

Jesus and the Sabbath

Matthew 11:25-12:21

Introduction

1. The creation account shows eternal and Divine wisdom, planning, and power with creatures created in God's image as the pinnacle.
 2. **Genesis 2:2-3** – God's rest concludes the creation narrative with a sense of peace and serenity which comes from the sufficiency of God's creative activity.
 3. **Genesis 3** describes this peace being disrupted when man rebelled against created order and purpose.
 4. From that point forward, the Bible tells of God's plan to restore man to His created purpose and reconcile them to His fellowship.
 5. The Sabbath, which commemorates the 7th day when God rested, is in great anticipation of this restoration, renewal, and redemption according to God's plan.
 6. Jesus' interaction with Jewish leaders about the Sabbath shows many things, but especially Christ's role in this redemptive plan.
- I. Jesus' Invitation to Rest (**Matthew 11:25-30**)
- A. Jesus' Assessment of Responses to His Messianic Activity (**vv. 25-27**)
- a. **"these things" (v. 25)** – the miraculous works of Jesus confirming His identity and preaching concerning the kingdom.
 - i. **9:35** – preaching gospel of kingdom.
 - ii. **Chapter 10** – sending out 12 to preach.
 - iii. **11:1** – Jesus preaching in cities.
 - iv. **11:20-24** – woes pronounced upon cities for seeing mighty works, but not repenting and responding – ultimately to receive Jesus.
 - b. (**vv. 25-26**) – their pride has kept them from seeing, whereas the humble readily embrace the blessing of the dawning of the Messianic age.
 - c. Ultimate meaning of **"these things"** that many are missing – (**v. 27**) – more than Divine authority and relation to the Father, but Messianic fulfillment of Divine visitation.
 - i. **11:10** – John prepared the way for the **"the Lord...Even the Messenger of the covenant" (Malachi 3:1)** – the Messiah).
 - ii. **Mark 1:2** – paired with **Isaiah 40:3** – **"prepare the way of the Lord (YHWH)"**
 - iii. **Isaiah 40:9-11** – YHWH would come among His people and shepherd them (**Matthew 9:36** – compassion of Jesus, sheep without shepherd).
- B. Jesus' Yoke of Rest (**vv. 28-30**)

- a. **(v. 28)** – the labor and being laden contrasted to rest is not a contrast between work and no work.
 - i. Jesus mentions a yoke and burden **(vv. 29-30)**.
 - ii. The point is striving without God – **Isaiah 40:27-31** – after contrasting God with idols, running and walking with God is activity, but not wearisome.
 - iii. **“Rest”** is in fellowship with God contrasted with that which is separate from Him.
- b. **(vv. 29-30)** – the rest Jesus provides is in union/fellowship with God through Him.
 - i. Yoke – *zygos* – “serving to couple two things together” (VINE); “a coupling” (STRONG)
 - ii. His yoke, learning from him – **(v. 27)** – fellowship with the Father.
 - iii. **“you will find rest for your souls”** – **Jeremiah 6:16** – Judah called to return to YHWH, His law, to find rest – fellowship with Him.
- c. **“I will give you rest”** – **“you will find rest for your souls”** – **“At that time Jesus...on the Sabbath”** (day of rest) – not coincidental.

II. The Sabbath Day

A. God Rested the 7th Day

- a. **Genesis 2:1-3** – sanctified the 7th day because He rested on it.
- b. Rested – *šābat* – “to cease, desist, rest” (BDB)
 - i. God never stopped being active – **John 5:17**
 - 1. EX: **cf. Matthew 5:45** – makes the sun rise and sends the rain.
 - ii. God doesn’t need **“rest”** as we think of it – **“The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary” (Isaiah 40:28)**.
 - iii. **(vv. 2-3)** – God’s rest corresponds to the cessation of His creative work.
- c. Why did God stop creating? – **Genesis 1:31** – He fulfilled His plan it was as He intended.
 - i. The plan – **“For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:36)**
 - ii. There was God (**Genesis 1:1**), then God created (**Romans 11:36** – for His glory, exactly as intended), then God ceased creating (rested).
 - iii. **“to Him”** – once God finished all He intended for His glory, the 7th day there was no more coming into being (creating), but just God.

iv. Ultimately, God’s “rest” is in Himself, and the “rest” of Creation is in God who created.

- d. Man was created to work – **Genesis 2:15** – “*tend*” – *âḇaḇ* – “to work, serve” (BDB)
 - i. However, being with God (fellowship) he was in rest (**cf. Genesis 3:8** – God in the garden as a regular thing).
 - ii. Fellowship broken led to the intense labor – **Genesis 3:17-19** – creation cursed, it would not be as God originally intended anymore.
 - 1. Defines “*labor and heavy laden*” – not just doing anything, but separation from God.
- e. God sanctified the day (**Genesis 2:3**) – a day that would have singular focus on God.

B. The Observation of the Sabbath for Israel – Exodus 20:9-11 – it is a holy day, because God rested.

- a. **Exodus 31:12** – a sign of covenant and fellowship, to know that the Lord sanctified Israel – i.e. gave them rest with Him (Exodus, covenant, tabernacle, promised land, etc.).

C. A Sacred Assembly for Worship

- a. **Leviticus 23:3** – “*a holy convocation*” – *miqrâ’* – “something called out, i.e. a public meeting” (STRONG)
- b. **Numbers 28:9-10** – sacrifices made.
- c. **Psalm 92** – “*A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath day.*”

d. The Sabbath was an interruption of daily activity for the imitation of God (as He rested), and an intense focus on Him and fellowship with Him in communal worship.

- i. All normal activity which finds its purpose in God is put on pause for total focus on God.
- ii. As James later noted – “*For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.*” (**Acts 15:21** – focus on God and His word)

D. The Sabbath was about a devotion of undivided attention toward God and engaged fellowship with Him. It was about remembering and sustaining covenant relationship.

III. Jesus and the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-21**)**

- A. Jesus is Greater than the Temple and Lord of the Sabbath (**vv. 1-8**)
 - a. The accusation (**vv. 1-2**)

- i. Nowhere did the law prohibit doing as they did on the Sabbath – (v. 7) – Jesus calls the disciples **“guiltless.”**
- ii. The Mishnah (Jewish traditions and teachings) famously listed 39 activities which were prohibited on the Sabbath – their objection was not based on Divine law, but human tradition.
 - 1. **Matthew 15:2, 7-9** – Jesus’ later exposure of the nature of their traditions.
- iii. **Their departure from God led to a condemnatory attitude toward those who walked with God on a day sanctified for God.**
 - 1. Great evidence they need the rest Jesus offered.
- b. Jesus’ exposure of their inconsistencies and bias (vv. 3-4)
 - i. Jesus labeled David’s actions as **“not lawful.”**
 - ii. His first argument is a type of noble ad hominem – Jesus knows their hearts and exposes them.
 - iii. They honor David and his actions though it was unlawful – why are they condemning the guiltless? (v. 7)
 - iv. Jesus does not advocate “situation ethics,” but calls for honesty and consistency before more accurately depicting what the law of Sabbath was all about!
- c. Jesus’ exposure of their misunderstanding of Sabbath (v. 5)
 - i. **Numbers 28:9-10** – Sabbath day sacrifices.
 - ii. Profane – not actually, according to the Pharisees’ traditional view.
 - iii. **Truly, they “are blameless” – in fact, they are doing the very thing the Sabbath was sanctified for!**
- d. Jesus’ Divine claim (v. 6)
 - i. His argument using the priests on the Sabbath (v. 5) was not to suggest a hierarchy of divine command where one that technically violates the other is accepted due to the importance of the other.
 - 1. His argument exposed their inconsistency in applying their own traditions.
 - 2. Exposed their misunderstanding of Sabbath – to remember God and drawn near to Him in worship.
 - ii. **“For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?... He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it.” (Matthew 23:17, 21)**
 - 1. Jesus’ claim is to be the God who is the object of focus and worship on the Sabbath – that’s who the disciples were walking with.

- e. Jesus' rebuke of their ignorance (v. 7)
 - i. This is more than Jesus admonishing them for their quickness to condemn the disciples due to their lack of mercy/compassion.
 - 1. Though it addresses the cause of this lack.
 - ii. **"For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6, NASB)**
 - 1. *Hesed* – **"faithfulness" (Hosea 6:4)**
 - 2. **"steadfast love" (ESV); "lovingkindness" (LSB)**
 - 3. Context – called to return to God, claimed repentance, God's admonition of merely a show, but no true faithfulness, fidelity, steadfast love – form **("sacrifice")** without substance.
 - iii. **Sabbath – a sign, reminder, time of devotion to faithfulness, steadfast love, and loyalty to God.**
 - 1. Pharisees – reducing the Sabbath to mere form and ritual, but worse, in binding human tradition were showing unfaithfulness to God.
 - 2. Walking with **"One greater than the temple" (v. 6)**, the disciples of Jesus were showing such covenant faithfulness the Sabbath was intended for.
- f. Jesus' second Divine claim (v. 8)
 - i. This certainly shows Jesus' ability to interpret Sabbath law accurately.
 - ii. Jesus is the One who sanctified the Sabbath, and is therefore the source of true rest:
 - 1. **Genesis 2:1-3** – He is the Creator God, and the aim of creation – **Colossians 1:16**
 - 2. **Matthew 11:27** – knows the Father and reveals the Father.
 - 3. **Colossians 2:9-10, 16-17** – Jesus is the **"substance"** (*sōma*, body) of the Sabbath.
 - iii. The rest which the Sabbath remembers and anticipates in connection with God is offered by Him – **Matthew 11:28-30**
- B. Jesus is the Restoring Servant of God (vv. 9-21)
 - a. Man enjoyed God's rest in the garden through fulfillment of created purpose in fellowship with Him and lost it when fellowship was broken and the creation cursed leading to intense labor.

- b. The Sabbath anticipated the restoration of fellowship with God, and the healing of what was broken.
- c. Jesus' healing of the man on Sabbath manifests He is God come to restore and renew fellowship with His people, healing and correcting what has been broken:
 - i. (vv. 12-14) – lawful to do good, healed, Pharisees show their burden of sinful separation by plotting evil on God's day of rest.
 - ii. (vv. 15-21) – Jesus is the Servant of YHWH, the Messiah, sent to heal and bring victory (vv. 20-21).

Conclusion

1. Jesus is the substance of all that the Sabbath foreshadowed.
2. His provision of rest is from the toilsome life of sin in exile from God's presence.
3. The rest He provides is not in a life devoid of activity, but in a life restored to original purpose in fellowship with God.
4. The yoke of Jesus is easy and light because it is our created purpose and fulfillment as those made in the image of God.
5. Will you come to Him to find rest for your soul?