds like spiritual freedom to me! That's real rest for body and soul!

Eternal rest is our hope. This is what we wait for, long for, live for, and serve the Lord in thanksgiving for! This is the blessed assurance when Jesus is Lord of our lives here.

What do this salvation rest and eternal rest mean for us today? How should it change the way we live while we're on earth in our perishable bodies?

We have to look at Genesis two.

In Genesis 2 we're told; 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.

By the 7<sup>th</sup> day God's plan for creation had been completed and He stopped working. It was done. He didn't rest because He was weary and in order to continue He

had to replenish His energy. He's God. He doesn't grow weary or tire. He was done His work and so He rested from it.

At this point in time God did not mention man nor did He declare the Sabbath rest. He rested from His work of creation. BUT, if we move ahead to the Mosaic covenant, (Exodus 20) God did command the Sabbath rest. He does want us to follow His example of resting from His work. When we read these verses closely we can see that this Sabbath rest was pointing forward to the rest we have in Christ – in His provision of salvation.

Exodus 20:9 – 11, **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.**

God designed the Sabbath as a holy day, a blessed day, which His people were to keep as a sign of their covenant with Him. He states this in Exodus 31: 13. God tells Moses to **“Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.’”**

God had freed His people, Israel, from slavery. He brought them out of Egypt and made this covenant between Him and them. If they were to disregard the Sabbath they would have been disregarding God's purposes in creation. To keep the Sabbath was to honor the covenant, to show that they belonged to God.

In the command for the Sabbath God was commanding a day of rest and a day of remembrance for what He had done for His people. He added holy days and feasts that were also remembrances but none of these directly addressed physical rest – though the command provided it physical rest wasn't really the point. God's covenant, His completed purpose, and a foreshadowing of rest in Christ were more the objects of these commands.

If we go to the New Testament we can look for physical rest there. Again, we don't find a whole lot of real specific instruction – even for the Sabbath. What we do see is the example that Jesus set. So, let's see what kind of principles we can take from what Christ did.

He spent the Sabbath's teaching – at least part of the time. The scriptures tell us that over and over. What we can take from that is that this was not a time for physical rest and relaxation for Him. In the book of Luke we see that His Sabbath days were filled. Luke 4:16, He entered the synagogue and stood up to read. Luke 4:31, And he came to Capernaum, a city of Galilee and He was teaching them on the Sabbath days. 6:6, And it came about on another Sabbath, that He entered the synagogue and was teaching.

I'm sure that if we asked our own Pastors that they would tell us that Sunday is not a day of rest for them. Teaching, preaching, and even the counsel that they are asked to give on a Sunday must be exhausting! And, like our Pastors, the work isn't done when the service was over. Luke 4 tells us that at the end of one synagogue service Jesus went to the home of Peter and healed his mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39). After sundown on the same day, Jesus ministered to the crowd that had gathered (verses 40 – 41).

On another Sabbath he was invited to the home of a Pharisee for Sabbath dinner and ended up healing a man with leprosy and having a confrontation with the Pharisees about the very issue of working on the Sabbath (which of course He did).

Now, it's clear that Jesus did rest and take some time to relax. After a full day of ministry He would seek to get away from the multitudes. Luke 4:42, **And when day came, He departed and went to a lonely place.**

Mark 1:35, **And in early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.**

It would seem that Jesus actually had a regular habit of getting away to a place of solitude for rest, prayer, and meditation. Luke 5:16 **says that he would often slip away to the wilderness and pray and in chapter 6:12, And it was at this time He went off to the mountains to pray.**

DO you think there is significance to the fact that often when Jesus went away to rest it included prayer? How many Christians do you suppose are more lax about prayer when they go on vacation or set themselves apart from the world for a time? We hope not because certainly Jesus prayed as part of His rest. (Remember that He's in a human body at this point).

The New Testament – specifically 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 teaches that our bodies – as Christians – are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Though rest is not the issue being addressed (Paul was addressing the problem of immorality in the Corinthian church) there is a principle that we can take from this that sheds light on the rest question.

Because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit then it becomes our responsibility to show some discipline regarding our bodies so we can be healthy and

effective in service to God. Regular times of physical rest are required for sound mental, physical, and spiritual health.

Think about the times that you are the most physically tired. Doesn't that physical weakness make you less able to think straight, less able to discern the details of a situation (sleep deprivation is a form of torture because we can be coerced more easily when we're physically tired), and far more emotional (at least for most women!). I thought it was interesting I just read a report that said people who get more sleep are thinner because of some metabolism boosting chemical that's formed in our bodies while we sleep. So, God planned for sleep and rest to be good for us!

Spiritually, aren't we also far more able to wisely serve God when we're rested, physically as well as having a spiritual filling? How about our ability to serve others – including our husbands. Rested wives make better lovers and helpmates!

Think about Elijah in 1 Kings 18. He confronts Ahab and has him bring all the people and the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel and he defeats the Baals by demonstrating God's power. Here is the account in 1 King's 18:18-46 **And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals.**

**Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel. And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am**

left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken." Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it." And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention. Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall be your name," and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." And he said, "Do it a second time." And they did

it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time." And they did it a third time. And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water. And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God." And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there. And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain." So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," seven times. And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'" And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

This whole event must have taken hours. (gather the people and the 450 prophets of Baal, kill and cut up the bull, wait for them to call on Baal for hours and hours, noon passed and midday passed, build the altar, cut up the second bull, run all the way to Jezreel, etc.) Elijah had to have been physically exhausted. Well, Ahab tells Jezebel what has happened and she threatens Elijah's life.

Now, he runs in fear for his life – as though God – who He had just demonstrated his faith in -had suddenly lost all His power. I think Elijah was too tired to think straight. Look at 1 Kings 19: 3-8 **Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.**

**But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.**

Sleep, food and water, sleep, food, and water. Elijah was in communication with God in that it was His messenger who was waking him and providing the food and drink. God didn't demand a time a prayer or a time of thanksgiving. He offered rest and nourishment. Sometimes rest is necessary. Unfortunately we live in a time when the least

exertion is seen as being this tiring. Elijah worked like crazy for the Lord, was comforted and provided for so that his strength and ability to listen and think were replenished and then he went on for 40 more days! Our bodies are capable of far more than we Westerners expect of our selves! But, God certainly provided rest for Elijah.

When we look at all of this together, salvation rest, eternal rest, even Elijah's need and God's provision of physical rest, what is it that God wants for you and me in regard to rest?

Salvation rest comes only when we have placed our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. It requires the basic understanding that we all have sinned against God, there is no one who has not and does not sin. This means that we owe God a debt for that sin. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Either we die in our sin and go to hell – separated from God or we believe that God sent Jesus so that His death would pay my debt and your debt. He died once for all the writer of Hebrews says. All this requires is a confession of our sin and a simple invitation to Jesus to come into our lives and save us from our sin. Without Him we cannot know the rest and peace of salvation. With Him we are offered a partner to wear the yoke that God gives us, our burdens are eased and we are free to know the peace and joy of living for the Lord.

That confession and prayer of faith will lead us away from the worthless works that we try to do to gain God's approval and into the hope that we have of eternal rest., heavenly rest, where we will abide with the Lord Jesus who sits at the right hand of God to this day.

Salvation rest will also lead us to the physical rest that we require to keep our bodies whole and healthy to effectively serve the Lord while we're here. We will be

sensitive to God's leading so that the work we do will be the work God calls us to – and He will have our best interests in mind when He assigns them. Times of rest will be possible because God loves to spend time with His children.

What is it about our culture that doesn't allow for rest – even with children who do way too much? How does all this work and busyness keep the world from looking at the only real rest any person can ever have – salvation rest/ eternal rest in Jesus Christ? Several years ago someone told me that “busy” is an acronym for “Bound Under Satan's Yoke.”

If you do not have salvation rest or you're unsure if you have made that decision, please do that tonight. In the quietness of your own heart tell God that you can see those works you've tried to do to get to heaven without Him, that you recognize the sin in your life and ask Him to save you from it. Invite Him to be the Lord of your life.

If you know you're a child of God, that you have sincerely asked Jesus to be the Lord of your life then examine your life for rest. Are you still trying to win God's approval through works? Ephesians 2:8-10. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

Clearly, God has work for every believer to do according to the gifts He has given us. But, we're not saved by these works. We need to rest from (stop) the works that we have chosen and do only those God has called us to do.

Rest in your salvation knowing that the eternal rest you have coming will be the best rest and then work, yoked to Jesus to relieve the burden. Do what God has prepared for you to do and rest as you need it. God's word will give us refreshment and revive us, we need to be in it. But there's more to rest. In addition to times of prayer and thanksgiving add time away from others, time with others, food, and water and you will be refreshed, revived in the Lord.