

Sabbath Rest and the House God is Building

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Psalm 127

Good Morning Perry Creek! We're about a week into our Stay at Home Order, so I hope this finds you well. I hope you are healthy. I hope everyone at your house is still getting along. I really hope that you are doing the things that normal people do: showering and brushing your teeth and wearing something other than yoga pants or PJ bottoms once in a while. I hope this finds you well, and I hope one more thing: I hope as you are watching this you are actually getting some degree of Sabbath Rest. What I mean by that is some degree of soul rest, of restoration, of spiritual renewal in your life. Now to some of you that may sound like a very easy wish like a two inch putt. You are getting nothing but rest as we go through this! To others Sabbath Rest may sound like an impossible dream, like a post-card from a land that you only wish you could visit! One of the nurses in our church said the other night in small group that she feels like they are running around on the beach waiting for the tsunami to hit. So maybe Sabbath Rest sounds unobtainable, but that's my prayer for you, no matter where you're at on that continuum.

That's what I want to talk about today: Sabbath Rest. You may have wondered "What passage is Pastor John going to preach on today?" We finished Philippians last week, so now that today is Palm Sunday maybe he's going to talk about Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Actually as you can tell from the beginning of the service, today is also something else: It's the third birthday of our church! Three years ago today our core group prayed together and committed this church to God. We ratified the church covenant, and we put our thumbprints on a poster of our logo, and the church at Perry Creek was born!

It's our third birthday! We were going to have a big meal after church to celebrate, so right now the Tharringtons have 500 pounds of Peruvian grilled chicken at their house if anybody wants some. Just kidding! It is our birthday, so for our birthday I thought we would take a look at our church's foundational passage: Psalm 127. This is a passage that our Lead Team studied as we prayed about starting a church. It's a passage that we looked at in core training as we prepared to launch our church, and it's a passage that we as a church have looked at in a sermon or two before. So I wanted to preach on it today. But here's the thing: Once again, I found God's Word to be so alive and relevant! I know I keep on saying that, but I only keep on saying that because it keeps on being true! As we go through this coronavirus crisis, I find that God's word is speaking in unexpected ways. It is speaking precisely and powerfully to our situation. Praise God. His word is alive!

Today this Psalm, the founding passage of our church, is going to speak powerfully to us about Sabbath rest during the disruptions of our life. We're going to do two things today as we look at this Psalm:

1. We're going to look at the overall, big-picture of what this Psalm is about.
2. We are going to see how the message of this Psalm applies to three groups of people:

- (i) The Resting: Those of you who are still in your yoga pants.
- (ii) The Restless: Those who barely have time to watch this. (We're praying!)
- (iii) Our Church: We're going to see how our foundational passage relates to Perry Creek Church during this time of disruption.

Let's read Psalm 12. King Solomon wrote this Psalm, and he says this:

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

- Psalm 127

The first thing we want to look at today is the overall big picture message of the Psalm, so the first thing I want to point out today is that:

This is a Psalm about Sabbath Rest

This is kind of an unusual Psalm, one of only two written by Solomon. I don't know if you noticed this but when we first read this Psalm, the first half, the part about the house and the watchmen and work, doesn't seem to fit with the second half which is about children. If we look at the Psalm and its background closely, we'll see that it does actually fit together and that it centers around this idea of Sabbath Rest. Let me show you what I mean. If we look at the outline or the overall flow of thought in the Psalm, we can see that this Psalm kind of conveys three thoughts:

First, Solomon points out that it is vain to try to do things without God's help. Right? Solomon says:

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat (or literally "eating the bread of anxious toil")

- Psalm 127:1-2a

Notice Solomon uses the word "vain" three times. It is vain to build a house without the Lord. The Lord is necessary to develop a household. It is vain to guard a city without the Lord. The Lord is necessary for security. And it's vain to work long hours trying to get ahead without the Lord. The Lord is necessary for prosperity. So Solomon says it's vain to do those things without seeking the Lord. Without God's help.

Then secondly, he says the reason it's vain to do these things without God's help is that God is actually the one that provides these things. Look at the second half of verse 2. The New

International Version puts it this way: “For he grants sleep to those he loves.” That’s the way the New International Version puts it. But I think the New English Translation has actually translated it much better. They don’t say “He gives sleep to those he loves.” They say “He gives to those he loves even in their sleep.”

The idea is that it’s not just sleep that the Lord gives to his people. It’s all the things Solomon has just listed. Even as God’s people sleep, He is providing them with a household and with security and with prosperity or wealth. We can sleep. We can truly rest, because God is the one who provides all these things. He’s always been the one who provides these things, and he can provide them even while we rest. So (1) it’s vain to try to find a household, and security, and prosperity without the Lord because (2) God is actually the one who provides them.

Now the last thing Solomon does is show us one example of how God provides these things. He says “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him.” If you think about it in Solomon’s day, children, and especially sons, were one of the main ways God provided these three things to Israelites. Sons provided an enduring household. The family name could carry on. Sons made sure that land stayed in the family. Sons provided security. It talks about them contending with enemies who are trying to enter the city gate, and children provided wealth for their parents. They could work when their parents grew old.

So that’s the flow of logic in the passage:

- (1) It’s vain to try to try to gain a household, and security, and prosperity without the Lord,
- (2) Because God is the one who provides these things for his people, and
- (3) Children are one example of how God provides these things.

Scholars tell us and we can see, if we look at it that the main focal point of this Psalm, the main message is related to the concept of Sabbath Rest. Although Solomon talks about a house (or household) and about security and about prosperity, the center of the Psalm is the idea that, because God is the one who is providing these things and because he can provide these things even while we sleep, that we, as God’s people, can and should actually rest.

The Psalm is about rest, and here’s the thing: That makes perfect sense, because this Psalm was written to be sung at a time of Sabbath Rest. This Psalm is what is called a “Psalm of Ascent.” If you look at the beginning of this Psalm in your Bible, you will notice that it says “A Psalm of Ascent.” Three times a year there were three great feasts held in Jerusalem: The feast of Passover, the Feast of Pentecost and the feast of Tabernacles. When these feasts came around, all Israelites who lived within a certain distance of Jerusalem were supposed to stop their work. They were supposed to gather their families, and they were supposed to ascend, to go up the hills, to the Temple in Jerusalem. As they ascended those hills, they would sing Psalms like Psalm 127.

Think about it: In order to take that journey, those Israelites had to rest from the normal pattern of life. They had to “cease,” which is what the word Sabbath means. They had to cease from building their households, cease from guarding their cities, cease from working to gain

wealth. They had to trust God that God would build their households, that he would guard their cities, that he would prosper their work, even though they weren't there to do it themselves.

So the occasion of this Psalm, our church's foundational passage (get this - the occasion of this Psalm), was a mandated Sabbath. It was a country-wide, God-appointed disruption to the normal pattern of their life, a time when God's people could not do what they normally did, a time when they had to trust God and rest. Solomon, who built the Temple they were ascending to, wrote this Psalm so that, as they sang it, they could be reminded that it was OK to do that. This Psalm was a Psalm about Sabbath Rest.

As I studied Psalm 127 this week, I realized that that makes it highly relevant to what we are going through as individuals and as a church. This has deep application for us as we got through this time of disruption and, really for many of us, this time of mandated rest. So let me give you three applications, three ways, this applies to three groups of people. The first application is to the resting (those with a little more time), and it's this:

To the resting: Turn your rest into Sabbath

Some of you are experiencing a little more rest right now. Maybe you're on a paid leave of absence, maybe you are furloughed right now, maybe you're working from home, but your schedule is a little less committed than it normally is. And to be honest, you just have more time to rest. This virus is terrible. We wouldn't wish it on anyone, anywhere but, if you're honest, maybe the net effect on you is just some downtime. Things have slowed down. If that's you, I would say "Lean into this time of rest." Lean into it. Get the most out of it!

When we lived in Zimbabwe, we went through a time that was really much like this. You couldn't get much in the stores. People were very fearful. You didn't go out at night because of the violence. Many times daytime activities were cancelled. It was like the whole country was on lockdown.

You know what we found about that time? There were wonderful things about it! We had time to maintain family relationships, time to enjoy and disciple our kids. We often lost power, but we had a lantern, so we would do family drawing night. Our church relationships became so precious to us. Truthfully, those were some of the best times we had.

Then we came back to the states and, to be honest, much of what I saw disturbed me. Families were just going and going and going. The school year and sports and activities were just gobbling up more and more family time. I saw parents farming out the teachable moments in their kids' lives to whoever happened to be around them at the time. One Christian psychiatrist has said "The greatest enemy of the North American Christian Family is the pace of life." It's very concerning!

Now in the very midst of that: BOOM! Enter COVID 19. Suddenly, we have a time of mandated Sabbath just like the Psalm, and each of us has to decide what we are going to do with that. You

can waste it by complaining about the things you can't do, or you can waste it by vegging out on Netflix, or you can turn it into Sabbath. You can use the rest as a time to restore your soul, time to intentionally reconnect with your spouse, to find out what's influencing your kids. You can use this as a time to renew your relationship with God. Why not do that? If you are resting, turn your rest into sabbath. That's the first application.

But like I said earlier, some of you are NOT resting. Not at all! Some of you own businesses that you are fighting to keep afloat. Some of you are moms or dads that are trying to do work and family at home, and it's not restful! Some of you are health care workers, looking at that approaching tsunami. What do you do? Well, this passage give instruction to you too, and it's this:

To the restless: Trust God for Sabbath

Trust God. Because sabbath isn't just about your circumstances, it's a gift from God. It's something God can give to those He loves regardless of their circumstances. That's what the passage tells us, and I want you to understand how that operates in your lives. Church, we need to hear the warning of this passage, and the warning of this passage is this: You can work in vain.

Did you notice that? The passage doesn't say that you can't build, that you can't guard, that you can't work without the Lord. The passage never says you can't do those. You can do all those things. What the passage says is that without the Lord you'll do them in vain. And see, that's the deception of this gerbil-wheel life. We feel like we're accomplishing something with our busy-ness, but we're not. Israel experienced this in the time of the kings. They built cities, but they didn't build them with the Lord, so they built them again and again and again. And they were destroyed again and again and again by their enemies. You can build in vain! So don't let that happen in your life. Don't eat the bread of anxious toil Don't build, don't guard, don't labor in vain. That's the warning of this passage.

OK but now church and especially those of you who are restless, listen to the promise of this passage: God can provide while you rest. I know that for many of you that seems impossible right now. It may even make you angry to hear me say that. You're fighting for your business or you're working in health care, and there's no time to rest. But please hear me: It has always been God's heart to provide seemingly impossible rest for his people.

God is a God of rest. He wove it into the fabric of the earth with night and winter. He mandated it for his people with a Sabbath Day and with the three Great Feasts and with a Sabbath year every seven years. He's a God of rest, and God provides seemingly impossible rest for us through Christ. There is no way that we can work hard enough to live up to what God justly requires. It's an impossible task. But Christ has done the work for us so that we can rest.

If you're restless, I want you to believe that God desires to provide rest for you. I want you to look not for moments where it's obvious that you can rest. (Because if you're restless and

you're looking for that, you'll never see it.) Rather, I want you to look for moments where you can take rest by faith and trust that God is going to provide even as you rest.

He can give to his beloved even as they sleep. I don't know how He's going to provide. Maybe He'll reduce your workload, maybe He'll increase your productivity, maybe He'll just give you spiritual emotional peace as you go about your exhausting schedule. I don't know how He's going to do it, but I know He can.

So if you're resting, turn your rest into Sabbath. If you're restless, trust God for Sabbath. Now one more application, and it's to Perry Creek church on our third anniversary:

To the Church: Rejoice in the house God is building, as you take Sabbath

Listen Perry Creek, God is building His house. He's doing it, just like He promised! We have several families that were ready to join our church today. Ugh! They will join as soon as we can gather and vote and welcome them in. God is building His church. So let's rejoice in that!

And you know what? Let's enjoy this time of rest. It's hard work planting a church, isn't it? We had no idea it would be this much work when we started it. It takes eleven teams to pull off a Sunday Service at River Bend Elementary School. We have to set up and tear down, lug our gear, transform the environment. It's a lot of work! It's going to be tough when we start up again!

So you know what? Enjoy the break! Make it a Sabbath! Watch the service in your jammies! Anchor into your small group! Love on your families. Spend time with God, and ask questions about your pace of life. Make this a special time. That's what this time is for. Look at it as a divinely appointed re-set, a mandated Sabbath for God's people. Enjoy the rest!

I'm not suggesting that this will be a time without sorrow it will. It looks like there is heartache ahead for many. but we don't need to spend our days and nights in fear. We don't need to eat the bread of anxious toil. God can provide, even as we sleep. The implication of the passage is that if God is watching over the city, the watchmen don't stand guard in vain.

So during this time we're going to rest, and we're going to pray for, and love on, and encourage our health care workers. When this time is over, we're going to start the work again. God has more work for us to do in Perry Creek, and we're going to do it. We're not meant to ignore Sabbath, and we're not meant to worship it. So we'll keep setting up our crazy church. We'll keep serving the community, and we'll keep on loving each other. When we can gather for worship again, we're going to blow the roof off that place, as we rejoice in the house that God is building!