

## Sabbath Freedom

“And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord, even of the Sabbath.” – Mark 2: 27-28

For the last several years, our family has been on a journey of learning to keep the Sabbath. Although some of the stigma has changed in recent years, when you talk to people about Sabbath keeping, some of the old misunderstandings still remain. “Isn’t Sabbath keeping always legalistic and oppressive?” “Didn’t Jesus say we don’t have to do that anymore?” or “That sounds great, but I just don’t see how that could possibly work today.” There’s some truth in that last one. This isn’t the new creation quite yet and there are always impediments to living the kingdom life in our fallen world.

But Jesus never said we shouldn’t keep the Sabbath. If you look back at his conflicts with the Pharisees over the Sabbath, Jesus is usually trying to say that the Pharisees have missed the point. Not only was their list of stringent rules unnecessary, they were hindering people from experiencing the Sabbath as God intended. Jesus actions on the Sabbath show us that it is about healing and wholeness, worship of God and strengthening relationships, reaching out in love and grace. In concert with our “Humanize Me” series, Jesus is telling us that true Sabbath keeping makes us more human.

The fact that Sabbath keeping makes us more human is clear in Old Testament history. In Deuteronomy, God tells the people of Israel that as they keep the Sabbath, they are to “...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.” (Deuteronomy 5:15a) In other words, the Sabbath is also about freedom. Fruitful, fulfilling work is a gift of God (Genesis 2:15) and the command to work is inherent in the command to keep the Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). But backbreaking, ceaseless work, with no rest, is a sign of slavery. I believe the Holy Spirit is working to revive Sabbath keeping among God’s people right now because we are in our own kind of slavery. We are slaves to time, our busyness and to do lists, to our bosses we can’t control, and to a culture that tells us that our worth as persons resides in our worldly success and accomplishments.

But God’s message to us is completely different, and we live it out when we keep the Sabbath. On the Sabbath we worship God and rest in the fact that salvation is a gift of sheer grace, accomplished by God’s mighty hand and outstretched arm in the cross and resurrection. We don’t have to do anything to earn it. On the Sabbath, we experience God’s love when we do nothing but rest in fellowship with Him and with one another. We heal and rest from the rigors of the week, taking time to enter joyfully into the fruits of our labor and the life God has given us. We take time to restore relationship with others, being together without busyness and deadlines. We remember that the whole world is not on our shoulders – it’s on God’s shoulders. If Jesus is Lord of our life, then he is Lord of our time. We have only to do the work he has called us to do, and we are free to enter into the life-giving, humanizing rhythm of fruitful, fulfilling labor and joyful rest God infused into creation at the beginning.

There are practical considerations, and keeping the Sabbath means making decisions which prioritize rest in the Lord on that day. Letting go of legalism also means that Sabbath keeping will look a little different for different people. Each of us have different work, so understanding our work (whether we get paid or not) and what we refrain from doing will look a little different. If we work on the weekends, or have schedules that shift, the Sabbath might need

to be on a different day than the more typical Saturday or Sunday. The Sabbath looks different depending on our personalities. If we are introverts, the Sabbath will have more solitude, and if we are extroverts, it might need more time with others (though it will have a little of both for all of us). The Sabbath looks different based on our different stages of life and situations, whether we are married or single, have kids at home, are retired, still working, or young and still in school. However it looks, the Sabbath is still a gift for all of us.

As our rhythms of life change with the coming of fall, I encourage you to pray about whether or not God is calling you to take this step in your journey of growth in Christ. I asked my 14 year old if he could tell people one thing about the Sabbath, what would it be? He said, "It's a day to rest, and forget about the troubles of life." In other words, it's a little piece of heaven, a pointer to the new creation and the kingdom of God, when all our sorrows will be no more. We could all use more of that in our lives.

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,  
To minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,  
Everyone who keeps my Sabbath and does not profane it,  
And holds fast my covenant –  
These I will bring to my holy mountain,  
And make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar;  
For my house shall be called a house of prayer  
For all peoples.”  
- Isaiah 56: 6-7