

Sabbath

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[0 : 00] All right, so Table Church and Resurrection City family, the last few weeks, as Pastor Anthony said, we've been talking from this series that was grounded in the Gospel of Mark.

The last few weeks in particular, we've been talking about this idea of confronting the powers. In particular, last week, Pastor, in the last two weeks, I and Pastor Anthony preached from Mark 5. And we've been inviting the community to think through what it means to confront these powers, these collective forces that seem to drive physical and spiritual oppression in our world.

The powers are that something hard to name, hard to define, but which seem to inhabit and also stand apart from the systems and structures in our world that bring death.

Last week, I, in particular, invited us into the work of Following Jesus, the Exorcist, which I know can be a troubling idea if you did not hear that.

[1 : 15] Context is important, but check that out. But Following Jesus as the one who casts out what is, you know, what are the forces of death in order to bring new life, in order to bring communal healing.

So put simply, we have been remembering that Jesus saves and that Jesus' salvation looks like deliverance.

But what have we been delivered from? And what are we delivered into? That's what we're going to be talking about in the next several weeks leading into Easter.

What specifically are the powers that we need to name communally? This is communal work. What sort of life are we delivered into? What are the accents of that life?

And what does it say about God, that God is fundamentally a deliverer? What does it mean for us to join in that kind of challenging work?

[2 : 16] So, to boil it down, we're going to be talking essentially about the multifaceted nature of salvation. Of what we're saved from and what we're saved into.

Of what we're liberated from and what we're liberated into. Of what we're delivered from and what we're delivered into. Which you'll notice are all different names for the same experience.

And I also, I want to say right at the beginning of this, that a lot of us have probably been accustomed to hearing about salvation talked about in only otherworldly ways.

So, essentially, we're going to take this idea. It's like a diamond and we're going to just keep turning it and turning it and turning it to look at different facets of this thing. To see how our liberation, our salvation is intertwined with both the concrete and with the spiritual.

So, Dr. Drew G.I. Hart puts it like this in his book, *Who Will Be a Witness?* And this is kind of a grounding idea that will carry us through toward Easter.

[3 : 25] To speak of God's deliverance, for me, invokes the broad scope of our earthly predicament. Deliverance helps us remember that God is the solution to the captivity to evil, injustice, and death that humanity experiences.

God is active, present, and intervening in the midst of the crushing poverty that people are experiencing, even right now. God is present through the cycles of violence from which refugees are fleeing and that produce over 30,000 American deaths from gun violence each year.

God has not abandoned people locked up in oppressive gauges, but rather shows up for the most vulnerable of our human siblings who have been treated in inhumane ways.

God is with the oppressed, the poor, the young people caught in vortexes of deprivation, and those with mental and physical disabilities who are stigmatized and vulnerable. God's delivering presence is a force that we can join.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our revolutionary Messiah came and lived, and he has overcome the cross and the powers that deteriorate our human condition. Jesus has broken into

our house of captivity, tying up the strongman and stealing us away into God's kingdom.
[4 : 52] We are delivered from ourselves, from the exploitation of others, and from the unjust structures and institutions that deny the dignity of all people.

Our revolutionary Messiah is overcoming sin and death and the evil that keep us captive. Deliverance is what we need from the sin, death, and evil that wreak havoc on humanity and the rest of creation.

I know that was a mouthful. I should have given you a little bit of warning there. But that is essentially what we're going to be talking about for the next several weeks. And then I want to name that in the African American experience and for many people all over the world, the story of God delivering the Hebrew slaves from Egyptian bondage is the fundamental lens through which we understand who God is and what God is about in the world.

So in order to honor Black History Month and in order to think about who God is as a deliverer, we're going to ground these next several weeks in the story of Exodus, the first part of the book of Exodus.

We'll talk about things like, and I'm really excited about this, y'all. We're going to talk about stuff like what does it mean to be delivered from our tendency to dominate? What does it mean to be delivered from false narratives about God?

[6 : 17] What does it mean to be delivered from false narratives of ourselves? And we're going to talk about a whole lot of other stuff, too. For the Israelites, God's delivering work was foundational to how they saw God.

And I think that in many ways, as a community, we have to censor it as the way we understand God and understand ourselves as well. So as we go toward this Easter, the invitation of this series is really to think about what it means to proclaim, let my people go in light of all the pharaohs of the world, spiritual and concrete, the things that are right outside this door.

What does that proclamation mean? Let my people go. Even in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is considered, is really framed as the new Moses, the one who proclaims, let my people go into the newness of freedom.

All right. So as I've been thinking about this series in the past few weeks, it's become very clear to me, like in my heart, that there was one place that I felt like we should start.

And I will recognize that that place might seem a little bit counterintuitive in some ways. We're going to start not at the end, or sorry, not at the beginning of the Exodus narrative, but we're going to start kind of more in the middle of it today.

[7 : 47] So next week, we'll get into all the background. If you're not familiar with the story of Exodus, don't worry. We're going to go through it pretty systematically. But today what I want to do is actually start at the moment when, or the moment after, these Hebrew slaves have been delivered from their bondage in Egypt.

They've come into the wilderness. They've crossed the Red Sea. They're out. They're free. They're being formed in terms of their identity as a nation, as a community. And God gives them this new covenant that they are to enter into with God.

And I want to start there because it's in that moment that one of the things comes up that I think we have to be keeping in mind if we're going to talk well about liberation. So we're starting the series today by talking about Sabbath.

Sabbath is always the cornerstone of a people who desire to practice liberation. Rest. Sabbath. It's got to be talking about it, keeping it in mind, wanting to be the people that God is calling us to be. So I also want to start here because I feel like in church we don't always do the best job of actually talk about grace, but actually like giving ourselves grace.

[9 : 11] And I know none of y'all know about this. Maybe I get a little amen at this point, okay? But yeah, we're real good at like the doing of church, like the things we, you know, and really living into the guilt of what we know we kind of should be doing this.

Jesus called us to this and this and this and this. And the pastor said, I should do this and that. And it can get, I feel like it can get really, really overwhelming. And I think to talk, to continue to talk in this way about these kind of aspirations, we have to talk about also what it means to rest.

And then I think it's important to name the other side of liberation is always Sabbath. And I love how one of my favorite theologians exists. His name is Jürgen Moltmann.

He says, Israel has given the nations two archetypal images of liberation, the exodus and Sabbath. The exodus from slavery into the land of liberty is the symbol of external freedom.

The Sabbath is the symbol of inner liberty. No political, social, and economic exodus from oppression really leads to the liberty of a humane world without Sabbath.

[10:26] But the reverse is also true. Men and women never find the peace of Sabbath in God's presence unless they find liberation from dependency and repression, inhumanity and godlessness.

So exodus and Sabbath are indivisible. So that's where we're going to start today. And I will also name that like a lot of my thinking about Sabbath comes out of my experiences as a black woman. Out of the experience of feeling like I don't deserve rest and I'm in a system that will never let me rest. And I know that experience is not just mine.

I know a lot of us don't actually feel worthy of rest. And I want us to be talking about that. So a question I want to ask you today, and I want you to consider and take home with you, is just this. Who taught you that you could not rest? Who taught you that you could not rest? What did you see that made you believe that you were not worthy of rest, even when your body testifies otherwise?

[11:48] What systems in our world prevent you from resting? How is your own beautiful life that God longs to draw into rest actually structured away from rest by circumstances you can control, but also by circumstances that you can't control?

Because that's also a part of this equation, right? So if as people of faith are going to talk about the work of salvation and liberation and deliverance, we have to be talking about rest.

All right. So that was a lot of framing. I want to do kind of a teaching on Sabbath today. I'm going to look. We're going to look at a couple of different scriptures that come out of the Hebrew Bible, starting with Exodus 21 through 17, which many of us know as the Ten Commandments.

I know it's a beautiful snowy day, and the Ten Commandments seems like a hard place to start, but we're going to go there. We're going to go there quickly. You should be able to see this on the screen. I'm not going to read all the Ten Commandments, but I did want to put it up for you to get a sense of one of the important things about how Sabbath draws together all of these commandments.

So this is essentially what God gives to the people after they've been delivered from the land of bondage. So at the very beginning, it says, Then God gave the people all these instructions.

[13:11] I am the Lord your God who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the house of your slavery. And then you get all the commands about not having other gods before God, not making images, idols, not bowing down to them.

And then you get verse 7, not misusing the Lord's name. And then in verse 8, you get the Sabbath command. Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the Sabbath day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day, no one in your household may do any work.

This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock and any foreigners living among you. For in six days, the Lord made the heavens, the earth and the sea and everything in them.

But in the seventh day, he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as for you. And then after that command, you get all these commands that are about the neighbor.

[14:19] So not murdering, not stealing. So you've got this first set that's all about like, how do we orient ourselves toward God? And the second, that's all about how do we orient ourselves toward our neighbor?

And they're drawn together by the Sabbath command. And they're also drawn together by that verse two, right? This identification and disclosure of God as fundamentally the God who brings out, who draws out, who delivers.

The idea here is that God is fundamentally different from the gods that these people experienced in Egypt. fundamentally different from the gods that do not allow rest, that put you inside a system of anxiety and coercion and endless production.

That this God is completely different from that. The invitation in these commandments is to this revolution of social possibility that is shaped and reshaping human interaction toward healing and liberating ways.

over and over again. All right. So a couple of things about this one verse. So one, it's a bridge verse, right? It's a bridge verse between these two poles of how to follow God.

[15:42] It's also positively framed, which is fascinating. So it's actually about something to do, which is nice, versus something, you know, it's not about not doing something. I also find it fascinating that it is the longest command.

And when I was reading about this, apparently, it's probably the longest command, because just like now, people like needed it emphasized, because they didn't do it, right? They were like, I don't know how to do this.

I don't know how to practice this. So we got to like put a little extra around it. And I think that's important. Definitely this command, like legitimizes work is good.

You've got six days for work. And then it also says, let's set aside a period of time to rest. And then it gives the motive for that setting aside as this idea that God rests, that we follow the resting God. All right. So let's look at where that comes from. So that's Genesis 2, 2 through 3. On the sixth day, God completed all the work that he had done. On the seventh day, God rested from all the work that he had done.

[16:48] God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it, God rested from all the work that he had done. And when you stop to pull back from this, this is pretty extraordinary.

Like often, and I do this all the time, I talk about God as creator. But I'm not great at talking about God as like the chief rester, like the chief one who like relaxes, the one who kicks their feet up. Like that's not what I'm great at doing. But that also means that I then model myself after only the part of God, the aspects of God that are about creation, and not the aspects of God that are about resting.

I also want to just note here that, you know, there's this sense that, you know, when we take Sabbath, we are acknowledging that God is in control, that even if God could step back and rest, that we can also step back and rest.

That God acknowledges that God is in control, and we can name that too. That we are dependents, that we are creatures who receive grace and receive gift.

[17:58] That basically everything is grace and gift. And that even though that's super, super uncomfortable, it's also the truth of our existence. So setting aside a period of time helps us to live into that.

And then I'll just say that Sabbath in this verse, I think one of the things that is kind of sad about the way chapter divisions have been imposed on Scripture, is that chapter one in Genesis ends with the creation of human beings.

And then there's like this imposed chapter division that's not natural to the text, and then you get the creation of Sabbath. And that makes it seem like human beings are the end of creation.

Like they're the pinnacle, they're the crown of creation. But that's not true. Actually, Sabbath and this creation of rest is what crowns the rest of creation. And we've got to live and walk in that, that it's not us, that there's something beyond that.

There's so much more I could say about this. But I want to go on to one more text, and that's Deuteronomy 5, 12 through 15. So these are kind of the big three verses on Sabbath to kind of study and think about.

[19:09] So here's what that says. This is also just a different form of the Ten Commandments. Keep the Sabbath day and treat it as holy, exactly as the Lord your God commanded. Six days you may work and do all your tasks, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

Don't do any work on it. Not you or your sons or your daughters, your male or female servants, your oxen or donkeys or any of your animals, or the immigrant who is living among you, so that your male and female servants can rest just like you.

Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, but that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. That's why the Lord your God commands you to keep the Sabbath day.

So what I want to notice here is that unlike in the Genesis version, the Exodus version of the command that leads to Genesis, the reason here is not because God rests.

The reason here to practice Sabbath is because you were once a slave in Egypt, because you've known oppression, you have seen oppression, and therefore you're supposed to create, you're called to create an alternative system, something that is very different from what the pharaohs of the world create.

[20 : 23] And then out of that comes all this in the Hebrew Bible. This is like a part two, three, and four. But I'll just say out of that comes these ideas of like Sabbath year and jubilee, which are all about what it means to allow periodic release of people from slavery or like servanthood, periodic release from like debts, which is a huge problem in our society.

What does it mean to actually create structures that allow no one to exist permanently in poverty? They're actually making sure people are structured out of poverty periodically.

That's what Sabbath leads to. Okay, so some takeaways, something a little more practical. And I'm going to guess that you hopefully know at this point that my first takeaway is attempt to practice Sabbath.

Okay, I wanted to start with a better first takeaway, but you know, there it is, right? So try to practice Sabbath. And here's how Walter Brueggemann describes it, right?

Like actually what Sabbath is. Periodic, disciplined, regular disengagement from systems of productivity, whereby the world uses people up to exhaustion.

[21 : 40] Disengagement that is apart from culture-produced expectations for frantic leisure, frantic consumption, or frantic exercise.

I don't have a problem with that last one, the frantic exercise, but the others. Yeah, how do we pull out of those things? Disciplined, regular.

How do we do that? And I'll say I'm a big believer that, you know, in the Gospels, Jesus is clear. I'm the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. So I don't think it has to be a full day, but what are the ways that we can live into this, that we can fundamentally create a distinct category of time for ourselves?

So our name, I talked about this last week, like when I was teaching, I taught for eight years. One of the shocks of my life was that the first day I showed up to my job as a teacher, they told me school started at 7.20 during orientation week.

And I was like, what did you just say to me? Like, I was like, you mean nine o'clock, right? And so it meant that I ended up getting up really, really early often to make this commute.

[22 : 50] By the end of the week, I would be just so tired. I would try to go out with my friends and I would basically just offend people. Because I would say, you know, make a joke that was like, just, I wasn't filtered.

I would make these jokes and it was inappropriate. I would have to apologize to people. And I realized Friday night is your Sabbath. You need to go home. And so I ended up just, I would often just, I hope I can say this, pour myself a glass of wine.

And I would put on this like ugly green bathrobe that one of my friends gave me. And I would like piddle. I would like piddle. I would just like, okay, I'm going to listen to jazz. I'm going to, you know, I would, I would just like read poetry.

And I would do these things that were just so different from my regular life. But very much in which I could recognize that like, I can enjoy not being in control.

Like, that's what I need to do. And then I would say now as a pastor, I do have the luxury of taking a Sabbath, a full day off. And it's, I want to tell you that it's like Sabbath 2.0 that I'm like, there's no screens.

[23 : 51] But that's not true. All right. I'm not there yet. But I do try to like, I would call it go off brand. Like, I try to like think about like, what is my alter ego?

Like, really, like, okay, I read a lot. Right? I write a lot. No, that's not happening on Sabbath. Maybe I should like ride my bike or do these things that are very distinct from who I see myself and the things that are so tempting for me to put my identity.

So that's, those are some ways to practice Sabbath. And I, I do not have this figured all out. Another thing I would say is think about prioritizing sleep.

If even just a few hours is too much, right? Sleep. And some of y'all are like, woo, I'm convicted. Yes. Okay. Sleep.

All right. Sleep is a good place to start. Here's, here's a quote I like from Jonathan Martin. Sleep. I'm not going to read all of this, I think, but you can see it up on the screen. Sleep in its own way is an act of trust.

[24 : 54] We enter into the realm of the unconscious, vulnerable, where we cannot work, where we cannot think, work, or wrangle. Even the most devout atheist enters into this act of surrender.

This letting go into the night that lets us go into God as the one who sustains us, who keeps watch while we no longer are looking at our watches. And I'll just add to that, that I don't think we can have a good imagination.

We can really embody dreams of liberation without sleep. And then the final thing I'll say is sponsor a system of rest.

And I think about this even, you know, I think about this in my own home. I think about this in our, this alternative community of this church. I think about what it means to recognize that in, in most spaces, like organizations, a few people are doing the work.

And, you know, most people are attending and kind of watching. So what does it mean, one, for the people who are doing the work to say, you know what, I need rest. I need rest.

[25 : 58] And there's no shame in that. I need to roll off. I need to take rest. And then what does it mean for other folks who are not volunteering, who are not serving, to say, you know what, I see I can sponsor a system of rest by stepping up.

I can volunteer for a season or I can see what the affinity group leader needs or whatever, right? Like how do we make this a complete thing where in our own alternative community, we are stepping, we are stepping up.

Cue all the volunteer, like ways you can volunteer. So many, so many, all right? But just think about that on this like very practical, small scale level. Okay.

I want to say as I close here that I do not have this figured out. I was a little intimidated to talk about this because I'm still figuring it all out. Like I don't know if anybody in here has just started a new job.

Can you raise your hand if you have? All right. You may not know this about me, but I have too. And what that means is I am figuring out again how to like make sure my whole life is grounded in rest.

[27 : 05] I don't have this figured out. Getting enough sleep and doing all those things. But it is core to the work that we have to do. I think I'm going to end with this poem that I love by Mary Oliver.

I like poetry. And the beginning of it and the end of it remind us that we don't need to feel shame as we talk about these truths.

It reminds us that we are a part of the human family, that we are dependent, and that we are loved. So the poem by Mary Oliver is called Wild Geese.

You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting. You do not have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves. Tell me about despair.

[28 : 04] Yours, and I will tell you about mine. Meanwhile, the world goes on. Meanwhile, the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees.

The mountains and the rivers. Meanwhile, the wild geese high in the clean blue air are heading home again. Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination. Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting, over and over, announcing your place in the family of things. Amen.