

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 “Take a Break” June 5-7, 2021
Pastor Don Sutton – St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹²“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴but 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 male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵Remember 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. (NIV)

Introduction

“Take a break.” These are welcome words when you have been working hard and need a rest. They are welcome words when you have been sitting in a meeting or a presentation and things are starting to hang out. They are welcome words when the dentist has been working in your mouth what seems to be hours and you’re wondering, “How long, O Lord, is this going to take?”

In the Old Testament reading for today we hear God saying to his people, **“Take a Break.”** Today we focus on what God was saying to his Old Testament people and what God is saying to us.

1. What God was Saying to His Old Testament People

Setting Moses spoke the words of our text as he met with the people of Israel on the plains to the east of the Jordan River as Israel prepared to enter the majority of the Promised Land of Canaan. Forty years before God had led them out of slavery in Egypt. 38 years before God had given his law for the first time. Now only those who had been young at the time of the Exodus and those born since the Exodus were in this group about to enter Canaan. Just as a parent might feel the need to re-emphasize caution to the son or daughter going solo in the car for the first time since getting his or her driver’s license, God decides it’s a good time to give his law a second time to Israel.

The verses we consider today are the Third Commandment as we number them. God says, *“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy as the Lord your God commanded you (v.12).”* Sabbath means rest. The Sabbath day was the 7th day of the week – Saturday. When God first gave his law, this reminded people that he rested from creating on the seventh day. Now Moses says that it reminds God’s people of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

What the NIV translates “observe” could just as well be “exercise great care over.” God isn’t saying, “Look at the calendar and remember that it’s the Sabbath.” God is telling his people that his will for the Sabbath is no trifling matter. It was of great importance to God and was to be the same for his people.

Physical Rest How were they to keep it holy? In verses 12 –14 God said that were to do so first by doing no work on Saturday. This applied to humans and animals alike. Obviously, there would be a practical side to this. The human body can only take so much and then it needs a rest. God knew this and in love for his people he didn’t want them to burn out physically.

Spiritual Rest But this physical rest was to be a pointer to a spiritual rest on which the Lord wanted his people to focus and to enjoy. God said, *“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.”*

God wanted his people to recall his love, faithfulness, and power put to work in their behalf as he delivered them from Egypt and sustained them through their wilderness journey. Repeatedly God forgave his people their sins and promised to be with them. God wanted his people to remember this every day of their lives. As they, on Saturday, stopped to rest from their physical labor, this physical rest would be a reminder of God's forgiveness and mercy, God's presence and power not only in the past but also in the future. It was a reminder, "God will be with us and have mercy on us in the present and the future." The Sabbath day was also a pointer to the coming Savior who would be the foundation for all spiritual rest.

At the same time the stopping of work symbolized a greater rest in God's love, this rest was reinforced by the fact that the Israelites on the Sabbath, according to God's will, assembled to listen to God's word and observe rituals of worship. In Leviticus 23:3, God said through Moses, "*The seventh day is a day of rest, a day of sacred assembly.*"

As the Israelites on the seventh day stop their labors, focused on and trusted in the Lord and his word, enjoyed inner rest. They took a break from their spiritual labors.

Nut & Shell The relationship of physical rest and spiritual rest is like a pecan. The pecan is made up of the shell on the outside and the nut or meat on the inside. Which is more important? More desirable? It's what's on the inside, isn't it? You don't buy pecans for the shell. But the shell performs an important function. It protects the nut or meat. Likewise, the physical rest on the Sabbath was the shell that not only brought something good for the body, it also protected and pointed to the spiritual rest that God in his grace and mercy gave to the souls of his people.

Honor & Worship But as God's people obeyed God by observing the Sabbath, they honored and worshipped the Lord. They said, "Lord, you are good. You are special. You created all in six days and rested from creating on the seventh. You saved us from slavery with your mercy and deliverance. So, Lord, we're taking a break for you."

2. What This Says to God's People Today

No Prescribed Day How does this apply to us, God's people, today? In New Testament times God no longer binds us to not working on the seventh day of the week - Saturday. In today's gospel reading Jesus indicated that as God he has the authority to make such changes. As for observance of special days through the apostle Paul in Colossians 2 the Lord says, "*Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (v.16-17).*" Dietary festival laws pointed to Christ and now that he has come, no longer apply. In Romans 14:5 the Lord tells us through Paul, "*One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord.*" The point is that we are no longer bound by a day.

Yet, it is common sense that we should regularly rest our bodies. To work ourselves to death would violate the thought that we are to care for our bodies because they are the temples of the Holy Spirit (1Co6:19). To hurt our harm our own body is a violation of the 5th commandment – "*You shall not murder.*"

What about Sunday – isn't that the Lord's Day? This was the day that the early Christians chose to gather because it was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. But we aren't bound to Sunday either. We can gather any and every day of the week if we choose. We are not bound to a day.

Still Bound

But there are some things which the Lord expects from us. He expects us to hear and use his word, *“Let the word of God dwell in you richly...”* *“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”* God expects us to believe his Word and trust in him. *“Jesus said, ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.’”* *“Trust in the Lord with all you heart and lean not on your own understanding...(Prov. 3).”* God expects us to obey his word. Jesus said, *“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching (Jn14:23).”* God expects us to gather to worship and fellowship. *“Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage each other all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb. 10:25).”* *“Worship the Lord with gladness...enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise (Ps.100).”*

When we fail to hear and use God’s Word, don’t believe and trust in him, fail in obeying him, become lax in gathering with Christian to worship God, we dishonor and fail to worship him. We fail to put God first in our lives and give him what is due. We also rob ourselves of the spiritual rest that comes to us through the gospel of Jesus Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit. We put ourselves through unnecessary turmoil and as a result may rob others of love we might show them if we had a greater sense of peace within ourselves. We disobey the 3rd commandment. We fail to take a needed break.

In these times when we are trying to decide what’s safe and what’s not, we may struggle what is the best thing for us. Bottom line God wants us to hear his word and worship. When we are able, the Lord wants us to gather in person for worship and fellowship, to receive Communion, and to serve together. Live streaming, cable replays, archived online services, or the Lutheran Chapel services – while good - are for when we can’t come in person due to vulnerability or lack of capability.

Rest in the Gospel

When we take a break giving time in our lives and a place in our hearts for the Gospel, we find rest for our souls. We hear of how Jesus, in our place, perfectly honored his Father by taking time for his word. That Jesus was perfect for us, gives rest to our souls. We don’t have to be and do what is impossible for us. Jesus was and did it for us. Through the gospel we sadly see Jesus suffering and dying for our sins, but gladly hear the result of this as God says, *“Your sins are forgiven in Jesus.”* Through the gospel we hear that we are delivered from the damnation we deserve. In the gospel we hear, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved (Acts 16).”* Through the gospel the Holy Spirit enables us to believe. Through the gospel we are strengthened as the Lord reminds us of the life everlasting the resurrection of the body, as the Spirit works in us to give us strength to overcome our weakness, as the Lord lights up our lives and helps us overcome the darkness of doubt and fear, and as the love of the Lord helps us to love him and others. Gathering with other Christians reinforces our face and provides encouragement.

Therefore, take a break. Use God’s word. Worship. Honor God. Then as a by-product of worship to enjoy the rest that comes through the word. Amen