



AND ... REST

Well, we've reached the end of this series on Genesis 1-2, and today we come to a subject that is going to be particularly relevant to the dads in the room, given that it's Father's Day: we're going to think about rest!

And we all need it, don't we? Of course we do. But few people realise it took *these* verses to make sure we get it:

Genesis 2:1-3

A question a lot of people ask when looking at Genesis 1 is: how are we supposed to interpret the 7 days? Apologist John Lennox groups the approaches into 4 main streams:

- A literal 7-day creation (everything made in a week).
- The day-age view (each day representing a period).
- The revelatory view (creation revealed over a week).
- The framework view (the cosmos as a tent / temple).

I personally hold to an overlap of those last 2 approaches, as they seem to make most sense of both the Bible in its context and a modern scientific knowledge of the world. Not only that, but an overly-literal interpretation will have you believing some very strange things, like God needs a light to work by, God has vocal cords by which to speak, God has a body just like ours, and God needs a rest at the end of a busy week.

Bonkers, and verging on the heretical.

But regardless of how you interpret this chapter, one thing is for certain: it was written for our benefit. And this is especially true when it comes to day 7: the Sabbath.

So, why does the creation account end with this? And why did God make it a command for Israel? And for us?

God established the Sabbath for 3 reasons:

1) Because The World Needs Rest. That's what the Hebrew word *shabbat* actually means. Rest. Pause. Stop. And as I've already said, God doesn't need to rest or recharge His batteries (Psalm 121:4). But *we* do.

Now 3000+ years ago, this was not a given. In fact, no-one had a Sabbath until God gave Israel the *Torah* (the nearest anyone got was a 'bad luck day' where people stayed in their houses for fear of something terrible happening). So, for Israel, there was a connection between the Sabbath and freedom. What's the point for us? That while work may be a necessity, our inner worth comes firstly from who we are, not what we do. Now that flies in the face of what our kids are taught and how our society thinks and even the way most religions function, but that's the lesson. That's why, when God creates human beings on day 6, the first thing they do is?

Rest.

The Sabbath, then, is about rest / relaxation. But it's also a reminder that we are human beings, not human doings; that we were born, not to be slaves, but to be free – as sons and daughters of the creator of the universe.

2) Because The World Needs Reverence. God blesses this day and makes it holy – *kadesh* – sets it apart. Which is a Hebrew way of saying this day is *His* day.

Now you could be forgiven for thinking, "Well, surely every day is God's day. What makes this one day so special?" The answer, according to Genesis 2, is that God does. Because we need to give the greatest Father of them all a day that is focused on Him; a day when we stop, spend time with Him, and listen to what He has to say to us. And not just to us as individuals – us as a community. Because what we do with *this* day will affect all the others; what God says to you *this* day will affect the week ahead. But it also sets a precedent: if we can't allow God to be King for a day, how are we ever going to allow Him to be King over everything? Over our *entire* lives?!

As I've said multiple times in this series, the Genesis 1 account is as much about worship as it is the origin of life. Miss that, and you've kind of missed the point.

3) Because The World Needs Resolution. It would be easy to look at Genesis 1 and think of it as past-tense: as what God has done in the distant past. But the 7th day has a future-tense to it, too (as Hebrews 4 tells us).

You see, the Sabbath is a promise that God will one day make this world His home, like a king in a palace (that's what is really meant by 'rest' here – the

same expression is used in 2 Chronicles 6:41, when the Ark of the Covenant comes to 'rest' in the Temple in Jerusalem). And He will reign here, forever. That's why the refrain "And there was evening, and there was morning", or 'there was start, and there was finish,' is repeated again and again throughout Genesis ch1. But then, when you get to day 7, this expression is strangely missing. Why? Because the 7th day is a picture of God's Kingdom. And God's Kingdom is eternal: no beginning, and no end!

The Sabbath, then, is a reminder that this world has a future: that God intends to come and make it His home. 2000 years ago, God paid us a visit, in Jesus of Nazareth.

One day, that same Jesus is coming back. For good.

Paradise

I could have called today's message 'The Magnificent 7', because this chapter is actually built on it. E.g.:

- 7 Hebrew words in vs1, the 'summary verse.'
- 7 days of God 'building' His world.
- 7 'and it was so's.'
- 7 'it was goods.'
- And on day 7, 21 words – 7x3!

Why the fascination with the number 7? Well, in Hebrew thought 7 is the number of 'completion' or 'perfection.' Genesis 1-2 reflects a yearning, inside of all of us: a dream of a perfect world, where everything is as it should be. In the words of a certain *Coldplay* song: "This could be paradise" (or even 'para-para-paradise', if you want to get it right).

But this will only become a reality when Jesus returns to take His rightful place. Because just as the 'creation week' is incomplete without a 7th day, the world is incomplete without a 7th day. And so are we. We are incomplete without Jesus resting in us, and us resting in Him.

Now, it might be you sense that incompleteness, in your own life. If that's the case, then why not pray this prayer:

King of creation, we long for that time when You will set up Your Kingdom and rule in our world. In Your world. But Lord, we need You to rule in us, too.

We thank You for living – and dying – for us. We confess our imperfections and turn from our sins. And we ask You to establish Your throne, right here, right now – in our hearts, and our minds.

In Your name, and to Your glory, we ask it, Lord. Amen.