

# **The Sabbath and Jesus**

*by J.D. Greear*

In the Fourth Commandment, God established the Sabbath as a way for the Israelites to refocus on their relationship with Him, rest from their labors, and remember His work in creation and redemption (Deut. 5:12-15). That was the Sabbath law for Israel. But what does all this mean for Christians today? Clearly the Sabbath is treated differently in the New Testament than in the Old Testament.

## **Christ has freed us from the technicalities of Sabbath law.**

The New Testament teaches us that Christ has freed us from the law because He has fulfilled the law. The laws of Israel, all of them—ceremonies and dress codes and special days of the week—were given as symbols of a greater reality. Well, Jesus was that greater reality; so after He came, we no longer have to observe all the symbols. And so, the early church believed that the resurrection of Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath in three ways:

First, in Jesus' resurrection from the dead, we see the fullness of God's purposes for and promises to His creation. The resurrection of Jesus' body from the tomb shows us that one day God is going to deliver this old, dying world from its curse. You see, the creation we live in is beautiful, yes, but it is cursed (Rom. 8:19-23). And God has promised one day to resurrect it. In the resurrection, we see the proof of God's promises to take care of us.

We see the "firstfruits" of that new creation in Christ's resurrection. So on Sunday, we reflect on the fact that God has purposes for us and for creation. And that is exciting! As a Christian, you know that God is going to raise your body from the dead, and that resurrection body is going to be much better than the current body you have now—no sickness, no deformities. The earth is going to go through the same resurrection process. Think about this—What does a resurrected Grand Canyon look like?

Second, in Jesus' resurrection, we see God's "rest" from redemption, or "new creation." God declared the first Sabbath after He made the world and rested in it. But then Adam fell into sin, and so God got up from His Sabbath rest, and He started to work again—this time His work was not on creation but on redemption, toward a new creation. And when Jesus rose from the dead, that work was completed. So, Jesus' resurrection was a new Sabbath, a rest from the work of redemption.

Third, in the resurrection, we see the proof of God's promises to take care of us. God gave Jesus on our behalf and raised Him from the dead. Therefore, we can be sure God will take care of us, even more than the first Sabbath demonstrated God's care for the Israelites.

## **We should still observe the principle of the Sabbath**

The point is not that Sunday is the new Sabbath and it now becomes the day upon which all Christians everywhere must worship. The point is that Christ is Himself the Sabbath, and if we are resting and rejoicing in His resurrection, we have fulfilled this Commandment.

For Christians, the Sabbath means we rest in and remember the gospel.

Even though we are freed from the technicalities of Sabbath law, we are still God's people, and we are still made out of the same stuff that Israel was made out of. This means we should still take one day a week to observe a Sabbath rest. But for Christians, the Sabbath means we rest in and remember the gospel.

The gospel is the most life-defining reality for us. The gospel is our identity. In Christ, we are fully loved and fully accepted by the only One whose opinion really matters. We don't have to base our self-worth on how successful we are at work or what others think about us. And we know that God has created us for a purpose. He's gifted each Christian specifically to be useful for His kingdom, and He has a specific plan for each one. The gospel is our security. I know that if God saved me, He'll take care of me, and He'll take care of you too.

The gospel also reminds us of our purpose. When I see the world through the gospel, everything starts to look different. I see that God loves the world intensely, but not all people know God. I see that every human being must stand before God and give an account, and only those who receive the gift that God has provided for them in Christ will be saved. That helps me see what is really important in life and refocus myself on the mission. The gospel brings such clarity to our lives. Every week, we need to remember the gospel and our mission.

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### **Prayer:**

Dear Jesus,

We give thanks that you came for us, you died for us, and, perhaps most importantly, you rose for us! May we find rest and rejoice in this good news, the gospel! Help us to remember that we no longer need to worry because your death shows us that you take care of us. We pray that all may find the rest they need in you.

In your name we pray. Amen.

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### **Questions:**

1. How did Jesus treat the Sabbath? In what ways does his resurrection redefine Jewish laws to Christian believers?
2. What was God's intent behind the Sabbath? How have modern Christians drifted from that intent?
3. How does rest reinvigorate us for the work of the gospel?