

## “This is the Day which the Lord has made”

We experience life in constantly repeating cycles, don't we? We see this in the changing of the seasons. How many springs have we seen come and go? And now here we are enjoying another spring that will be followed by another summer, and then another fall, and then another winter, and then another spring. We see this at the most basic level in the constant repetition of day and night, and even of lunar months as the moon waxes and then wanes and then starts the cycle all over again.

And yet even as we see these cycles of seasons and months and day and night, the Bible tells us that history (the story of this world and of God's governance of this world) is not ultimately cyclical (going in circles) but linear (moving always towards a goal). We're all familiar with the first verse of Genesis:

➤ Genesis 1:1 — “In the *beginning* God created the heavens and the earth.”

That there was a definite beginning of creation and of history already foretells that there will be a definite end – not an “end” as in an apocalyptic end of the world, but an “end” as in a wonderful goal and consummation.

If history is linear, what's the point of all the repeating cycles of days and months and seasons and years? That day unfailingly follows night and spring unfailingly follows winter should point us always to the perfect faithfulness of God who never changes – who's the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

➤ Jeremiah 33:20–21, 25–26 — “Thus says the LORD, ‘If you can break My covenant for the day and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant... If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the statutes for heaven and earth I have not established, then I would reject the seed of Jacob and David My servant.’”

The statutes that God has established for heaven and earth (days and seasons) are things that no man could ever attempt to alter. These are cycles that even the plants and the animals observe. But what about weeks? Why, in the midst of all these repeating cycles determined by the earth's relationship to the Sun and even by the earth's relationship to the Moon, do we humans also measure the passage of time by a seven day week? Plants and animals don't observe weeks. Weeks are not marked or determined by any natural law of the universe. And yet all of us experience the repeating cycles of days and months and seasons and years in terms of the ever-repeating cycle of the week: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday... Sunday.

The ancient Babylonians explained the significance of seven days in terms of the seven observable and “moving” celestial bodies (the Sun and Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn). The Romans named the days of the week after their gods, each of whom was associated with one of the seven “planets.” But these ancient peoples didn't invent the seven-day week; they were only trying to give meaning to something they already had in terms of their own

pagan worldview. If the seven-day week can't be accounted for by any natural law of the universe, then where did it come from? Only the Bible answers this question in a way that explains why the week has been so perpetually and so universally observed.

- Exodus 20:11 — In *six* days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the *seventh* day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day [the *seventh* day when He *ceased* from His creative activity] and made it holy.

The seven days of our week aren't determined by any "natural law," but they have been given to us by God and woven, as it were, into the very warp and woof of the creation itself.

Why, then, did God superimpose upon the natural cycles of day and night and [lunar] months and seasons and years our constantly repeating, but seemingly "artificial" week of seven days? The answer is because He wanted to weave into our experience of time and of life on this earth the constant reminder that history has an "end" and a "goal" toward which it's moving. And that goal or end has been represented from the beginning by the *seventh day* – the *day* when God rested from all His work which He had done.

Of course, God's rest isn't to be understood in the sense of recovering from weariness. Neither is God's rest to be understood in the sense of total inactivity. The Bible tells us that God is unceasingly sustaining and governing this world by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3). God's rest is to be understood "negatively" in the sense of ceasing specifically from His activity in the preceding six days and now, "positively," in taking perfect delight and pleasure in His finished work, because all that He made was "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

God's own rest on the seventh day is one thing; but what does it mean when God blesses the seventh day and sanctifies it? He does this not for His own sake, but for ours. He does this so that we might see in the seventh day a picture of that glorious eternal "*day*" of rest that He calls us to share in with Him. And again, this "rest" isn't just a negative idea (a ceasing from a certain activity), but something wonderfully positive – the celebration and the enjoyment of God's infinite goodness forever, and ever, and ever.

In the beginning, there wasn't any obstacle standing in the way of our final entrance into this day of rest. All that was required was our continuing in that state of innocence and holiness in which God had created us. As a sign of this requirement and as a way for us to express our willing submission to His kingship, God placed the "very good" tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden and commanded Adam that of this one good tree—out of all the many trees in the garden that were good for food—He must not eat, because in the day that he ate from it he would surely die (Gen. 2:16-17). The Bible, and the whole course of history itself, testifies to what happened:

- Romans 5:12 — Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

The guilt of Adam's sin has been imputed to all of us so that we are now born into this world already guilty. It's because of the guilt of this original sin that death comes even to infants—such

as we all once were. It's because of the guilt of this original sin that we're now "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil."

- Romans 3:10–12 — As it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."

And so it's because of the guilt of this original sin and the corruption that results from it that we all commit "actual transgressions" of our own.

So now we have to ask: What has happened to that original end and goal of creation? When God entered into a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, the sign of the covenant was given in the fourth commandment (cf. Exod. 31:12-17):

- Exodus 20:8–11 — 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 of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work... For in **six days** the LORD made the heavens and the 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."

Can you see, now, the goodness and the mercy and the graciousness of God in this commandment – in this sign of the covenant? God was signaling to His people that in spite of the fall and man's rebellion creation was still moving toward that final "Day" of rest for which it had made. But how can this be? How can we who have *rebelled against* God's goodness ever come to that "Day" which is the perfect *enjoyment of* His goodness forever and ever and ever? How can we who have brought death upon ourselves desire or seek after the very goodness that we've all spurned?

To enter into that "Day" now requires the removal of two apparently insurmountable obstacles: sin (not as something external to us but as that which has wholly infected and corrupted every part of us) and death. To come, ourselves, to that "Day" requires, now, that a battle be waged – that both sin and death be overcome in a victory that's irreversible and everlasting. God committed Himself to waging this battle immediately after the fall in Genesis chapter three (Gen. 3:14-15). And when God made Sabbath-keeping the sign of His covenant He rooted it not only in the pattern of creation (Exod. 20:8-11), but now also in the emerging "pattern" of redemption.

- Deuteronomy 5:12–15 — "Observe the sabbath **day** to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. **Six days** you shall labor and do all your work, but the **seventh day** is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work... **You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.**"

Even before the fall the seventh day represented the day that the Lord had made for His creation to enter into. But after the fall the seventh day represented more than ever that "day" that only the Lord could make – that only the Lord could bring about for us by His almighty power. The

day of *rest* must now also be the day of *victory*. The day of rest can only be entered, now, through a victory that God Himself wins for us.

God delighted to hold before His people the promise of this eternal rest – not just by the weekly observance of the seventh day but also by their inheritance of the land of Canaan. If their life in Egypt had been one of bondage and slavery and if their life in the wilderness had been one of constant “pulling up stakes” and “wandering,” then their life in the land of Canaan was to be one of “rest” – not in the sense of inactivity, but rather in the sense of peace and security and settled abundance and gladness and joy – enjoying to the full the goodness of God. So Moses said to the Israelites before they entered the land that flowed with milk (hills and pastures for grazing) and nectar (fruit trees):

- Deuteronomy 12:9–12 — “You have not as yet come to the **resting place** and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you. Now you will cross the Jordan and live in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit. And He will give you **rest** from all your enemies around you so that you live in **security**. Then it will be that the place in which the LORD your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I am commanding you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the LORD. And you shall be **glad** before the LORD your God.”

Here was a picture of that eternal rest that was the goal of creation and now also the goal of redemption. Here was a picture of what every seventh day was promising and proclaiming. But for Israel to enjoy this “rest” in the land required faith and obedience on the one hand and victory over enemies far more powerful than they on the other. So we hear the Lord saying through the psalmist in Psalm 95:

- Psalm 95:8–11 — Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tried Me, they tested Me, though they had seen My work. For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who wander in their heart, and they do not know My ways. Therefore I swore in My anger, they shall never enter into My rest.

God was speaking here of the experience of His temporal blessings in the land of Canaan. The requirement for this rest wasn’t the same as what is required for our true, eternal rest. All that was required of Israel in order to enjoy rest in the land was a basic national obedience to God’s law (the Ten Commandments). But because of their sinful hearts, even that proved to be impossible. So God appointed a *king* in Israel to be the instrument by which the seventh day would come to its fulfillment. God appointed a *king* to be the instrument by which His people would enter His rest and rejoice forever in His goodness. The Lord said to David, Israel’s king:

- 2 Samuel 7:8–11 (cf. 1 Kings 5:3-5; 1 Chron. 22:6-10, 18-19) — “I Myself took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. And I will appoint a **place** for My people Israel and will **plant** them, that they may **dwell** in their own

place and **not be disturbed** again; and the unrighteous will **not afflict** them any more as formerly, even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you **rest** from all your enemies.”

And the psalmist celebrates:

- Psalm 132:13–18 (cf. vv. 7-8) — The LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is **My resting place forever**; here I will inhabit, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her **provision**; I will satisfy her needy with **bread**. Her priests also I will clothe with **salvation**, And her holy ones will **sing loudly for joy**. There I will cause the **horn of David** to spring up; I have prepared a lamp for Mine anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon him, his **crown** shall blossom.

In this description of Israel’s life lived in Canaan under the rule of a righteous king is a picture of our eternal rest in God’s presence. When the kings were faithful, Israel experienced rest in the land (cf. 2 Chron. 14:6-7; 15:15). But not even the most faithful of the kings could give God’s people the “true” rest that was only being shadowed forth by these blessings of life in Canaan. Not even the most faithful of the kings could give God’s people that rest that was the true fulfillment of every seventh day. And so when the kings were unfaithful—as they most often were—the blessings of peace and abundance and joy in the land were forfeited (cf. Neh. 9:27-28). What Israel needed was a new heart. What *we* need is a king who can defeat for us the enemy of sin (not as something external to us but as that which has wholly infected and corrupted every part of us – mind, will, and affections). What *we* need is a king who is able to defeat not only the enemy of our own sin, but even the enemy of death itself – which, because of our sin, has every rightful claim upon us. But when such a king has been given and when such a victory has been won, then that seventh day of every seven-day week will have been fulfilled. Then that rest that was only shadowed forth for us in the land of Canaan will be fulfilled in that eternal rest that was the original goal of creation and that has been from the very beginning the goal of our redemption. Then not only Jews, but Gentiles also will enter into this day of victory and this day of rest – this day that God has made. The prophet Isaiah foretold this day:

- Isaiah 32:1, 18 — Behold, a king will reign righteously and princes will rule justly... Then my people will live in a peaceful abode, and in secure dwellings and in undisturbed **resting places**.
- Isaiah 11:10 (cf. 14:1) — Then it will be in that day, that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, who will stand as a standard for the peoples; and His **resting place** will be glorious.

What has happened, now, to that seventh day? Why do the people of God no longer observe that seventh day? Why are the people of God no longer contained within the borders of an earthly Canaan? These things have been fulfilled in that day of victory and of rest that Jesus has purchased for us by His death and resurrection. On the cross, Jesus bore the full curse of the law for all of us sinners who through faith are in covenant union with Him. In His resurrection, Jesus made available to us the infinite merits of His perfect obedience. So the Apostle Paul says:

- Romans 4:25 — He... was delivered over on account of our transgressions, and was raised on account of our justification.

Through our covenant union with the resurrected Christ not only are we fully pardoned and clothed with His perfect obedience, we're also new creations, transformed and renewed from the inside out. The Apostle Paul says again:

- Romans 6:4 — We were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

And this resurrection life that's already at work in us will one day be fully revealed in the resurrection of our bodies – on that day when death is wholly swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54). Jesus has crushed the head of the serpent. Jesus has waged war with sin and death and conquered. And so we read in Luke's Gospel:

- Luke 23:53–24:6 — [Joseph] took [the body of Jesus] down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. It was Preparation day, and **the Sabbath was about to begin**. Now the women, who had come with Him from Galilee, followed and beheld the tomb and how His body was laid. Then after they returned, they prepared spices and perfumes. And **on the Sabbath** [the seventh day] **they rested according to the commandment**. Now **on the first day of the week**, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened that while they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing, and when the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen.”

It was on the day following the Sabbath, on the first day of the week, that Jesus rose from the dead, symbolizing for us that the goal of creation and of redemption is now fulfilled in this “day” that the Lord has made – in this day of victory and of rest and of the unceasing enjoyment of the goodness of God. And so we celebrate this day that the Lord has made not just on Easter Sunday, but every Sunday (1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). Every Sunday for the church is equally Resurrection Sunday because every Sunday is the first day of a new week. Every Sunday is a reminder to us of the victory and rest into which we've already entered and of the final consummation of this victory and rest when our Lord returns. Truly, this is the “day” that the Lord has made!

Have you entered this rest through faith in Jesus? Have your sins been pardoned? Have you been clothed in His perfect obedience? Have you been raised up with Him to walk in newness of life? Are you looking forward with confident expectation to the resurrection of the body when He appears? Do you know the joy of this day that the Lord has made?

In the Old Testament, after the Lord had given to His people a victory in battle, they would process back to Jerusalem with the king riding at their head. We see a wonderful picture of this in 2 Chronicles chapter twenty:

- 2 Chronicles 20:26–30 — On the fourth day they assembled in the valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the LORD... And every man of Judah and Jerusalem returned with Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with gladness, for the LORD had made

them glad over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with harps, lyres, and trumpets to the house of the LORD. And the dread of God was on all the kingdoms of the lands when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. So the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him **rest** all around.

We know that this jubilant picture of the victorious king returning to Jerusalem is fulfilled in Jesus—our King, risen from the dead, and now ascended victorious into the heavenly Jerusalem leading us, as the Apostle Paul says, in His triumphal procession (2 Cor. 2:14). It's by this victory that the goal of creation and of redemption has been achieved. This “day of *victory*” has ushered us who believe into God's own eternal “day of *rest*” – a rest that's not mere inactivity, but rather the celebration and the enjoyment of God's infinite goodness forever, and ever, and ever. The psalmist describes this day of victory and this day of rest from the perspective of one being led in the king's triumphal procession:

- Psalm 118:19–24 — Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous will enter through it. I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and You have become my salvation. The stone [the King in Zion] which the builders rejected [suffering and death] Has become the chief corner stone [resurrection and triumph]. This is from the LORD; it is marvelous in our eyes. **This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.**