

Resting in Christ's Finished Work

Peter, James and John hiked with Jesus up a high mountain. It was just the four of them. No doubt they felt privileged. Jesus had selected them from among the other disciples for something special. They didn't know what was about to happen, but they must have sensed it was important. Jesus had told them that they would see the kingdom of heaven manifest with power, but they probably had no idea what he meant.

As they hiked up the mountain, they may have reflected on the past weeks and months they'd spent with Jesus. They had seen Jesus do amazing things. They had watched him drive out evil spirits and heal the sick - lepers and paralytics, the deaf and blind. They had seen him feed five thousand, and then four thousand on another occasion. They had witnessed Jesus calm a storm and walk on water, even raise a dead girl to life.

And his teachings. They had listened to and pondered over his parables. They had watched little children's eyes light up with understanding and wise scholars confounded and mystified. Truly this was an amazing man who led the way over boulders as they summited the mountain.

Suddenly the disciples fell to the ground as Jesus was transfigured before them. He began to shine with dazzling, radiant light. His clothes became whiter than anyone could bleach them. Then Elijah and Moses appeared out of nowhere - just materialized - and began talking with Jesus.

As soon as he could find his voice, Peter, who was always quick to speak (whether he knew what he was saying or not) said:

"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ([Mark 9:5](#))

Moses and Elijah were two of the most respected figures from Jewish history. What did Moses represent to the Jews? The Law. And Elijah? The Prophets. Elijah was one of the first great prophets of Israel, so noteworthy that God took him to heaven in a fiery chariot at the end of his career.

So when Peter suggested building three monuments -- one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah - he was affirming that Jesus was a great prophet. He was indicating that Jesus deserved a promotion. Jesus was more than just a Nazarene carpenter turned traveling teacher. He was a prophet equal to the greats - Moses and Elijah.

In fact, the implication of his words was that Jesus was equal with the Law and the Prophets, the Hebrew Scriptures. "Wow, what a statement, Peter!"

But do you know what? Jesus is not only equal, he is greater! [Hebrews 3:3](#) says, "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses." And God made that point dramatically there on the top of that mountain.

"Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!'" ([Mark 9:7](#))

Peter was willing to promote Jesus to equal status with the Law and the Prophets, but the Father spoke from on high and said, in effect, "This is the Son of God. He is greater than all that has come before. Listen to him!"

Jesus is God's final word, his best communication, the grand fulfillment, God's ultimate covenant with humanity. Jesus is the fullest revelation of the Father. He supersedes all that came before. He is the reality to which all the shadows pointed. God is saying, "Now that the best has come, listen to him!"

Jesus alone

Perhaps it was to dramatically show that Jesus fulfilled and replaced the old covenant that God provided this acted drama that we call the Transfiguration. Placing Jesus next to the Law and the Prophets, he says, "This is my son... listen to him." Then the very next verse reads:

"And all at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone." ([Mark 9:8, NASB](#))

Moses and Elijah disappeared and they saw no one except who? Jesus alone! That is an awesome phrase - Jesus alone! I believe God made a dramatic point with that teaching lesson about the superiority of the New Covenant and the central place of Jesus in God's plan.

I believe that Jesus Christ was and is the divine Son of God and I have accepted him as my Savior. I want to be a "Jesus alone" Christian. I trust Jesus alone for my salvation, hope and security.

I am not going to have divided loyalties - living partially in the old covenant and partially in the new, partially under law and partially under grace, partially dependent on my own efforts and partially dependent on Christ. I want to be a "Jesus alone" Christian. How about you?

Jesus is our covenant mediator. Through his death and resurrection he has restored the relationship between God and man which was severed as a result of sin. God has always desired a covenant relationship with his people. The heart of each of his relational covenants was the declaration "I will be your God and you will be my people." That is why he created humans in the first place - for relationship with himself.

The first chapter of Genesis tells the Creation story. Each day God created some part of his perfect world. After each day there is a recurring formula statement - "and the

evening and morning were the first day... the evening and morning were the second day..." -- all the way through the sixth day.

"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning-- the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And 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 1:31-2:3](#))

Notice a couple of things here. First, notice that God was finished on the sixth day and considered his creation "very good," then he rested.

Creation rest

Was God tired? Did he need to rest? No. [Psalm 121:4](#) says God never slumbers or sleeps. He doesn't get tired. God finished a perfect work and then he admired his creation and pronounced it very good. He rested in the sense that he just settled in to enjoy his creation. And how better to do that than to fellowship with the children he had created?

The text doesn't say anything about Adam and Eve resting. It was their first day of life. But they entered into God's rest by enjoying the benefits of what he had provided for them and fellowshiping with him in an intimate, face-to-face relationship.

The words "completed" and "finished" are used to indicate that the work was all done. Notice the phrase, "finished the work." The text says that God rested and blessed the seventh day after he had "finished the work."

Adam and Eve hadn't lifted a finger to make the world, they just received freely the benefits of God's finished work for them. So they enjoyed God's rest and blessing on that first day and entered into perfect fellowship with their Creator.

It wasn't God's intention for that experience of rest and fellowship to end at the close of the seventh day. Notice that the formula doesn't occur after the seventh day. It doesn't say, as it did after each of the first six days, "the evening and morning was the seventh day." That doesn't mean that there was no literal seventh day. But down through Christian history various scholars have noticed this and seen spiritual implications.

After God finished his perfect work of creation, he then offered the benefits to his creation in an unending spiritual rest. Mankind was to enjoy God's finished work, an uninterrupted and continuous resting in what God had provided for them, including perfect and unbroken fellowship with God.

Unfortunately, sin entered the picture and spoiled this blessed and sanctified condition. The relationship was broken; the spiritual rest was lost. As a result of sin a curse fell on

mankind. The curse included things such as pain, hard work, thorns, sweat, and death ([Genesis 3:16-19](#)). There is no mention of rest -- in fact, just the opposite.

A promise was given of a coming Savior, though. The sacrificial lamb pointed to a Messiah who would redeem God's people from the curse and restore the rest and fellowship that was lost.

God initiated covenant relationships with Noah, Abraham and then the nation of Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai. Just before the people arrived at Sinai, God instituted the weekly Sabbath.

The Sabbath reminder of rest

The first time the word "Sabbath" occurs is in Exodus 16:23. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the desert. It didn't take long for them to run out of food. So God sent manna to feed them. But he sent it only six out of seven days to teach them about the Sabbath, which he would soon institute as a covenant sign at Sinai.

"[Moses] said to them, 'This is what the LORD commanded: "Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning."'" ([Exodus 16:23](#))

This was a new thing for the Israelites. Moses had to give them explicit instructions about the Sabbath because it was new to them.

"So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 'Eat it today,' Moses said, 'because today is a Sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.'" ([Exodus 16:24-26](#))

Once again, he explains to them what a "Sabbath" is and how it is to be kept. Even after his instructions some still didn't get it.

"Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out.' So the people rested on the seventh day." ([Exodus 16:27-30](#))

When God says, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?" he is not talking about the Ten Commandments. They had not been given yet. The Israelites didn't arrive at Sinai until [Chapter 19](#) and the Ten Commandments were given in [Chapter 20](#).

It appears that God is just referring to his specific commands and instructions that he had given in regards to gathering the manna and observing a weekly Sabbath.

In the last chapter we saw that the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant God made with his people at Sinai. Notice why God gave the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant. Just before Moses left Mount Sinai, after receiving the law, God said:

*"The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested."
([Exodus 31:16,17](#))*

God gave the Sabbath as a weekly reminder of the perfect rest that had once existed before sin and to point forward to the restoration of that perfect rest in the accomplishment of the Messiah. [Colossians 2:16,17](#) clearly says that the Sabbath was a shadow which pointed forward to the coming reality found in Christ.

So the Sabbath reminded the children of Israel of the spiritual rest and fellowship with God that existed before sin entered, and the coming spiritual rest and restored fellowship which would be provided through the finished work of Christ.

A cycle of Sabbaths

The Sabbath concept was not limited only to the weekly observance, though. If you read [Leviticus 23-25](#) you will see that there was a cycle of Sabbaths.

- The weekly Sabbaths pointed forward to the seven annual Sabbaths ([Leviticus 23](#)).
- The annual Sabbaths pointed forward to the Sabbatical Year. Once every seven years there was a Sabbatical Year where the land was given a rest ([Leviticus 25:1-7](#)). Debts were to be canceled and slaves were to go free ([Deuteronomy 15:1-18](#)).
- The Sabbatical Year pointed forward to the Year of Jubilee every fiftieth year ([Leviticus 25:8-55](#)). Seven times seven is forty-nine. After every forty-nine years, the fiftieth was the year of Jubilee - the Grand Sabbath Year. The Jubilee was a year of liberty and release. Not only were debts to be canceled and slaves set free, but also land was to be returned to its original owners.

Each Sabbath was leading to the next:

Weekly Sabbaths (ever 7th day)

Annual Sabbaths (7 every year)

Sabbatical Year (every 7th year)

Jubilee Year (after 7x7 years)

Each Sabbath kept hope alive as the people were led to anticipate the ultimate "rest" that would come with the Jubilee.

The Israelites broke the covenant, though, and overlooked the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years. No one wanted to forgive debts and return property to its original owners.

God chastised his people through the prophet Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 34:13-22](#)) for neglecting the Sabbatical Years and refusing to free the slaves.

Some scholars believe that the Babylonian Exile lasted 70 years because Israel had not observed the Sabbatical Year since the days of the judges, for 490 years. God sent his people away and allowed the land to "rest" for seventy sabbatical years that should have been observed over the past 490 years. You might say he was collecting "back rent"!

Towards the end of the Babylonian exile God foretold through the prophet Daniel that the Messiah would come after another 70 x 7 or 490 years ([Daniel 9:24-27](#)).

Jesus is our Jubilee

Jesus arrived as the grand fulfillment of the "rest" that had been foreshadowed by all the Sabbaths. He was the Jubilee.

When Jesus officially launched his public ministry, he did so by going to his hometown and reading a Jubilee prophecy from the prophet Isaiah. He read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll... and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" ([Luke 4:18-21](#))

Jesus was the fulfillment of the Sabbath. He came to restore the rest that had been lost. His ministry brought the Jubilee, the Grand Sabbath.

- During the Jubilee the people were to return to their hometown ([Leviticus 25:10](#)), so Jesus goes back to his hometown of Nazareth to make this announcement ([Luke 4:16](#)).
- During the Jubilee the people were not to plant crops. Instead they were commanded to eat directly from the fields ([Leviticus 25:12](#)), so Jesus leads his disciples through the fields where they publicly pick grain and eat on the Sabbath ([Luke 6:1](#)). When Jesus is questioned about his behavior by the religious leaders, he declares that he is "Lord of the Sabbath" ([Luke 6:5](#)). He has come as the grand fulfillment.
- During the Jubilee there was release for those who were bound by debt or slavery ([Leviticus 25:54-55](#)), so Jesus goes about his ministry releasing those in bondage,

often on the Sabbath. He casts out demons, heals the sick, opens the eyes of the blind, forgives sin, and proclaims the good news of salvation by grace.

Once when Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath who had been crippled for eighteen years, the synagogue ruler criticized him, saying that because there were six days for work, he didn't have to heal on the Sabbath.

Jesus replied:

"...should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" ([Luke 13:16](#))

Jesus used the Jubilee language to show that he was the fulfillment of the Sabbath. He had come to set free those who were bound. There was no more appropriate time for that than on the Sabbath. After all, the weekly Sabbaths were a part of the cycle that pointed forward to the Jubilee which found its grand fulfillment in Christ.

The curse is broken

Jesus came to restore that perfect Creation rest and fellowship that existed before sin. To reverse the curse it was necessary for Jesus to take the curse, to become a curse.

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." ([Galatians 3:13](#))

Remember that Edenic curse? Pain, hard work, thorns, sweat, and death ([Genesis 3:16-19](#)). Christ took it all. He suffered pain, he did the hard work for our salvation. He wore a crown of thorns. As he anguished in the Garden hours before the cross, his sweat was like great drops of blood. And he died the sinner's death as our substitute on Calvary's cross.

Rest could not be restored until the curse was taken and broken by the Perfect Substitute. By his cross, Jesus bridged the gap between God and humanity that had been created by sin. He opened the door once again for fellowship with the Creator. He was the mediator of a new and better covenant of grace. He restored that Sabbath-like rest that had once existed before sin.

The original creation rest and fellowship was offered only after God had finished the work himself. And so it was with the restoration. Christ did all the work and he offers us the blessings of entering God's rest, depending on Jesus alone for salvation, receiving eternal life as a free gift, based on grace alone.

All we have to do is reach out in faith and receive what has already been accomplished for us by Christ. When we accept the gift we enter into God's rest. It is a spiritual rest of security, assurance, peace, and restored fellowship with our Creator God. It is dependent solely on the finished work of Christ.

When Jesus had fully taken the curse, borne the sins of all humanity, suffered the wrath of God, and tasted the bitter penalty of the wages of sin, he bowed his head and gave up his breath. But just before he did -

"...knowing that all was completed... Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." ([John 19:28,30](#))

Don't take lightly those words. It is finished! Don't try to add to it. You can't. All you can do is enter the rest of his finished work. Jesus has provided us with eternal Sabbath rest.

Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath

At the close of the last chapter I mentioned that we would study in this chapter how the Sabbath takes on new meaning in the new covenant. Jesus makes the Sabbath better in the new covenant by fulfilling it and offering us the blessings once again of that original rest and fellowship that existed before sin.

This lesson is clearly taught in [Hebrews 3 and 4](#).

[Hebrews 3](#) shows how Jesus is greater than Moses. Moses could not give the people God's rest. They rebelled in the wilderness and therefore spent 40 years wandering until the generation that rebelled had died. Then Joshua led them into the Promised Land and they received physical rest from their enemies for a time, but still they did not experience the spiritual rest that God wanted to give them. It was unbelief that kept them from entering God's rest.

"And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." ([Hebrews 3:17-19](#))

Notice that the Israelites did not enter God's rest. Even though they had the Law and promised to obey it. Even though they kept the weekly Sabbath and annual Sabbaths. Still, they did not enter God's rest.

Now look at the new covenant application in [Hebrews 4](#):

"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, 'So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."' And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world." ([Hebrews 4:1-3](#))

Notice carefully what these words are saying. "The promise of entering his rest still stands." And how does one enter his rest? Through faith in the gospel, by believing. "We

who believed entered that rest." God's rest is something you enter at a point in time, when you believe. When you accept the gospel you enter his rest.

The Israelites had the gospel preached to them in types and shadows, but they did not stand in the full radiance of the cross as we do since the coming of Christ. For them, and for us, the gospel is only of value if we believe.

Now look at that last phrase. Entering God's rest is somehow connected to the "finished" work of creation. "His work has been finished since the creation of the world." When you enter into God's rest, you enter into the freedom and blessings of God's finished work.

That experience of spiritual rest and fellowship with God was available at creation -- before sin entered. But Israel did not enter into that rest.

"For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.' And again in the passage above he says, 'They shall never enter my rest.' It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience." ([Hebrews 4:4-6](#))

Can you see how those verses indicate that there remains a rest that God's people may enter through faith that is related to God's rest at creation? But the people of Israel did not enter that rest, either at the time of Moses or Joshua.

"Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day." ([Hebrews 4:7,8](#))

Another day

After mentioning the seventh day, the writer now speaks of "another day," saying, "God again set a certain day." What is it? Sunday? No. **Today!** God does not want you to wait until some day on the calendar to enter his rest and then only for a period of time. He wants you to enter his rest today, and everyday, to live in his rest!

That's what "Today" means. It means today and everyday. That's how it is defined early in this same discussion.

"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." ([Hebrews 3:13](#))

"Today" means "daily, as long as it is called Today." God wants us to enter his rest and live in it, to enjoy the blessings of peace and fellowship with him that existed before sin and that is restored through the Messiah.

With that understanding read these words again:

"Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today... 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day." ([Hebrews 4:7,8](#))

Joshua led the people into the Promised Land and through him the Lord gave Israel "rest" from their enemies ([Joshua 21:43-45](#)). But that is not the type of rest spoken of here. It is the Creation rest that the writer is speaking of. He made that clear in the previous verses.

Now notice how this passage concludes:

"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." ([Hebrews 4:9,10](#))

The Greek word here for "Sabbath-rest" is not found any other place in the Bible. It is as if the writer invents a new word to express the New Covenant fulfillment of the Sabbath.

Do you want to experience Sabbath-rest? It doesn't come from a day. It comes from a person - Jesus Christ. If you have accepted Jesus and are depending on him alone for salvation, then you have rested from your own work. You are trusting in his finished work and you are experiencing the Sabbath-rest that God wants you to have, not just once a week, but "Today" and every day.

Just as God's covenant people at creation lived every day in the freedom and blessings of God's finished work, so in the New Covenant Christ has restored that fellowship and we can live every day in the freedom and blessings of Christ's finished work.

Of course we are not able to commune face to face with God yet. But the sin barrier was dealt with at the cross. Christ inaugurated God's kingdom at his First Coming and it will be consummated at his Second Coming.

There were those in the early church as well as today who chose to worship on one day or another. And that is fine. Don't judge each other. There is room for various opinions within the church as long as there is unity on the main thing - the gospel.

"One man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind... let us stop passing judgment on one another." ([Romans 14:5,13](#))

But regardless of which view you take, don't miss the significance of Christ's fulfillment. Sabbath-rest is offered every day for those who receive the gospel and rest from their own works, trusting instead in Christ's finished work.

Christ is the fulfillment of the Sabbath. He is our rest. The reality has come to which the Sabbath foreshadowed.

"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." ([Colossians 2:16-17](#))

True rest is found in Christ alone

The reality is found in Christ. Let me say it once again: Do you want to experience Sabbath-rest? It doesn't come from a day. It comes from a person - Jesus Christ. Jesus said:

"Come to 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." ([Matthew 11:28-30](#))

The immediate context of this passage is the incident where Jesus received criticism from the old covenant experts because his disciples were picking grain on the Sabbath and because Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Jesus responded by saying he was Lord of the Sabbath.

In that immediate context we read these words: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... you will find rest for your souls." Jesus has restored the Creation rest that was lost through sin. Only he can free you from the burden of sin. He offers you rest for your soul - not just your body, but your soul -- a peace "which transcends all understanding" ([Philippians 4:7](#)).

He invites us to take his "yoke." Notice that it is his yoke that he invites you to take, not the yoke of Moses. In various places, the Scriptures use the word "yoke" to refer to the old covenant law - the Law of Moses.

"Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?" ([Acts 15:10](#))

In context, this verse is clearly talking about the old covenant law of Moses. In Galatians 4, the apostle Paul compares the old and new covenants to the slave woman and free woman. He says to get rid of the slave woman - the old covenant. Then he writes:

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." ([Galatians 5:1](#))

In these verses the old covenant is referred to as a yoke of slavery. It is heavy and hard, impossible to bear. Now contrast that to Christ's new covenant law of love. It springs from gratitude in the hearts of those that are saved by grace and is prompted and guided by the Holy Spirit who dwells in every believer.

Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The old covenant is a yoke that is hard and heavy. The new covenant yoke is easy and light. As we have studied these two covenants, it is an easy choice for me to decide which yoke I want to be under! I'll take Jesus' yoke.

Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me."

That brings us right back to where this chapter started. The disciples saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain with Moses and Elijah - the Law and the Prophets, the old covenant. Peter was ready to build a monument to each of them, declaring them equal. But God overshadowed them with a cloud and said, "This is My Son, listen to him." Then they looked and saw no one except "Jesus alone."

I encourage all who read these words and study these passages to join me in becoming "Jesus alone" New Covenant Christians!

[New Covenant Christians](#)