

John 5-1-18
Fighting for rest!

Sermon introduction:

Last Spring break my family decided to drive to Phoenix, Arizona—a twenty-hour road trip. We left Spokane Sunday afternoon around 1pm. The plan was to crash in Salt Lake City on Sunday evening. We arrived in Salt Lake around 11pm. But at 11pm I felt great. I was full of energy, thanks to a good audio book and a can of Bang, so I kept driving.

Around 4am I started to get tired. I figured I needed just an hour or two of rest to keep driving. We pulled off the interstate somewhere in Southern Utah and parked in an empty parking lot to get a few hours of much needed rest.

Even though I was totally exhausted, finding rest proved to be incredibly elusive. Why? I could not get comfortable in the driver's seat. In addition, there were seven bodies in our car, and everyone was breathing way too much, turning our car into a damp sauna, and fogging up all the windows. Finally, one of our children was lying in the very back of the car. Even time he moved a millimeter (which was every 7 seconds) we heard a loud crunching sound. It turns out he was lying on a Costco sized bag of potato chips.

After 35 minutes of trying to get some rest in that abandoned parking lot, I said to my wife, "This is not working, I can't sleep, let's just keep driving." So, we did. We arrived in Phoenix at 11am Monday morning, totally exhausted.

Rest eluded us that night. Has rest every eluded you?

While physical rest is elusive, soul rest is even more elusive. Furthermore, a lack of soul rest often leads to a lack of physical rest.

Why is it so hard to find soul rest? Our souls are often exhausted from striving—striving for more approval or striving for more stuff. Or our souls are anxious about a relationship, a child, the economy, politics, or a job situation. Or they are angry about being mistreated.

Is your soul at rest this morning? Here is the acid test, no matter what medical issue, work issue, family issue, or relational issue you face this week, will you sleep well tonight?

Soul rest is elusive. But there is hope.

How do our souls find rest???

This brings us to John 5:1-18. *We will look at this story under three headings.*

Desiring rest

Destroying rest

Delivering rest

First, desiring rest!

What kind of rest is desired? Rest from suffering!

Look with me at 5:1-9

John 5:1–2 (ESV) — 1 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **2** Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.

This little pool was NE of the temple in Jerusalem. Recent archaeological excavations have uncovered this specific pool with its five colonnades. I mention this fact to remind us, that events in the Bible really happened. Furthermore, no discovery of archaeology has ever contradicted the truthfulness of the Bible.

John 5:3–5 (ESV) — 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. **5** One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

This particular man has been crippled, unable to walk, for 38 years. That is a long time. Where were you 38 years ago. Keep in mind that there was no way to alleviate his suffering—no pain medication, no surgeries, and no social services. He was enslaved to a life of suffering.

John 5:6 (ESV) — 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?”

Many people ignored this crippled man. But not Jesus, he not only noticed him; he stopped to engage him in conversation. Why? Jesus is full of mercy.

Then Jesus asks him, “do you want to be healed?” This seems like a strange question. Of course, he wants to be healed. Then why the question? Probably because he wants to find out where this crippled man is placing his trust. Verse 7 tells us.

John 5:7 (ESV) — 7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.”

Jewish folk religion, *not the Bible*, taught that angels occasionally stirred up the waters of this pool, giving the water healing power. Unfortunately, he was always the last one to the pool. Apparently by then, the healing water had evaporated.

This crippled man is so desperate to get rest from suffering, that he is willing to put his trust in folklore and superstition.

John 5:8 (ESV) — 8 Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.”

John 5:9a (ESV) — 9 And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

After 38 years, this man finally has rest from his suffering.

Application:

At this point, we could apply this text several ways. For instance...

This text reminds us of the incredible mercy of Christ.

This text reminds us of the futility of false gospels (i.e., angel water).

This text reminds us that Christ has the power to heal. And someday he will heal everything that is broken, including all the saints.

But these wonderful truths are not the focus of this specific story. The focus of this story is seen in verse 9b.

John 5:9 (ESV) — 9 And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

Don't forget that Jesus healed a lot of people. Why did John include this specific story and mention this specific day? To highlight the growing animosity between Jesus and the Jews over the sabbath. This animosity is about to cause some serious problems. Which brings us to the next point.

First, desiring rest!

Second, destroying rest!

Who is being accused of destroying rest? Jesus!!!

John 5:10–14 (ESV) — 10 So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.” **11** But he answered them, “The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk.’” **12** They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” **13** Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. **14** Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”

Jesus healed this man physically. But to receive spiritual healing, he must repent of his sins. If this man does not repent of his sins, he will experience something far worse than being crippled. What is far worse than being crippled? Eternal judgment.

John 5:15–16 (ESV) — 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. **16** And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

Illustration:

For the first time in nearly four decades, this man is walking around with his mat under his arm. He probably had a smile on his face and a spring in his step. Who knows, he may have been skipping and singing. Then he heard a voice,

“Hey, what in the world do you think you are doing carrying that mat around? Don't you know that today is the Sabbath? A holy day! What you're doing is illegal? Tell me your name so that I can report you to the religious authorities.”

The man replies,

“Oh, ok, but can I tell you what happened first? It is unbelievable. It's amazing. I was paralyzed for 38 years. People had to carry me to that spot right over there by the pool, every day. But I never got healed. Then people had to carry me over there so that I could beg for food. People had to carry me to the bathroom. People had to carry me home at night. I had sores all over my legs from lying in the dirt all day. Speaking of my legs, my leg muscles were atrophied and emaciated. They were like little kid legs, since they had not been used in 38 years. I was lonely, rejected, despised, and immobile.

But then, this guy came along and asked me if I wanted to be healed? So, I told him I did. Then he did the strangest thing, he told me to stand up, take up my mat, and walk. This seemed crazy... I was crippled for 38 years. But then I looked down and I watched my leg muscles grow. Then I felt power surge threw my body. It was amazing... then I stood up for the first time in 38 years... Now I can walk, skip, and dance. Isn't that amazing?"

The Jew responds,

"Blah, blah, blah!!! I don't care about you or your medical history. All I care about is God's glory. And clearly you don't because you are desecrating the sabbath by carrying that mat around. Don't you know that carrying a mat is work! You are in trouble!

By the way... Who is the guy that told you to carry that mat, he is just as guilty of desecrating the sabbath as you are because he told you to break the sabbath?"

Exposition:

What is going on here???

The Jews accuse the formally crippled man and Jesus of desecrating the sabbath.

But this accusation is incredibly ironic, since the Jews, not Jesus, are the ones guilty of desecrating the sabbath.

What do I mean?

In the OT, God commanded his people to rest from their labors on the seventh day of the week (Ex. 31:12-14; 35:2). This was called the sabbath. The sabbath was considered a huge blessing to Israel since they had been working as slaves 24-7 for decades.

Sadly, it did not take long for Israel to turn the day of rest into a day of rules. All God said was don't work (i.e., take a break from your vocation on Saturdays). Over time, the Jews added 39 man-made (extra biblical) rules to "protect" the sabbath. These rules were designed to ensure that no one ever worked on the sabbath.

Here are some of the man-made rules...

Looking in a mirror was forbidden. Why? If you looked into the mirror on the Sabbath day and you saw a gray hair, you might be tempted to pull it out and thus work on the Sabbath.

You could not wear your false teeth because if they fell out, you would have to pick them up and you would thus be performing work.

You could not carry a handkerchief on the Sabbath, but you could wear one. That meant if you were upstairs and wanted to take a handkerchief downstairs, you would have to tie it around your neck, walk downstairs, and untie it.

The Jews even debated about a man with a wooden leg. Namely, if his home caught on fire, could he carry his wooden leg out of the house on the Sabbath?

You could spit on the Sabbath, but you had to be careful where you spit. If you spit on the dirt and then scuffed it with your sandal, you would be cultivating the soil and performing work. Spirituality could be determined by where you spit. (K. Hughes commentary on John)

The 39th rule prohibited carrying something, like a mat, on the sabbath.

Application:

The sabbath was meant to bring rest.

But working hard to keep all the extra biblical man-made rules was not restful, it was exhausting.

Unfortunately, the human race loves rules.

Why do we love rules???

We love rules because obeying the rules makes us feel good.

We think, "I'm not that bad at keeping the rules." Pretty soon we are resting in our ability to keep the rules.

We start to think...

I go to church most Sundays.

I give money away.

I read the Bible and pray.

I serve in the nursery and lead a small group.

I pay for my kids to go to Christian school.

I don't watch those bad shows on Netflix

I'm nice to most people.

I know all the doctrines...

We start to feel really good about our rule keeping, especially when we compare ourselves to others...

A few problems...

We can never keep all the rules... it is impossible.

Eventually, you will be exhausted... no rest!!!

We are not made right with God by our rule keeping...

Tim Keller asks an insightful question...

What is the difference between the Christian and the religious person? They both repent of their bad deeds. But the Christian repents of his good deeds. That is the good deeds done to earn God's favor.

Maybe you don't work hard to "obey the rules", but I bet you still work hard...

We work really hard for approval...

We work really hard for success...

We work really hard for fitness...

We work really hard to reach our sales goals...

We work really hard for that new house, new car, or new pair of shoes...

It is not wrong to work hard, have nice stuff, and achieve great things. But it is wrong for our soul to find their rest in these things.

How do we know our souls are resting in these things... when we don't get them we are devastated.

Ironically, when we finally grasp the things, we worked so hard for, our souls feel empty.

This is because our souls were never meant to find rest in achievements, approval, or things. Not even a six-month vacation in Hawaii, in a luxury condo, on a private beach can provide your soul with the rest it needs. If it could all the billionaires would be well rested... Most or not!

So where is real rest found?

This brings us to the last point...

Desiring rest

Destroying rest

Third, delivering rest!

Who delivers Rest?

John 5:15–18 (ESV) — 15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. **16** And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. **17** But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” **18** This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus words in verse 17 are astonishing.

Jesus claims that he is working just like his father is working (like father like son). Genesis 1-2 teaches that God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh day—not because God was tired. God never grows tired or weary (Isa. 40:23). He rested to enjoy his work. This pattern of work and rest was the foundation of Israel's sabbath.

Yet, most of the Rabbis during the time of Christ recognized that God did not rest from all his work on the sabbath. He specifically rested from his work of creation. He surely does other work. Like what? God never stops working to uphold the universe. Theologians refer to this work as God's work of preservation (Heb. 1:3, Acts 17:28)—an aspect of his providence.

This means that God the father does some types of work on the sabbath (i.e., his work of providence). The Rabbis agreed on this point.

Back to verse 17. Jesus says, “I'm just like my father. There are certain types of works that I also do on the sabbath.”

Said another way, “because I'm equal with the father, I too am exempt from your Sabbath regulations. Just like my father, I'm allowed to do certain work on the sabbath. The work of recreation.” This explains why he calls himself lord of the sabbath in the gospels of Mark and Luke (Mark 2, Luke 6).

At this point, the Jews freaked out, because they knew exactly what he was claiming. He was claiming to be equal with God. More on this point next week.

Who delivers rest? Jesus Christ!

How does Christ deliver rest? Through his work of redemption.

John 5:17 (ESV) — 17 But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

What kind of work was Jesus doing? Jesus spent his whole life working for our salvation (foreshadowed in this man’s healing). This was his primary work!!! Everything else was secondary. What was his specific work of salvation?

His work of active obedience.

His work of passive obedience.

His work of resurrection.

His session

His intercession

His return

How does Christ’s work bring rest to our souls?

Application:

Jesus obeyed all of God’s laws perfectly. Therefore, we can rest knowing Christ earned for us a perfect record of righteousness. We can stop striving to earn our own righteousness.

Jesus died on the cross in our place. Therefore, we can rest knowing that we will never have to pay the penalty for our sins.

Jesus rose from the grave. Therefore, we can rest knowing that we too will rise from the grave and say goodbye to all our problems.

Jesus is praying for us right now. Therefore, we can rest knowing that he has everything covered!!!

Jesus will return someday. Therefore, we can rest knowing that he will defeat our enemies.

In addition...

Because Christ died for us, we know that are fully loved and accepted by God. This means that we can stop striving to earn the love and acceptance of others. We can rest in God’s approval.

If God loves us, what good thing will he withhold from us? (Romans 8). Nothing!!! Therefore, we can rest in his provision and stop striving for more money, more power, and more stuff.

Jesus brings rest. He is the fulfillment of the sabbath. Under the New covenant we don’t rest by ceasing to labor on Saturdays. We rest by trusting in the work of Christ.

Let me ask you a question...

Is your soul at rest this morning? Or is it stirred up? Striving? Toiling? Exhausted?

Conclusion:

Several years ago, I attended a conference in Phoenix with some friends. One of my friends ended up sharing a small hotel room with a snorer. Now when I say snorer, don't think about a quiet electric car think about a diesel truck. To make matters worse, my friend was a light sleeper. As you can imagine, he tossed and turned for hours. He put his pillow over his ears. He tried counting sheep. He probably prayed for deliverance. Nothing seemed to help. Finally, at 2am desperate for rest, he got out of bed, packed his bags, and went to the front desk to purchase his own room. He wanted rest so bad he was willing to pay \$150 for it.

You don't have to pay anything for rest. It comes from Jesus. He offers rest to all freely.

Matthew 11:28–30 (ESV) — 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Lets pray...