

Lesson 3: "The Sabbath and Worship"

Here in the United States there has been another week of news "overload" (as there has been in other countries as well). From the long-awaited jury decision in the trial in Florida of a young mother accused of murdering her young daughter, to the launch of the last Space Shuttle, to whether or not to raise the "debt ceiling," and on and on. We have been bombarded by the "pundits" who wish to sway us in all directions. This in addition to all other facets of our lives that "stress us out."

The word "stress" appears nowhere in the Bible, but does that mean that God never foresaw the No. 1 problem that modern human beings have to contend with? No, for the idea of stress permeates the Bible, and it is full of remedies. One is the invitation of the Son of God who says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28). Being "heavy-laden" is the precise idea of stress as we know it. Another remedy is the subject of our lesson topic: the holy Sabbath day. For 6000 years the Lord has known that six days of stress is all that any human can endure at any time; the seventh day is permeated with His presence; in the beginning He made that day "holy." We don't make the Sabbath holy. Our "job" is to "keep it holy." Then the rest from stress is diffused throughout the busy week, because for the "six working days" (Ezek. 46:1) we "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8). That very remembrance itself brings a renewed promise of "rest" that soothes our frayed nerves throughout the week.

The Ten Commandments, including the fourth to "remember," are the basis of the promises in both the old and new covenants—in the old, on the people's vain promise to keep them; and in the new, on their being written in the heart. The new covenant truth was an essential element of the 1888 message, and even today lifts a load of doubt and despair from many heavy hearts.

Rightly understood the Ten Commandments become ten promises. Believe, God says, that I have redeemed you from "Egypt," cherish My covenant promise, and you will never come into the bitter bondage that transgression entails. Unfortunately, one of those ten promises is often neglected by the believing person, that he or she will "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," as the "sign" or "seal" of the new covenant.

He has asked us to choose, yes; to make a commitment, yes; but never has He asked us to *promise* to keep His Ten Commandments. James calls the Ten Commandments the "law of liberty" (2:12), and if we believe the glorious Good News of His deliverance, we shall

“remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” (And we shall honor our father and our mother; and we shall never take the Lord’s name in vain.) Think about it: are you living under the new or the old covenant? If you’re in “bondage,” the reason has to be the old covenant. Come, get under the liberty, the freedom, the joy, of the new covenant!

When we keep the Sabbath holy, when we cherish that precious gift He gave us from the Garden of Eden, as each Sabbath steals upon us with the setting of the sun Friday evening, we enter anew into the presence of Jesus. On that day He meets with us in a special way, Yes, He is with us every day, but He is with us in our work during the week. He says, “Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work” (Ex. 20:9). During those six days the Lord is with us in a “working” capacity.

Jesus Himself was a carpenter, a mechanic. So we work with Him side by side these six working days. But on the Sabbath Jesus lays down His tools, closes His carpenter shop, and goes to the house of God with other people who also “come” in response to His invitation, and we rest “with Him.” He teaches us; He comforts us; He encourages us; each new Sabbath day we “learn of Him,” for He says, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me” (Matt. 11:29). We learn more and more about who He is, what it cost Him to save us, why He had to die on a cross. And our souls are knit with His soul, we become one with Him, His joy fills our hearts. And then comes verse 30: “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” Oh, the joy of keeping holy the Sabbath day of rest—not merely physical rest (good as that is!), but the rest of soul, a day of heaven upon the earth. That wonderful word “rest” means rest from self, rest from anxiety. It’s what the Bible speaks of as “justification by faith,” a precious gift we don’t want to miss.

The idea is that the Sabbath is closely related to the idea of justification by faith. It’s the experience of realizing that you can’t save yourself by any good work you can do, not even one percent; it’s the realization of heart that your salvation is totally a gift of the Savior of the world (John 4:42), “not of works, lest any one should boast (Eph. 2:8, 9). Sabbath-keeping is almost infinitely beyond the idea of “keep-the-Sabbath-or-God-will-zap-you.” Thus, your heart appreciation of the objective truth that God so loved you that He gave His only Son for you becomes the thrilling subjective experience of justification by faith.

There is not a trace of legalism in the Sabbath truth. It’s John 3:16 repeated every day, reminding you that God so loved you that He already gave His only begotten Son, already redeemed you, already died your second death (Heb. 2:9), has already given you the gift of a verdict of acquittal “in Christ” (Rom. 5:15-18, REB), reversing the condemnation that came upon you in Adam; the “rest” which the holy Sabbath brings you is rest from all your anxiety and fear. True, the Sabbath comes only on the true seventh

day, but the Holy Spirit brings to you the remembrance of it every day throughout the week—the Sabbath becomes the “glue” that holds the week together.

The 1888 message is especially “precious” because it joins together the true biblical idea of justification by faith with the unique idea of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. The Sabbath will become a time for total reconciliation with God (“atonement” means just that), living as Jesus lived, in loving, happy dedication to Him, in total sympathy with what He is doing now as our “great High Priest,” His special work of preparing a people to meet the final issue of “the mark of the beast” and “the seal of God” (Rev. 13:11-18; 7:1-4).

At the commencement of the time of trouble, we read that God’s people will proclaim the Sabbath “more fully.” [1] The lesson indicates that that time is near! The time is near when God’s people around the world, delivered from the last vestige of legalism, will “delight themselves in the Lord” by that kind of Sabbath-keeping.

—*Compiled from the writings of Robert J. Wieland*