

## Series: Transforming the World in which God has Placed Us

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

January 21-22, 2006

Nehemiah 10:31

### “Getting Life Back in Rhythm”

When my family moved to Europe, we lived in a village where things were closed almost every night

- And next to nothing was open on Sunday
- No paper, no Starbucks, no NFL, no malls, no Fred Meyer in this Dutch wasteland
- Just closed signs and dart games from London on the BBC

We began stockpiling on Saturday afternoons to survive this weekly 24 hour period of deprivation

- When merchants selfishly stayed at home

We missed our convenience culture in America

- The land of all you can eat whenever you want to eat
- Where things are never off, always on
- Where an insurance quote from Geico is available 24/7
- Where we obsessively cram everything we can in this small box called time
- Where hyperactivity is our nature and consumption is our goal

It might have been where Israel found itself in Nehemiah

- A story of a people who had tasted the bitter fruit of turning away from God
- But were coming to grips with their moral, spiritual decay
- Evidenced in their unholy alliances (vs 30)
- Evidenced in their unholy use of time (read vs 31)

They were vowing to get things right

- To stop treating every day as if it is the same
- To stop their mindless capitulation to a commercial culture
- And come back to what God required
  - Shabbat: A WEEKLY DAY OF REST

They were intent upon taking this a whole lot more seriously

- The question is, should we?

Some years ago, a survey was taken of churches, asking readers to rate the importance of certain theological questions

- To their surprise, at the top of the list was this question: *“Should Christians take the Lord’s Day observance more seriously?”*

It may not be at the top of your life, but it is one I often ask

- For I'm keenly aware that I have not taken the day so seriously
- If the Sabbath is to be a strict 24 hr weekly observance, my sermon title would be something like this: "Confessions of a Sabbath Breaker"

But then, you might find yourself in this line-up as well

What does it mean for us?

Maybe we should first ask, what did it mean for Israel?

#### 1) A DAY SET APART TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT WE HAVE LEFT EGYPT

- Moses declared "Observe the Sabbath. On it you shall do no work and remember you were once slaves" (Deuteronomy 5:15)
- Slaves to a culture that was work, work, work-incessant, unrelieved work
- The Sabbath amounted to a defiant stand against any tendency to perpetuate this oppressive lifestyle
- A stand against becoming totally captivated by our work, and the stress and hurry accompanied with it
- It is the day we must give ourselves and others rest
  - Right in the middle of all of our work
  - Stop operating machines, plucking fish from the sea, changing darkness to light, wood into furniture
  - Cease interfering with the world and give it rest
- The Sabbath recognized that God stitched into nature an inviolable need to be left alone now and then

#### 2) A DAY SET APART TO CLARIFY OUR VALUES

- For values get perverted when we succumb to a fast paced materialistic oriented culture
- This was part of Israel's sin
  - Treating everything as purchased and used
  - Reducing relationships to functions to be managed
  - All of which can desecrate time
- In respecting Sabbath we are erecting a "weekly bastion against the commodification of time"
  - And determining to practice life outside the frantic pace set by financial markets and round the clock shopping and entertainment venues

### 3) A DAY SET APART IN ORDER TO IMITATE GOD'S RHYTHMS

- Moses wrote, "Remember the Sabbath. For in six days God created, but on the seventh He rested."
  - Stopped making, stopped speaking in order to literally "catch breath" (Exodus 31:17)
- Observing the Sabbath was all about entering into His rhythm
- The cadence He established and embedded in the world
  - Low tide, high tide
  - Growth, dormancy, rising, setting
  - A bird flying, that never nests soon plummets
  - Grass trampled day after day scalps down to hard bone
  - People never stopping become thin, dull, prickly, and forgetful

### 4) A DAY SET APART TO DISTINGUISH OURSELVES FROM THE WORLD

- Israel was called to be unique, set apart as God's people
- Not isolated, insulated, but people who look a lot like their God
- Who honor set apart days and enter into set apart acts
- Israel had lost their identity. Their repentance was about recovering this

### 5) A DAY SET APART TO DEEPEN OUR TRUST

- Honoring the Sabbath requires trust
- For it is a deliberate act of interference on us, an interruption of our work
  - A moment we are forced to take our hands off things
  - No matter the deadlines not met, the product not delivered, the manuscript unfinished
- And trust in this: that God will take care of things, take care of us
- *That if the world continued while God rested, it will continue when we do*
- The Sabbath is a moment we come to grips with this fact, we are not indispensable
- Knowing He will accomplish whatever needs to be accomplished

### 6) A DAY SET APART TO SEIZE GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

- The Sabbath is a basic unit of time away from the distractions of life

#### A) TO REST

- For rest is one of God's great gifts
  - Downtime to sit on the stoop and stare into the sky
  - And discover that doing nothing is generally when we do our best, our best thinking, our best creativity
  - Get perspective, discern proportions
  - Stop making and let the things we've made bless us
  - That without such time, our lives become permanently stunted

## B) TO CONNECT

- For in rest, we slow down and allow connection to occur
- DT Niles offered these words, "Hurry means that we gather impressions but have no experiences, that we collect acquaintances but make no friends, that we attend meetings but experience no encounter."

- Sabbath aims to counter this

## C) TO WORSHIP GOD

- For the Sabbath is far more than mere relaxing, connecting
- It is primarily an opportunity to center on one's relationship with God
- Here we get our bearings, lest we end up following our impulses
- We are recreated
- We come back to our senses, that there is more to work than work, THERE IS GOD!
- Lest work become our idol, reduce it to the dimensions of our egos
- Sabbath brings us back to this first principle
  - Life is not about us, it is about God
  - It's not about what we are accomplishing, but about what God is doing
- It all amounts to a weekly housecleaning
  - Sweeping out the cluttered idols that track their way into our lives
  - So that we can invite God in and worship

## D) TO TASTE HEAVEN

- For time with God, time from the craziness, enables us to gain a foretaste of the future kingdom
- Which is referred to from time to time as entering into His rest
- Sabbath is a "workshop for the practice of eternity"
  - No wonder Isaiah referred to Sabbath as the ultimate ride (58:13-14)

So Israel repented

- They determined to recover this time

What about us?

- If this is what Sabbath meant for Israel, what does it mean for us?
- SHOULD IT MEAN ANY LESS?

We have to work our way through a lot of junk

- For by the time of Jesus, legalism chased the Sabbath like a hound
- Chasing it into the corner of regulations and rules
- Pharisaic types reduced man to “created for the Sabbath,” rather than the Sabbath created for man

Though it has not been restated in the NT, something in our soul longs for Sabbath, the Sabbath God intended anyway

- A time (weekly, daily?) to take a stand against an oppressive lifestyle of non-stop work
- A regular moment to say no to our propensity to buy and sell without boundaries
- Resist a culture that is intent upon defining us as consumer

We sense a God given mandate that transcends OT and NT

- To get in step, stay in rhythm with God, and mimic Him in the process
  - High tide, low tide
  - Deepen our trust by saying “NO!” to “oughts” until we have entered into the rest of Jesus
  - Get out of a stress filled, RESTLESS, life out of control that is ruining our marriages

Something in this text calls for my own repentance

- When I let life become this
- And recognize that entering God’s rest is as much a part of faithfulness as moral purity and living with integrity
- It can be as much a sin to do more than God intended as to do less than God intended for our lives

Where are you when it comes to God’s Sabbath?

- Have you entered His rest?