

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflections
Rest for Your Soul
18 &19 February 2023
Lead Pastor Tammy Long

Scripture Text: Genesis 2:2; Matthew 11:28-29; Hebrews 4:9-10

Video Clips: - <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1YwhPc5OxZxM5a4Nrm1wA5tueTBg6-7vt?usp=sharing>

Sermon Preamble

We are in a sermon series called The Chosen. The main message from last week is that, like Mary Magdalene, we are known, loved, and chosen by God. When we embrace this truth and have a personal encounter with Jesus, our lives are forever changed. The life changing factor between our before and our after is our personal encounter with Jesus. After the encounter with Jesus, we experience rest for our souls. This rest for our souls applies even though we may be exhausted. As we celebrate Black History Month of February, we know the trials some face in a life knowing people are going to hate you, demean you, and mistreat you because of who you are. We remember the African American response of resilience, perseverance, determination, and faith in God. That faith in God allows some of us to keep walking the road with trials, like potholes and fallen branches on the road of life. God is our Protector, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, our Liberator, and the Source of Peace and Rest for our Soul.

Mary meets the Pharisee Nicodemus

See Video Clip 1. Mary begins to live her new life as a follower of Jesus with new friends and renewed spiritual practices. One spiritual practice Mary renews is Shabbat, the Hebrew word for Sabbath, meaning the day of rest that God established at creation for all of time and eternity.

Let's go back to 948 BC for what God says to us about Sabbath rest

See Video Clip 2. ²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Genesis 2:2-3).

Celebrating Sabbath has been a mandate from God for hundreds of years for Jews in the 1st Century. ⁸You remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. ¹⁰On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock and any foreigners living among you. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy." (Exodus 20:8-11). This scripture is the 4th of the 10 Commandments given to Moses at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness after God freed God's children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. God established this 4th Commandment as part of the covenant between the Israeli people and God.

When God included observing the Sabbath in the 10 Commandments, many Jewish scholars believe the idea of a Sabbath was not new. Israeli Rabbinic tradition and Jewish writings note that the Sabbath goes back as far as Seth, Methuselah, Noah, Abraham, and the Patriarchs. There is also evidence that Israelites observed the Sabbath while enslaved in Egypt.

Whether they were actually keeping the Sabbath as God intended is another matter. Much like us, knowing something and doing it in obedience are often two different things.

Through the Old Testament, God helped the Israelites with the Sabbath rest

As the Israelites traveled through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, God helped them with their spiritual practice of Sabbath rest. For example, as recorded in Exodus 16, God provided manna each day (except for the 7th day) for them to eat. Manna was a wafer-like bread that appeared on the ground;

they gathered up only what they needed each morning. However, on the 6th day, they were to gather twice as much in order to observe the Sabbath on the 7th day. God did not provide manna on the 7th day. They had to cease the work of gathering manna whether they wanted to cease that gathering work or not! They were to trust God completely for their daily bread. Keeping the Sabbath then as now was one way they practiced trusting and depending on God. They have to recognize that God is their source and their provider, not their labor or the work of their hands.

Why God is serious when it comes to keeping the Sabbath

There are at least 16 verses where God expresses frustration, disappointment, and anger toward the people of Israel for violating the Sabbath. For example, “But the people of Israel rebelled against me, and they refused to obey my decrees there in the wilderness. They wouldn’t obey my regulations even though obedience would have given them life. They also violated my Sabbath days” (Ezekiel 20:13).

Why is God so insistent that we keep the Sabbath? Is it because God knows we are only dust and need self-care? Is it because God knows we need breaks to keep our bodies working properly? Is it because we are prone to kill ourselves as a workaholic, with stress and worrying about things that really are not that important? Is it because we get overwhelmed and overwrought from the trials of life and need to reboot and re-center? While God cares about these things, and the Sabbath does address these items, God’s vision for us is even broader.

The Sabbath is about God’s Kingdom vision of a deep rest in our soul both now and later

God’s kingdom vision is for God’s people to experience a Sabbath rest. This rest is metaphorically depicted in the Promised Land. The Promised Land is a destination to be desired, flowing with God’s bountiful provision and peace. God’s vision is for God’s people to experience a Sabbath rest in God’s Kingdom. The Sabbath is a deep rest for our souls, as modeled by God at the very beginning of time.

When we think about rest, we often think about sleep or a vacation. When God rested on the 7th day, it was not because God was tired, for God never sleeps or slumbers. “Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” (Psalms 121:4).

Two main Hebrew words for rest: Shabbat means to stop working; Nuakh means to dwell or rest together

Genesis scripture uses both meanings of rest. God is resting by stopping the work of creation on the 7th day. Also, when God created humans, the Hebrew word for rest means that God dwelt with them and settled them in the garden with God. Before Adam and Eve made their disobedient choice against God, they lived in unbroken communion with God. God created humans to have fellowship with God. That is why God would walk in the Garden; God wanted to meet with Adam and Eve and rest with them.

The Sabbath is an act of worship to our faithful God. God asks that we rest from our work and stop all of our “to do list items.” God also asks that we dwell with God in relational trust, dependence, and joy as we remember and celebrate who God is in our lives.

The Sabbath is not about us, but about worship and our relationship with God

When God gave Moses the 10 Commandments, God said, “The seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God.” This reminds us that the Sabbath is fundamentally not about us. The Sabbath is not something we squeeze into our schedules when we feel we need it. Instead, keeping the Sabbath is a gift dedicated to the Lord that by God’s grace we benefit from!

On a regular basis, we are to have a rhythm where we stop working. We set time apart to unplug, disconnect, rest, and dwell with God. As we do this, we will experience the Sabbath rest God offers and desires to restore and refresh our souls. In fact, resting and dwelling with God is actually the reason God made us. It is why we exist.

The Sabbath Commandment was given to the entire community, not simply to the individual Jew

Notice the specifics God gives about who is to participate in the Sabbath. “On that day, no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and nay foreigners living among you” (Exodus 20:8-11). They were to celebrate the Sabbath together as a community. It wasn’t only just the Israelites; foreigners living in the community were included for unity in solidarity, for the good of the community resting with God.

God is about community, for our God exists in a triune community. Because we are created in the image of God, we are also to be about community. The video clip we saw earlier captured the community, not individual, aspect well. We saw God’s people gathered together in community to celebrate Shabbat together.

The mother explained Shabbat to her son. She said Shabbat is a time for rest as we honor three things: family, our people (including strangers and friends not yet met), and God. For centuries continuing through today, Jewish households and communities have celebrated Shabbat. It begins sundown on Friday evening through nightfall on Saturday night. The big parts of the celebration are three Shabbat meals. There is a fancy Friday night dinner and Shabbat lunch with ceremonial prayers still repeated today. Then there is a third lighter meal on Shabbat afternoon. For observing Jews and Messianic Jews, Shabbat is central to the life, identity, and practice of what it means to be faithful to God.

Shabbat in the New Testament is about Sabbath rest and the role of Jesus

For Christians, the idea of Sabbath rest is not as strongly tied to our identity. However, the commandment and God’s invitation to Sabbath has not gone away. The writer of Hebrews makes that clear. “So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. So let us do our best to enter that rest.” (Hebrews 4:9-10). The context of this scripture is Sabbath rest and the role of Jesus in providing that rest for our soul in the presence of Jesus.

We fast-forward about a thousand years from the last clip to the 1st Century as Mary Magdalene is experiencing rest for her soul in the presence of Jesus. Jews were still celebrating Shabbat in the same way they did in 984 BC. We will see the different ways the Jewish priest Nicodemus and Mary Magdalene prepared for the Shabbat.

See Video Clip 3.

The writers of The Chosen did a good job of giving us a glimpse of very different Shabbat celebrations

In comparing the Shabbat celebration of Mary with the Jewish celebration as practiced by Nicodemus, we see similarities and differences.

Similarities are the following: we see people gathering for the meal, we see hospitality and the welcoming of guests, an air of celebration. We also see the same rituals that have been followed since 984 BC.

There are also differences. The Nicodemus Shabbat has pomp and circumstance. The Pharisees are jockeying for a key seat at the table. It is a lavish setting with evidence of material wealth. In contrast, Mary’s Shabbat is simple and humble. Mary is unsure, and she admits to making a mistake. She is warm and welcoming to those she does not know. Mary’s celebration feels fresh, genuine, and sincere. In contrast, the Shabbat of Nicodemus feels like they are simply going through the motions using rote tradition. Sometimes going through the motions becomes rote for us as well. We may not want to admit it, but sometimes our passion for God has cooled, and we are merely going through the motions.

At Mary’s Shabbat, Jesus is standing at the door; the presence of Jesus is all we need

“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends” (Revelation 3:20). The writers of The Chosen video applied this biblical principle in the next video clip scene. Let’s see what happens next.

See Video Clip 4. There is so much to notice and reflect on in this video scene.

We are reminded that Jesus was Jewish. Jesus was a Middle Eastern person of color. Jesus would have participated in all of the Jewish religious ceremonies, festivals, and traditions with his family and friends.

Did you notice how gentle, humble, and personable Jesus was?

This psychological portrait of Jesus is in keeping with the Jesus we see in the Gospels. Even though this scene is not in the Bible, it is consistent with what we know about who Jesus is.

Jesus did not force his way inside; Jesus waited to be invited. Jesus never forces himself on us. He reaches out to us, seeks to get our attention, and offers invitations. Jesus always respects our free will, and He waits to be invited in.

Jesus did not take offense at Barnabas' rude joke about people from Nazareth. In fact, Jesus defused the discomfort in the room, exhibiting kindness, warmth, patience, and love, as Jesus does with us.

Jesus was not frustrated or disappointed that Mary was flustered and unsure of what she was doing. There was no attitude that Mary should have had this together better. Instead Jesus was reassuring, extending grace and sensitivity. Sometimes, we beat ourselves up way more than Jesus ever would. Jesus teaches, guides, and extends grace as we grow and learn. Jesus models the grace we need to give ourselves.

Jesus is the center because Jesus embodies the Kingdom in ceasing from work and dwelling with God

Mary was right to defer to Jesus to lead the ceremony, but Jesus did not feel the need to be at the center. Jesus just wanted to be with her and the other guests to enjoy resting with them.

Yet, by his presence, Jesus was the center, not because he was entitled so they should make room for him. Rather, Jesus was the center because in the flesh, Jesus embodies God's Kingdom vision for Sabbath rest. Jesus embodies what it means and what it looks like for us to cease from work, to settle, to dwell, to rest with God and loved ones.

In this video clip scene, we see the picture of what God desires for the people of God. Made possible through Jesus, there is warmth, love, laughter, intimacy, acceptance, and peace. There is rest for our soul to face another day. Jesus is present, and that is all we need. When the dust settles, and no matter what else may be happening around us, if Jesus is present and we are following Jesus, that is all we need. That is where we find Sabbath rest for our souls.

Shabbat rest for us today both in Jesus and with Jesus

"Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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" (Matthew 11:28-29). Jesus was addressing the burden of religiosity and the heaviness of religious laws. The truth of Jesus' words extend even broader. Jesus is the Prince of Peace and He invites us to cast our cares on Him. Jesus offers rest for our souls because Jesus is right there with us and promises never to leave us, even when we are going through hard times.

As we journey together, Jesus looks forward to regular intervals when we pause from work, shut everything down, and choose to be with Jesus and His family. We find Sabbath rest for our souls both *in* Jesus and with Jesus. Perhaps Jesus is inviting you to trust him and draw closer, finding rest for your soul in Jesus. Perhaps Jesus is inviting you to stop, unplug, disconnect from the treadmill of life and find rest for your soul with Jesus. As you worship with the gift of quality time with Jesus and His family, it doesn't have to be heavy or spiritually serious. Jesus is gentle and joyful. Jesus simply wants to be invited in. As you invite Jesus in, you will find rest for your soul.

God is intentional and asks us to also be intentional. We can experience and offer Sabbath rest on a regular basis with a rhythm of making time. That is something we can learn from our Jewish brothers and sisters. We can begin small and build a rhythm over time. It is about enjoying God and enjoying one another with mindfulness that Jesus is the center of it all. Find time for you and Jesus and time to connect with God's family, so God can fill you and provide rest for your soul.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDING FOR USE IN FAMILY GROUP

Sermon Preamble

-Listen to, “I Don’t Feel No ways Tired.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw75v2uqts&ab_channel=WalterRobinsonJr. The lyrics assert that Jesus is always present, and we don’t believe Jesus brought us this far to leave us. The life road may not be easy, with physical exhaustion and mental abuse, but the gift of Jesus is that “we don’t feel no way tired.” Instead, the presence of Jesus in our lives provides rest for our soul. In what circumstance can you testify that even in difficult times of physical exhaustion or mental abuse, the presence of Jesus provides rest for our soul?

Mary meets the Pharisee Nicodemus

-What did you feel about the approach from the Pharisee Nicodemus to Mary in the Video Clip 1 before Mary had met Jesus?

Let’s go back to 948 BC for what God says to us about Sabbath rest

-According to Jewish scholars, is the Sabbath rest, as the 4th of the 10 Commandments given to Moses at Mt. Sinai, a new commandment? Why do you think it is part of human nature to not obey God’s commandments that have been established for hundreds of years?

Through the Old Testament, God helped the Israelites with the Sabbath rest

-Even though God provided assistance in obeying the Sabbath by providing manna daily, except for the 7th day, to eat their daily bread, how do you feel that the Israelites still had disobedience and idolatry instead of trusting and relying on God?

Why God is serious when it comes to keeping the Sabbath

-Since obedience would have given the Israelites life of daily bread, how does it make you feel that they would not obey God’s regulations that would give them life and violated Sabbath days as recorded in Ezekiel 20:13?

The Sabbath is about God’s Kingdom vision of a deep rest in our soul both now and later

-In what way is the deep Sabbath rest for our souls, as modeled by God, not because we are physically exhausted either in the here and now or later in the after?

-“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...they will rest from their labor” (Rev. 14:13). In what way do we receive the rest for our souls available to us today in this world, not just in heaven?

Two main Hebrew words for rest: Shabbat means to stop working; Nuakh means to dwell or rest together

-In what ways are the two main Hebrew words for rest both applicable to God’s desire for us to rest? For our close relationship with God, as modeled by God, what is necessary besides to stop working on the Sabbath day?

The Sabbath is not about us, but about worship and our relationship with God

-In resting with God, why should our focus not be about us and our need for rest from exhaustion and busy schedules? Instead, how might we benefit from the grace in dwelling with God?

The Sabbath Commandment was given to the entire community, not simply to the individual Jew

-Why is the Sabbath Commandment, as modeled by God, given to the entire community, not just to the individual Jew?

Shabbat in the New Testament is about Sabbath rest and the role of Jesus

-Why are the role, presence, and relationship with Jesus central to the Sabbath rest in the New Testament?

The writers of The Chosen did a good job of giving us a glimpse of very different Shabbat celebrations

-What similarities and differences between the Shabbat celebration celebrated by Jewish people and the Sabbath celebration celebrated in The Chosen video clip most resonated with you?

At Mary’s Shabbat, Jesus is standing at the door; the presence of Jesus is all we need

-Why is the presence of Jesus all that we need for rest for our soul?

Did you notice how gentle, humble, and personable Jesus was?

-How is the psychological portrait of Jesus as the true servant's gentleness in the video clip consistent with the Jesus we see in the gospels, especially in Matthew 12: 15-21 and in the prophecy in Isaiah 42:2-3, 53:1-2) ?

Jesus is the center because Jesus embodies the Kingdom in ceasing from work and dwelling with God

-Why is Jesus the center of Christian Sabbath rest celebrations?

Shabbat rest for us today both in Jesus and with Jesus

-In what ways will you be intentional, start small in building a rhythm over time, have the mindfulness that Jesus is the center of it all, and receive from God rest in your soul?