

[00:00:00] Speaker A: Jesus said, come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[00:00:11] Speaker A: We see here that rest is something that Jesus wants to give us, and he doesn't seem to regard it as kind of like a luxury item, maybe something we might have occasionally. No, actually, it's an open invitation.

And. And it's to come to him, which is what God's already been speaking to us about this morning, isn't it? Which is really exciting. He says, come to him and we'll find rest.

[00:00:38] Speaker A: If you don't know me, my name's Mark. I am one of the leaders here in Hope Church.

And this morning I'm going to be speaking under the title of Cultivating Rhythms of Real Rest.

[00:00:54] Speaker A: Let me just pray briefly.

[00:00:59] Speaker A: Father. We. We love you, Jesus. We're so in love with you. And. And we're just so grateful for this invitation that you have given to us to come to you and that. That promise that in you we will find rest.

I pray that my words this morning would bring life and that they would be useful.

But above all, I pray that we would hear your voice this morning and that we would meet with you afresh.

So come, Holy Spirit, use this time, inhabit this time and our lives afresh. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

[00:01:42] Speaker A: So let's just start by looking at what this word rest actually is, that Jesus talks about it. The Greek word is something like anapao, probably not quite that, but that's my best attempt. And when you look it up, the word means to cause or permit somebody to cease from labor for the purpose of recovering strength.

And there's an implication that the word carries of previous toil and care.

[00:02:14] Speaker A: So the point here is that this kind of rest is about recovery of strength. And notice also that it implies that there's been work, and therefore there will be work to come. So, you know, it's not about a lazy life. In fact, the opposite. It's more about working hard and then finding in Jesus the kind of rest that refuels our strength.

[00:02:39] Speaker A: Now, I'm going to talk in fairly practical terms this morning, but I want us to kind of just have in mind throughout all of this that actually this is an entirely supernatural thing, isn't it?

So there can't ever be a rigid formula for this. Yes, there might be practical steps that we can take, but really what we're doing is creating space for a supernatural exchange to find rest in Jesus, which is really just an aspect of this thing we've been already hearing this morning. Jesus heart for us to come to him, because we find all we need in him, don't we? And that includes this kind of rest.

[00:03:18] Speaker A: So I wonder which of these sort of caricatures you most relate to.

Would you say that you're somebody who maybe struggles to prioritize rest? Maybe it's something, you know, it's important, but it's not easy, actually, for you because your instincts are more telling you to keep busy and be productive. And maybe actually you feel a bit guilty if you rest for any period of time. I probably fall in that category.

Maybe you're someone, though, who's actually very happy to stop working. And maybe your problem is actually on the other end, your problem's more actually just getting on and getting things done that you know, you're really meant to be doing.

But perhaps for you, there's a question mark still about are you finding that kind of real rest that Jesus is talking of that enables you to recover your strengths and kind of push you out into the next thing that he has for you?

Or maybe you're sitting there and you're kind of a bit befuddled. You're thinking, mark, honestly, what is the big deal about this word rest? Why would you feel the need to come and talk to us for 20 minutes about this? And there could be various reasons for that, you know, a range of different things. I wonder where you fit into in that regard.

[00:04:38] Speaker A: Or maybe you feel like you have all this sussed, in which case, great, and hopefully this morning will just be a nice encouragement for you. But as I say, I wouldn't regard myself as an expert in this. Actually, I probably come into that category, I said at the start, where I kind of. I know it's important, but I actually kind of have to really kind of work at it. And it's probably something that I've been working at over the last few years, which is why I feel like I've got something to say about this. But actually, if I'm really honest, some of my biggest regrets in life stem from times where I've probably overworked and not actually done a good job of this. So I'm not coming as an expert, but I'm coming as someone who's wrestled with this over the last bit of time.

[00:05:26] Speaker A: So I want to just now dig a little bit deeper into the question of motivation around this. Like, why is this important? We've already seen that Jesus wants to give us rest, and maybe that's important enough. But there's one particular rhythm of rest that we see in the Bible, and it's called Sabbath.

And the basic idea, you might be friends, is to stop working for one day at the end of each week. And it's one of the Ten Commandments.

And some of you might be familiar with the fact that the Ten Commandments are actually stated twice in the Old Testament. Once when they're given by God to Moses at the top of Mount Sinai, and then Moses again restates them to the people before they're about to go into the promised land.

[00:06:12] Speaker A: We're going to have a look at these two because it's quite interesting to see the. The similarity and the difference.

Firstly, I'm going to read just a little few verses from Exodus chapter 20, starting at verse 8, which is the first statement of the Sabbath command. And it says this. It says, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it, you shall not do any work, you, your son, or your daughter, your. Your male servant, your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who's within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

[00:07:02] Speaker A: We see there that the reason that is given for the Sabbath command is made in linking right back to creation. It picks up the language of Genesis chapter 2, where it says in almost identical language it says in Genesis chapter two, on the seventh day God finished His work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work.

So God blessed that seventh day and made it holy because on it God rested from all his work that he'd done in all creation.

So what we see here is that the first motivation for this rhythm of rest that is given is actually to draw us into line with the created design of the world. And we could even say that it's to live in the image of our creator, God. He was the one who rested first. And so it's not primarily a question of whether we're feeling tired or in need of a break, but actually, you know, God knows we're all finite and do need a rest. But really the motivation here is much more about, you know, not so much our capacity or our tiredness, but following a pattern that God has established, which is actually for the good of all creation.

So that's the reason that we find the motivation given for Sabbath the first time it's stated. But then I said that the Ten commandments are stated a second time, which is when the people are about to go into the promised land and Moses reminds them. And so when Moses brings this up, the first part of the Sabbath command is almost identical words, but then he follows it with a different motivation. He says, for you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

[00:08:58] Speaker A: You see, when they were in Egypt, they were slaves to Pharaoh. And the system they were forced to live under meant that they just had to keep working, no days of rest. They were treated more like machines for output than humans with dignity.

And therefore the Sabbath day becomes motivated as a remembrance of liberation from this cruel system.

And it also becomes a deliberate act of resistance against ever falling back into anything like this.

[00:09:30] Speaker A: So this speaks to that specific defiance of that historic Pharaoh in that narrative. But more broadly, we can see that Sabbath rest becomes an act of resistance towards any Pharaoh that would seek to capture us within a system which prioritizes productivity and output maximization at the expense of humanity.

And we lived, don't we, in a world where, for a lot of people, a significant part of our identity is wrapped up in and defined in terms of output. Whether that's success in your job, success in your exams at school, even things like posts on Instagram that make us look good. Or maybe we're trying to get a certain amount of likes.

Whatever it is, it could simply be just trying to achieve that kind of tidy house that you aspire to. I don't know what it is for you, but we live in a world which is full of pressure to perform and to look like something. And also a non stop world that never really goes to bed or switches off completely. We're addicted to being on the go, multitasking and finding ways to achieve more.

Maybe you feel like I'm not describing you, but this is a reality for a lot of us. And our phones really don't help us in this. They keep us connected, available and on the go.

And in this context, Sabbath is an act of resistance. It's an intentional rhythm of rest which punctures a hole in this system of relentless, relentless go, go, go.

It speaks of a counter cultural kingdom of God, doesn't it?

[00:11:14] Speaker A: So we see there in these two statements of the Sabbath command two reasons, two motivations for us to develop.

[00:11:23] Speaker A: Intentionally rhythms of real rest. One, to align with the created order of things, and then secondly, to resist The Pharaohs of our day.

[00:11:34] Speaker A: But at this point, there might be some of you thinking, well, what about the New Testament?

Don't we just need to go to Jesus now to find our rest, like we've already said? And like, he invites us? Well, yes and no.

[00:11:50] Speaker A: I mean, Sabbath was actually a huge area of conflict for Jesus, wasn't it? In fact, the Gospels, in the Gospels they often seem to present almost like Sabbath was like the main reason why the Pharisees and Jewish, Jewish teachers of the law were so riled up by him, because he did things like heal on the Sabbath and he allowed his disciples to pluck grains of corn for a snack on the Sabbath, didn't he?

But he never said they wanted to get rid of the Sabbath or ignore it.

The problem of his day was that people had got all tangled up with details around this practice.

And actually Jesus called himself the Lord of the Sabbath, didn't he? And as with many other things, he was wants to get to the heart of the matter, to get things the right way around, to recognize that actually Jesus could bring life in a way that religious observance never could.

The Sabbath was made for man, he said, not man, for the Sabbath. In other words, Sabbath should benefit life and not be a burden, which was really what was happening in his moment on earth.

[00:13:00] Speaker A: Paul also addresses the topic of Sabbath a few times, and mainly he brings it up to oppose the idea that observance, festivals and special days, including the Sabbath, are a way of us to be declared in the right by God.

[00:13:17] Speaker A: And Paul instead makes it very clear that that is wholly a matter of a gift from God. It's grace to be received by faith in Jesus.

[00:13:27] Speaker A: And then in Hebrews we see Sabbath rest being reframed as a destination for us as believers that Jesus is leading us into now in a measure and in fullness in the new creation. This is very much in line with the words that I started with Jesus's invitation to come to him and find rest in Him.

[00:13:49] Speaker A: Now, the Sabbath command is the only one of the Ten Commandments which isn't specifically reaffirmed in the New Testament. And theologians therefore debate whether or not it should be considered as a binding command for Christians or not. And there are certainly some passages which appear to kind of throw it out at first read. And if you're interested, Colossians 2 is probably where it makes the strongest case in that direction. But with

any topic, you need to look across the whole of the Bible, don't you, before concluding. And there are plenty of theologians who find A way to fit that Colossians 2 passage into their sort of pro Sabbath view.

[00:14:29] Speaker A: Some of you may be familiar with a Bible teacher called John Mark Comer. He likes to talk about the Sabbath quite a lot. And what he says is that actually this question is a mute point. He says that for him, if somebody could decisively prove to him that Sabbath is no longer a binding command for Christians, he would nevertheless continue to adopt the practice of Sabbath because he recognizes it as a gift and he's experienced it as something that's life giving.

And I tend to agree with that perspective.

Certainly Jesus issues with the Sabbath seem to have been focused around that overly detailed and religiously or even oppressively enforced Sabbath, Sabbath keeping. And these just aren't our main problems today.

Our culture is completely Sabbathless.

And I suspect that Jesus very likely has very different bones to pick on this topic in our culture today.

[00:15:32] Speaker A: So I want to encourage us.

We could spend all morning going into the detail of this debate, couldn't we? But I think that's just a very quick skim over the top. And you can go and look into it more if you want to. But. But I want to encourage us all to develop and cultivate rhythms of real rest in our lives.

Maybe it'll look like specifically a Sabbath, maybe it'll look slightly different.

But firstly, we want to do this because as I said, there's this idea of it being baked into the fabric of universe, of the universe, that we are to have these rhythms of rest to mirror our creator God, which is central to who we are as humans, isn't it? And then, as I said, it's this act of resistance against the pharaohs of our day of performance and relentlessness.

And because of all this, it does us good.

[00:16:24] Speaker A: It helps us to experience the rest that Jesus wants to give us, this supernatural exchange that enables us to recover our strength and then to continue on with our work as priests, priests and kings for him in this world.

[00:16:42] Speaker A: Okay, but why have I been using specifically this phrase, rhythms of real rest?

Well, I'm glad you asked.

[00:16:52] Speaker A: Allow me to say a few words about these things and then we'll come in towards a close.

So firstly, why rhythms?

Well, well, Sabbath we've been talking about, haven't we? And.

[00:17:05] Speaker A: The whole idea of Sabbath is that it's a rhythm. And I think that's important. You know, it comes once every seven days. Why do I think that's important?

Because it means it's outside of our control.

[00:17:20] Speaker A: If we align our rhythms to things that are linked to the passage of time. It takes them outside of something that we can control.

You know, God stopped after he completed creation.

But for us, we're probably unlikely to be like God in that sense, because for many of us, we're never really finished Sabbath. And this is the beauty of Sabbath. It doesn't just come around when we're ready for it or when we finished our to do list. It comes around whether we like it or not.

It tells us to stop, to put things down, maybe to switch our phones off, or certainly to draw a line in the sand.

[00:17:58] Speaker A: We're not just responding to our feelings in that moment.

We're choosing instead to trust God with our unfinished business and with the things that we've not completed.

And so it becomes a place of humility, a place to recognize that the world around us doesn't actually revolve around us and our abilities.

We might not have done everything we wanted to do, but we're not the ones who are holding the world in our hands, actually.

[00:18:26] Speaker A: And for some of us, that can be a really hard moment. And I would include myself in that category.

And it's an aspect of this act of resistance that I mentioned earlier.

[00:18:38] Speaker A: But do you know what I've experienced is that when I've chosen to stop, when it's time to stop and place that incomplete to do list into God's hands, those sort of negative consequences of the unfinished business that I'm feeling really keenly in that moment almost always turn out much less dramatic than what I think they are going to be in that moment.

God's good at holding our unfinished business, actually. Let's learn to trust him with that.

[00:19:10] Speaker A: You know, think of resistance training in the gym. It's hard work, but it achieves the goal. And resisting the fairies of our day is likely to involve some kind of discomfort or difficulty at that level. Because we're going against the flow of our culture.

Let's never believe that it's just a case of what feels good is good.

That's just not the truth, is it, guys? We know that there are lots of things that are hard work, unpleasant at the time, but are just really important and good for us.

[00:19:45] Speaker A: So then the other part, real rest.

[00:19:49] Speaker A: So here I just want to come back to the Sabbath command and how it's

worded. It's interesting to notice that the command isn't to practice the Sabbath or observe the Sabbath, but it's to keep the Sabbath holy.

Now, the word holy, at its core is about something that is distinct, something different from the norm, something that's Set apart, it has a special purpose.

So the command was to honor the fact that there was one day at the end of every week which was to be different from the others. It had a unique purpose.

And so, yes, it's about stopping work and the need to be productive on the go, but there's also a substance to what is meant to fill that time.

[00:20:35] Speaker A: And really, to summarise what I've learned about this, I would use three.

[00:20:42] Speaker A: Armistice, delight and worship.

Now, armistice isn't a word we use all the time, is it? But it's essentially this idea of an agreement to stop fighting. The most famous example that you might sort of think of when you hear that word is the agreement to end fighting at the end of World War I.

I really picked up this word because of some writing by a guy called Abraham Joshua Heschel. He was a Jewish rabbi who actually lived through both of the world wars.

And he said.

[00:21:19] Speaker A: The Sabbath is an armistice in man's cruel struggle for existence. A truce in all conflicts, personal and social.

Peace between man and man, man and nature, peace within man.

[00:21:35] Speaker A: When Simon was sharing earlier, I was thinking, this is exactly what I'm going to be talking about. It may be slightly different language, but it's this idea of actually Sabbath being.

[00:21:48] Speaker A: Not about escapism, but actually about a reconciliation with reality, with what is, is.

It's hard. And Simon touched on this sometimes.

[00:22:00] Speaker A: But in the rhythm of Sabbath, we have six days to work, to do maintenance, to work, to make things better. But then the time of rest is to actively accept what is.

[00:22:13] Speaker A: To have an armistice if you use that language.

So in this way, it's very different to what the world tries to sell us, which is the idea of work hard now and then maybe, you know, in the future you'll have earned an endless holiday or a retirement in the sunshine that actually breeds a sense of dissatisfaction. Whereas this kind of Sabbath rest fosters peace with reality and deep gratitude.

And from this place, I think, grows the fruit of delight, which was my second word. Because as we cease striving to improve things in that moment, our eyes are able to open to delight in what we do have to be thankful and wonder at simple things like, you know, a leaf.

It's amazing.

[00:23:06] Speaker A: Isaiah 58 tells God's people to call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable.

Which leads me onto the third word, which was worship.

The seventh day, it said in Deuteronomy 5, is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

Keeping this day as holy, as it said, is meant to be an act of worship, of making space to give our all to our God, who is our most cherished prize in a way that is uniquely possible in a day of rest.

[00:23:43] Speaker A: Somehow, whatever we're doing with this time, we want to have an attitude of worship that undergirds the whole thing.

If we miss out on this dynamic, then the whole thing very easily just collapses down to some sort of me centered mindfulness or something.

[00:24:03] Speaker A: So what might this actually look like? Well, as I said at the start, I don't think it's a rigid formula. I don't think it can be. I don't think it's meant to be. And in fact, as we've seen, that was the very thing that Jesus seemed to come against. And I think it's going to look different for different ones of us and in different seasons of our life.

But just to throw out a few thoughts, maybe it could look like a long walk in the countryside. Maybe it looked like journaling, reading poetry or reading your Bible, maybe taking photographs or having a slow, long grateful meal with your close friends or family, maybe playing music, exploring a new place, or just simply pouring your heart out to God.

[00:24:45] Speaker A: What it probably doesn't look like.

[00:24:48] Speaker A: Is just consuming entertainment.

And that is just so easy for us, isn't it? Like that's sometimes we receive that lie that actually we're just going to go and have some rest and we just switch on whatever the easiest thing to do, we consume some entertainment. It's not sinful to do that, of course, but it's not really rest in the way that I'm talking about here.

[00:25:13] Speaker A: Really. It's a question of what would help you lead.

What would help lead you into a place.

[00:25:21] Speaker A: That kind of captures these words, these ideas of armistice and delight and worship.

[00:25:30] Speaker A: So in conclusion, let's come back to that opening verse. Jesus said, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

He will give us rest.

He will. He desires to, as a means for us to recover strength for the good and hard work ahead of us.

[00:25:55] Speaker A: This is for our good.

It's a witness to the world and it's for the good of the world.

[00:26:04] Speaker A: So really I just want to leave you with some questions and do we have time just to kind of ponder these for a few minutes now? Steve, maybe if you'd be up for coming and playing guitar, that would be nice.

[00:26:19] Speaker A: I think this is the kind of message that, you know, can sometimes feel nice.

But actually what God wants to do is he wants to speak to us and actually just ask us, what do we want to do? What does he want to do in us, really is probably the better way to say it. So as Steve just plays for us, I just want us to be asking God a few questions in response.

[00:26:47] Speaker A: I mean, primarily the question to ask him is what? What steps God do you want me to take in response to. To this message? But if you want some specific questions, maybe you could ask him, what does real rest look like for me?

And are there any specific routines or rhythms that you would like me to build into my life? It could be something completely new, or it could just be adapting something.

But I just want us to have a moment to hear from God, to listen to the Holy Spirit. What does he want to say? Well, these theories and ideas are great, but. But let's bring it into our own personal world.

Now ask God what do you want me to do with this? What does real rest look like for me? Is there anything specific that you'd like me to build into my life?