

Fighting the Good Fight Part 2

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Nehemiah 13. Didn't finish my sermon last time so we're going to go back there. I do want to say a word about, well, first of all, appreciation to this blessing of being away and having Dalton preach last Sunday and being able to leave the church in such good hands with the elders that we have. It's a wonderful blessing and our family was really just delighted to be able to spend some time away, but it's always good to come home and it's wonderful to be back. And if it's wonderful to come home and sleep in your bed as it is, what must heaven be like to really be home? Oh, that day.

Well, today I want us to also think about before we introduce the sermon too much, I want to mention and say a little more about Reformation Day, October 31 is Reformation Day. It's also known by another name Halloween, of course, and just to help us to understand a little bit about that, you know, the reason Luther chose that day to nail, October 31, 1517, Halloween, 1517, he chose that day because it was named Halloween, actually at that time it was called All Hallowed Eve. It was the eve of a holy day, November 1, a holy day in the Roman Catholic Church, All Saints Day, which was a lot of this unbiblical tradition. The people would go to the burial grounds of their ancestors and pray for them, spend money for indulgences trying to get them out of purgatory and things like that, and so Luther chose the day before All Saints Day to nail the 95 Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, and those 95 statements of protest were basically, as he read the Bible, trained as an Augustinian monk, that particular order of monks in Roman Catholicism was the most tied to the Scriptures and Luther was a Bible teacher and that's how he got saved, teaching the Bible as an unsaved monk to other unsaved monks but he was in the Bible and as he taught the Bible, his soul was transformed. He saw the reality of justification by faith alone, that we're justified before God not by what we do, our works, but completely by faith, resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Christ alone. So that the gospel really is the justification is by grace alone, no merit, through faith alone, faith, no works, in Christ alone, Christ plus nothing. That's the gospel and Luther found that gospel because he was in the Bible.

So it's been said though the material principle of the Reformation is Sola Fide, faith alone, that's the shorthand version of what I just said a moment ago, we're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, Sola Fide, faith alone is the way you say that

essence, faith alone, that was the main issue at stake in Luther's Reformation, the Protestant Reformation, but the material principle of the Sola Fide is based on the formal principle, the foundational principle is Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone. That is, as the Reformers saw the light of God's word now again, they understood that what had changed was that they actually had the Bible. They had recovered the Scriptures and they now had the privilege of understanding God's revelation, his truth. You know, the Bible had been locked away for almost 1,000 years. It's really hard to imagine this but because there was this kind of romantic view of the Latin language, the language of Rome, as the gospel went throughout Europe, the priests preached and read the Bible in Latin to people who spoke English, French, German, you know, the antecedents of those things now. They didn't speak Latin. So it would be like coming to church and having me speak some other language the whole time I'm up here. The sermon was in Latin so there was no Bible for the people of God and when Luther, now as an Augustinian monk, learned Latin but he also learned Greek and Hebrew and he studied the Bible in the original texts of Greek and Hebrew, he came to see that what the church needs is the word. God intends the word to be released to his people. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

So he translated the Bible into German. A few years back, we had the blessing, Patti and I did, of going on a Reformation tour of Germany and we went to Wittenberg and we saw the door of the castle church where Luther nailed those 95 Theses. Then we went to the Wartburg Castle outside of Eisenach where Luther translated the New Testament from German, I mean from Greek into German. We also went on that tour later in the tour to Geneva, the place where John Calvin pastored St. Peter's church. Calvin, Luther, Tyndale. Tyndale translated the Bible into English and they preached, they not only translated the Bible into the common language, they preached the Bible in the common language and God lit a fire and that is the Protestant Reformation, and what happened was the word of God returned to the people of God and everything changed.

In Geneva, just a few steps away from Calvin's church, John Calvin's church, you have the Reformation monument. It was one of those moving parts of the trip for us was when we saw that monument. It is there, it's like many monuments you see today. You go someplace and you see a monument and nobody cares about it anymore. It's at the University of Geneva and they have long since abandoned the faith. Nobody even knows what's going on and there we are looking at this monument and basically it's some statues of people, Calvin, Farel, and some others, and then basically they were the ones who preached the Bible in Geneva, particularly Calvin, and they preached to people who then took the Bible into various other parts of Europe into the language of the people. So the Reformation monument was built in 1917, roughly that time, 400 years after the Reformation as a gift from the Hungarian Reformed Church to the city of Geneva to say thank you for the word of God. And on that monument, this massive wall that runs about 100 yards, I think, are these words inscribed in that wall spanning that expanse, "Post Tenebras Lux," after darkness, light.

So the Hungarian Reformed Church was saying thank you for the light. Thank you for being the instrument through which we received the light. It is the light of the gospel that

had been hidden, had been buried, was set on display and brought to the hearts of God's people. That's the Protestant Reformation. That's what we celebrate today. Luther lit the powder keg that then turned into the Protestant Reformation and Tyndale, Zwingli and Calvin followed in his wake, expositing, translating the word of God, expositing the word of God, and everything changed and that's what made modern Western civilization. By the way, this is one of the reasons all of this stuff about anti-Western civilization is evil and from the pit of hell. Not everything about Western civilization is great. No, there's nothing about it intrinsically. There's a lot of factors that come into it that aren't godly and that are a part of it, but one of the fundamental realities that's true of Western civilization is it was shaped by the gospel in a way that no other part of the world was shaped. And so if you reject it, you're rejecting the gospel, and so be careful as you listen to the rhetoric of the day.

After darkness, light. Everything changes when the word of God comes. That's exactly what we see in the text that we're reading. We actually have seen this happen in the lives of God's people as we've read the books Ezra/Nehemiah. Ezra returned in 458 BC to unleash the law of God on God's people. Nehemiah comes along 13 years later to join him in the work. We read in chapters 8 and 9 and 10 about the revival that God sent. How did that revival happen? How did the life of God return to the people of God? It returned to the people of God through the preaching of God's word. Remember the hours of preaching services they had after they rebuilt the wall. And as they heard the word of God in their language, they heard God's word, they were cut to the heart and it produced in them true genuine repentance. It caused them to see everything that was wrong and it caused them to see the treasure, the treasure of knowing the living God, and they saw that God is a forgiving God and so they confessed their sins, and God is a God who invites people, wicked people like you and me to return to him because we're all filthy sinners. Nothing in us to commend ourselves to God but the gospel is that he's done everything necessary to make filthy sinners right in his sight and to bring us into his presence.

So we've seen that lived out in these pages. This radical movement of God, this glorious revival culminated in a covenant renewal. The people basically said in chapter 10, "Listen, we understand now as we've heard the word of God all that we've done to depart from You, and we now will return to You. We'll no longer neglect the house of God. We'll pay our tithes. We'll make sure that the house of God has everything it needs, the temple to function, to have sacrifices. We will keep the sabbath. We'll no longer profane the sabbath. We will seek the Lord with all of our hearts." So they say that, that's 445 BC. Tremendous revival. Nehemiah in chapter 13 after about somewhere around 15 years later, he's gone away for a few years. He comes back and he finds that everything has fallen apart, that how rapidly the revival, the spiritual renewal has been replaced by apathy, complacency and wickedness.

So we saw and we talked about this when we first looked at this chapter. We said there are no happy endings because it wasn't happily ever after. You have revival and now we just keep marching onward and upward to heaven, and we never look back, you know, everything is easy now. No. And then last time I preached, we called it "Fighting the Good Fight," and that's the title of the message again. Fighting the good fight, because

Nehemiah comes back and he sees how things are a mess and he realizes the urgency of fighting the good fight and he fights for the people of God, for the glory of God. And the Christian life is a fight. We can't rest. We have to keep fighting and there's a sense in which and the tone of Nehemiah to really understand this correctly and this is one of the things if you understand what I try to do when I preach the word of God is not only give you the message of the passage but I think that true exposition gives you the tone of the passage. Do you understand what I'm saying? The spiritual attitude of the passage needs to be honored. You don't talk about verses where Nehemiah is going around and basically just turning things upside down in a way that's, you know, really unemotional and, you know, you have to, there has to be some sense of the tone of the text coming through.

I say that because this is why I don't always sound like this on Sunday mornings because other passages where God is ministering comfort, and where God is comforting us, we want to be comforted, but where God is unsettling us, we want to hear the word of God unsettle us, and this passage is basically saying, "Listen, the Christian life is a fight. Arm yourselves for battle. Be ready. Put on that mind that is prepared for battle in the Christian life." Until we go home, it's a fight.

I remember hearing John MacArthur actually talk about this one time. He was approached by another well-known minister evangelical, I can't remember who it was, it was either, I think it was either Rick Warren or Robert Schuller, and maybe you can help me out with who it was if you remember this story. But they basically came up to him and said, "You know, MacArthur, what your problem is? You need to lighten up. You just need to lighten up." And MacArthur reportedly what he said back to them was, "How can you lighten up when you are in the midst of a spiritual war?" It's not the time for lightness and levity and there's a sense in which that's always part of the reality of what it is to live for God.

There's a sense in which we have to fight. Now we fight not against people. Our enemies are not people. The lost are not our enemies. Our enemies are not flesh and blood but our enemies are principalities and powers and spiritual forces of wickedness who are holding people in bondage, and our enemies must be recognized and fought against, and so we must be people whose lives reflect the gravity of the situation. Nehemiah helps us to do that in Nehemiah 13.

Now we're going to focus on verses 15 to 22 today and we're going to look at basically fighting the good fight is the title, subtitle, fighting for the sabbath rest. Fighting for the sabbath rest because Nehemiah fights for the sabbath in this passage and we need to fight for the sabbath. Now it's going to be a little different for us because we live on this side of the fulfillment that has come in Christ so we're not going to be fighting for the same exact application of the sabbath, we're fighting for the reality of what the sabbath always typified, there's typology and we'll look at that as we go along. But let's read the entire 13th chapter and we're just going to focus on verses 15 to 22 but it helps us to get the tone and the reality.

Chapter 13, verse 1,

1 On that day they read aloud from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, 2 because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3 So when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel. 4 Now prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah, 5 had prepared a large room for him, where formerly they put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. 6 But during all this time I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had gone to the king. After some time, however, I asked leave from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. 8 It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room. 9 Then I gave an order and they cleansed the rooms; and I returned there the utensils of the house of God with the grain offerings and the frankincense. 10 I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given them, so that the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field. 11 So I reprimanded the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" Then I gathered them together and restored them to their posts. 12 All Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine and oil into the storehouses. 13 In charge of the storehouses I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen. 14 Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services. 15 In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food. 16 Also men of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the sabbath, even in Jerusalem. 17 Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day? 18 "Did not your fathers do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath." 19 It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the sabbath day. 20

Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem. 21 Then I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you." From that time on they did not come on the sabbath. 22 And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the sabbath day. For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness. 23 In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. 24 As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah, but the language of his own people. 25 So I contended with them and cursed them and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. 26 "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless the foreign women caused even him to sin. 27 "Do we then hear about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?" 28 Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me. 29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. 30 Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task, 31 and I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

Nehemiah, somebody probably came to Nehemiah and said, "Nehemiah, you need to lighten up." But he obviously saw things the way the Lord sees them. The Scripture presents him as a hero in this book. May we be like him.

Let's pray.

Father, we ask that You would help us now to unpack Your word, to understand it. Lord, set it loose in our hearts. Send forth Your light and Your truth and let them lead us to Your holy hill, to the place of Your habitation through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fighting the good fight, fighting for the sabbath rest. Verses 15 to 22, we've seen that Nehemiah as he came back after some years away, he sees and observes things that are showing that the people have radically departed from God. They put Tobiah the Ammonite in the temple complex, an unthinkable thing which we talked about last time. Worship has completely fallen down. They've abandoned the house of God even though they swore they would not. Then in verses 15 to 22, he sees this unthinkable profanation of the sabbath, that they're continually on the sabbath just acting like it's another day and

that's what we want to look at today, the sabbath, its significance, and how we need to understand it and apply it to our lives. Fighting the good fight by fighting for sabbath rest.

What I want us to do is look at this under four points and the first is the distilled essence of the sabbath. How can we fight for sabbath rest? Now before I even get into that first point, let me say this. I said earlier that it's a typology issue and there are disagreements about how you apply the sabbath in your life but I think that we can say with authority that the New Testament makes clear that the sabbath is basically a type that the Lord used to teach us some very important spiritual truths. This was something that was talked about in Sunday school today. Our Sunday school lesson was on typology. Scott Rouse taught it, Todd is normally preaching through Mark but today he's out and so we had a message on typology. Typology is a key part of how God reveals himself in the Scripture and the idea is that he uses things that are very practical and even basic visual things to teach deeper spiritual truths, and he does it in the history of Israel. He does things in their lives that then are pointing ahead to a fuller reality. For instance, the sacrificial system is an obvious typology. How can sinners be made right with God? Well, there needs to be a sacrifice and so all the sacrifices that were offered for sins. The Passover lamb that was slaughtered, how can God's wrath pass over us? We need a sacrifice and you see in the New Testament the type gives way when the substance comes. John the Baptist seeing Jesus says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." So all of those Old Testament lambs and sacrifices were types that pointed ahead to the reality of Christ. Typology is something that God uses throughout the Old Testament to teach us these things and the sabbath is a type.

Look with me for a couple of minutes at Colossians 2:16 and 17. Hold your place in Nehemiah but let's turn over to Colossians 2 for a moment. The Apostle Paul is writing to the church at Colossae because they're being troubled by false teachers and one of the things about the false teachers is they're advocating kind of a legalism. Christian basic focus, "Yes, we believe in Jesus. Yes, you can believe in Jesus but you also need to do these things in this exact way." So he says in Colossians 2:16, "Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day," look at the next verse, "things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." He's saying the new moon festival, the festivals themselves, Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, were types that were going to be fulfilled in Christ and once the fulfillment comes, the type falls away. We no longer need the type. The type was actually just to prepare our minds and our hearts to receive and understand when the fullness comes. It was a shadow. It's like you see a shadow and this takes an interesting circumstance but if you're in the right place, you might see around a corner a shadow come before you see the person. The shadow tells you a person is coming. You see a shadow coming around the corner, there's going to be a person behind it but you don't talk to the shadow, you don't celebrate the shadow. When the person comes, you're all about the person. That's what Paul's saying. The sabbath was a type. These festivals were a type. They were to teach us something.

So we're not looking at a legalistic approach to the sabbath but yet we're still to fight for the sabbath rest. What does that mean? It means the spiritual significance of the sabbath.

What is the real spiritual significance? What we're going to see is there is this fundamental principle. First point now: the distilled essence of the sabbath. The distilled essence of the sabbath. You'll find in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15, those are the passages on the 10 Commandments, that the fourth commandment of the 10 Commandments is the commandment to remember the sabbath day to keep it holy, to do no work, to stop from your work. In fact, let's look at Exodus 20 for a moment, verse 8, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy." One of the things that he called his people to is, "Listen, you're going to be different than everyone else in the world. Everybody else works seven days, you're going to work six." Now, listen, this is hard for us as modern Americans who live in a society that is so advanced in technology that we don't have to work seven days. But if you were still, you know, raising your own beef and chickens and lamb and if you were having to make all of your own food and grow it in your own garden, and you were having to light your heat all through this winter was going to be with wood that you chopped down, do you see that? We have it so easy. We just go over to the thermostat. We do work but we can only work five days and we think we've had a hard week. But most people throughout history have had to work seven days just to stay alive, but God says to his people, "Listen, part of My covenant with you is I'm going to provide for you in such a way that you will only work six days and yet I will provide for you even beyond what you would have had if you'd worked all seven. You're not going to cook on the sabbath. You're not going to do any work on the sabbath. You're going to stop on the sabbath and you're going to rest." Why? "Because that's what I did. I created the earth in six days and on the seventh day I rested."

It's really astounding when you read the account of creation, the six days of creation, the seventh day God rests, Genesis 2:1-3, "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts." Genesis 1 has been the six days of creation. Chapter 2, verse 1, I just read. Chapter 2, verse 2, "By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." This is where just an inquisitive mind and you need to think, "Why is God resting?" The Bible says in other places that God never rests. Psalm 121 says one of the reasons that you don't have to worry is because the God who keeps you does not slumber or sleep. One of the reasons you don't have to worry when you're worn out, Isaiah 40, and you're completely overwhelmed is God, who keeps you, is not weary. Jesus, in fact, in John 5 in a confrontation over the sabbath which is amazing when the New Testament, all the issues with the sabbath. Jesus is correcting the Pharisaical perversion of the sabbath and he's assaulting their perversion of the sabbath full on continually because he's saying, "You're missing the whole point. Man wasn't made for the sabbath, the sabbath was made for man." The sabbath was God's gift to man.

Six days you work. God created the earth in six days, then he rested. Why did he rest? He obviously didn't need to rest but why did he rest? What's that tell us about God? What it tells us about God is that he likes to take time to delight in his finished work. I think when you look at that in context, you see God creates man at the end of creation, the sixth day. He says, "Let Us make man in Our image according to Our likeness." You have a dialog in the Trinity. Think about, "Let Us make man in Our image." Then God made man in his image. What's the "us"? That's the Trinity. "Let Us make man in Our image according to Our likeness." So God makes man in his image, he looks now at his creation and says, "It's very good," and so ends the sixth day. And the seventh day after all of that, God rests and what is he doing? He's stopping and he's delighting in his work. He's taking time to delight in his work. This is something that we need to actually practice more. When you finish a hard project of work, it's good to stop and delight in it. That's actually the way God made us.

I mean, think about this. We find great joy in that. Isn't it interesting, you watch a ball game and one of the things that happens after the ball game and sometimes, you know, some of us don't appreciate this as much as others, they like to interview people and talk to them about the ball game, about the great plays that were made. There's something in that that's just in our wiring. We're supposed to stop and do that. I've been trying to do that when I do work and my son and I will do some projects around the house or whatever in the yard, I've tried to, it used to be just getting through it, drudgery, get through it and because the goal is just to do the resting part of ending the labor. But that's not all that rest is. Rest is celebrating the work so what we need to do is stop and look. Remember how terrible this area looked with all of the weeds that were there and look at it now. This is good. That's what God made us to do.

This is what God was doing. On the seventh day, there was a communion, a relational communion among the Godhead celebrating the work, and then when he calls man to himself, after the exodus he redeems man from slavery, he brings him to himself, he says, "Listen, this is part of My covenant. I'm going to invite you into My sabbath. One day a week you're to cultivate this habit and it takes faith. You're going to trust that I'm going to provide for you and you're going to stop working though you feel like you need to keep working to make sure that the crops are going to be okay, to make sure the animals are okay. No, you're going to rest trusting in Me and you're going to focus instead, you're going to stop your work and you're going to focus on My work, My completed work." And the distilled essence of the sabbath is essentially this: stop your work and rest, three things, stop your work, rest and delight in the finished work of God. That is the spiritual essence of the sabbath. The distilled essence. Stop your work. Rest. And delight in the finished work of God.

The wonderful privilege is the second point. The distilled essence we just covered, now the wonderful privilege of the sabbath. Back to Nehemiah. He can't believe they're profaning the sabbath, profaning, desecrating the sabbath. In fact, the word "profaning" is used twice in verse 17 and 18. He asked the question and he gives us a direct quote of what he said to them. Verse 17, "I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day?'" What are you

doing? "Did not your fathers do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath."

In fact, it's interesting in Jeremiah 17, Jeremiah makes the case that if you don't, basically to the people if you don't stop profaning the sabbath God's going to judge you and send you into exile, and that's exactly what God did. Ezekiel makes the point in Ezekiel 20 that one of the real reasons God was so angry with Israel was because they profaned the sabbath day. He says that 4-5 times in Ezekiel 20. I say that, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are the exilic prophets that are prophesying right up to the exile and after the exile starts and they're getting the justification from God on why the people are cast away into exile.

So you see, Nehemiah knows those passages and he's saying, "Why are you doing exactly what God said is the reason He sent us into exile? You're profaning the sabbath." Profane means "to treat as common that which is holy." It's the opposite of "to make holy or to set apart." To be holy in the Bible, to make something holy is to set it apart, this is important, the opposite of profaning. They profaned the sabbath but to be holy, to be sanctified is to be set apart unto God. It is to be set apart from that which is common. You take something and you put it over here and you say, "This is for God and nothing else." So the sabbath was to be that kind of day. This is for God and nothing else. We're to devote a day to stopping and resting and delighting in God.

Nehemiah chapter, he says profaning the sabbath. You're treating as unholy that which is holy. It's interesting in chapter 9 when they were, chapter 9 of Nehemiah, when they were voicing a prayer of confession, they make reference to the sabbath in that section. They're reminding themselves of what, as they pray to God they're reminding themselves and praising the Lord for what he's done for them. Nehemiah 9:13 says, "Then You came down," You, Lord, came down, "on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them," our fathers, "from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. So You made known to them Your holy sabbath, And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, Through Your servant Moses." You gave them laws and commandments and statutes, he actually says that twice, but in the middle he's saying, which is in there, "You made known to them," look, "Your holy sabbath." You see, it's God's sabbath. God's inviting us into his sabbath. He was inviting the Old Testament people of Israel into his rest and delight. It's like you're being invited over for almost like a victory party. The Braves, I almost don't want to say it, right? We're so used to losing that it can still happen. But if we were to have the unthinkable happen and we had a celebration party afterwards and if the Braves invited you to be a part of their celebration, I mean, like you were going to be with Freddie Freeman and Rosario and all the other guys, that would be pretty awesome that you got invited down there. If you don't think so, okay, that's fine, but most of us would think that's pretty awesome but that's nothing. You are invited, he says to the people of Israel, "You are invited every week into a celebration with Me of all the great things that I have done. I'm inviting you into My family room, into My inner circle, into communion with Me to celebrate with Me My finished work." It's a wonderful privilege, the sabbath.

Thirdly, it's not just the distilled essence of the sabbath and the wonderful privilege of the sabbath but it's the practical necessity. To fight for the sabbath principle in our lives, to fight for sabbath rest, we need to understand also the practical necessity of the sabbath. He puts it in the 10 Commandments for a reason, they needed it to be something that was right before their eyes and it's emphasized so much, as you read through the Old Testament you'll see this more and more, but it's the fourth commandment. It's the last commandment in the first tablet of the law. The tablet of the law, the 10 Commandments break down into two tablets: the first four commandments and the last six. The first four are our duty to God and the last six are our duty basically to God among other people. The first four, you know, we're "to have no other gods before Me. Do not make an idol for yourself. To treat the name of the Lord with reverence, not to take it in vain." And fourthly, "to remember the sabbath day to keep it holy." Then he turns the corner and says, "Honor your father and your mother. Don't commit murder, etc." The fourth commandment, the last one on the table that deals with our love to God directly is "remember the sabbath," that is, "remember that I've invited you in to one day a week stopping your work, forgetting everything else, resting, clearing your mind and communing with Me."

The practical necessity of the sabbath is that it's just part of being a human being but especially being a fallen human being, is we need to build this principle into our lives, that is, you have to set aside time where everything else stops and I commune with God, and if you don't do that, you're being very foolish. If you're a Christian and you want to walk with God, you want to glorify him, you have to have this principle at work in your life. Now that means for us now on this side of Calvary and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the day of the week, the Saturday was the seventh day and so that's been changed, we worship on Sunday. Part of that is making worship a non-negotiable in your life, that every Sunday what I do is I go and I worship the Lord with the people of God. And I think it's interesting, the Lord, now listen, the reason it's not to be legalistically applied is one of the things that we see is God gave the sabbath as a type of this idea of coming, resting and delighting in his work, and he said one day a week so that they would get the point but in reality it's to be like this every moment of every day. The goal is to live the sabbath all the time. That's why Paul says, another passage to look at is Romans 14:4-5, he says, "Some people regard one day as more important than the others, others regard every day alike. Let each be convinced in his own mind."

That is, if you want to apply certain things to a certain day in a certain way, that's up to you but it ultimately, the sabbath, the idea of resting in the finished work of God is something that we're supposed to be doing all the time but you have to have, God knows we have to develop habits, something I think we just really have lost in our culture, the importance of good habits. Just a habit of getting up and going to church on Sunday morning is a good habit that you want to cultivate. You want to help your children cultivate that and you want, now listen, we're not for dead formalism, we understand the Bible is about that, we're not just to come and go through the motions. No, but you're to be here even when you don't feel like it and you're to keep doing it and when you feel like you're going through the motions, go to God and ask for help in that and lament that but still keep coming. Get up and read your Bible every day, some time. Maybe everybody is

not a morning person so you need to set aside your sabbath time of rest is maybe it's right before you go to bed, that's the best time that you can spend with the Lord. Maybe it's right when you get up. But set aside time. This principle means that we need to set aside time where everything else is stopping. My phone is away from me. Now think about that, that's one of the reasons is you don't need to read your Bible on your phone. Now I'm not going to make that a law and a regulation, I'm just making it a recommendation to really think about that because your phone has a way of distracting you continually. Another notification. I wonder who that text is from? Got an email. You see how every time that happens you're losing focus. So put everything away and some time I'm giving just to God because I want all of my life to be lived that way. I want it to become so that even when I'm walking through the day with all the busyness, I'm communing with him because I set aside time to devote myself to him and that's how I'm trying to live.

God knows we need those habits in our lives. What are the habits that you have in your life? How are you doing with those, your spiritual disciplines? Maybe you haven't been taught to do that. You need to learn about that. You need to ask other Christians to help you cultivate some goals and objectives. This is one of the things we're seeing in that leadership study that we're doing on Wednesday evenings, and I encourage everybody to come. It's an opportunity that to be a leader you have to be the first thing they talked about, is a Bible reading leader. You've got to set aside time to read the Bible every day. You've got to set aside time for prayer and communion with God, memorization, meditation. It seems overwhelming so start with one thing and start doing that until you get it down and then add a second thing, and keep doing that until you get it down. I have to keep reminding myself. I was convicted when I was looking at those studies, to get ready to lead the study that, hey, I haven't been as faithful in reading the Bible myself. I tend to be studying it or memorizing it and meditating and not just consistently reading it through every year like I should. So I started back onto a reading program. There are some very helpful things, in fact, I got a really good one that's really working great for me. But anyway, there are all kinds of things you can use. Navigators is a great resource, navigators.org. They have several different reading plans. But we need to set aside time that is holy to the Lord.

The sabbath principle is I've got to set aside time to stop everything else, to stop my work and rest and delight in the work of God. That's the purpose. It's not just to go through some spiritual checklist so I feel good about myself. That's not it at all. It's to delight in the finished work of God. It is to delight in all that Christ is and has done.

Fourth point. We talked about the distilled essence of the sabbath, the wonderful privilege, the practical necessity, but we need to understand the ultimate purpose of the sabbath. The ultimate purpose of the sabbath. Colossians 2, the passage we read, said that these things are a shadow, Christ is the substance. How is Christ the fulfillment of the sabbath? This is such a beautiful truth. Turn with me to Hebrews 3 and I'm not going to be able to go through this passage like I'd like to, I'm going to just encourage you this week to read sometime Hebrews 3:7 all the way through chapter 4, verse 16, because the author of Hebrews here is making an astounding and beautiful connection for us. And the first connection, the most obvious connection is actually what Dalton preached on last

week. He's talking about, listen, what he's doing in this chapter of his book, in his letter, is he's saying to Jewish Christians, Jewish believers who have begun to believe in Jesus, he's basically saying, "Keep trusting in Christ. Don't turn away. Keep believing." He's saying, "Trust in Him by faith alone." Grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone. That's his urgency in this passage is, "Don't add works or don't turn away but trust what Jesus has done as everything necessary for you."

Now that's his goal to get the people to do that and what he does is he brings a reminder from the Old Testament, a type. He brings up when the nation of Israel had left Egypt after the Passover, they'd gone out and they'd received the law, they received the commandments, they received God's holy sabbath, now they're ready to go into the land of promise, Dalton preached on this last week, Numbers 13 and 14. God told them to send out the spies, chapter 13, verse 1, the Lord said to Moses, tell them to go spy out the land and just to see, you know, what the circumstances are in the cities and all that, see if they're walled cities, see, etc. Now why did God do that? Did God need reconnaissance information? No. Did the people really need reconnaissance information? If your leader has all the information he needs to know, why did they need that? Well, they didn't really need that but do you know what God was doing? God wanted them to come to terms with the fact that they were absolutely incapable of taking the Promised Land if they relied on their resources. He wanted them to see the walled cities and the giants, as well as the fact that the land was exactly what God had promised. He wanted them to see their hopelessness. These trained armies in there. We're not trained armies, we just came out of being shepherds in Egypt. How can we do this? He wanted them to see that because he wanted them to put that, the greatness of the challenge, their utter inability, what did they have? The promise of God. "I am giving you this land."

So the call was to believe the promise of God, to rest in the promise of God. In fact, this passage, the word "rest" occurs about a dozen times. "They failed to enter My rest," God says, "therefore I was angry with this generation." The rest was Canaan, the rest was heaven, and what God is saying by saying that heaven, Canaan, the land of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey is a type of salvation but it's entered into by rest. You have to stop working, rest, rest in and delight in the finished work of God. That is the sabbath principle.

You see it particularly clearly in chapter 4. He says basically in verse 9, so there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God. Listen, he's saying they didn't enter the rest. Then in the Psalms, the psalmist says, "Hey, you need to enter His rest." And he's saying basically what the psalmist said that Joshua didn't actually give them rest when he took them in later. No, they didn't get rest in. That's not the rest. That was only a type of the real rest. There remains a sabbath rest for the people of God. Verse 9 of chapter 4, Hebrews, "So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." Look what it says, "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His." He's saying this is a picture of the gospel. The way of salvation, the way that you can be made right with a holy God though you are a filthy sinner, every one of us is, just differing in types and degrees but we're all equally hopeless and helpless, irreformable, nothing you can do. And when you understand that and you stop working and you rest in the promise

of God who says, "I will justify the ungodly through My precious Son. I will take you, though your sins are as scarlet, I will make them white as snow. Not you." Well, don't I need to clean myself up a little bit? No, if you try to you're not going to receive salvation. Stop trying and start resting. Stop trying and start trusting.

That's the gospel and that's what the sabbath is all about. It was to teach them that, stop all our work and focus on the finished work of God. Exodus 20 he says, you know, "remember the sabbath day, keep it holy, do not do any kind of work for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, on the seventh day He rested." So he's saying, "Look, work and then on the seventh day think about the great works of God in creation." Look what he did. Look at this world. Look at what a beautiful world he's made.

It's interesting, I mentioned that the 10 Commandments are twice in the Old Testament, Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5. Deuteronomy 5:12-15, it's the same fourth commandment is repeated in the list of the 10 Commandments. The word "Deuteronomy" means "second law." Second law. It's the second giving of the law that God gave through Moses to the people after the 40 years. Remember, they didn't go in, they didn't believe in Numbers 13 and 14, they didn't trust God therefore God swore, "They will not enter My rest." None of the adults went into Canaan but 40 years later after all of them had died out except for Joshua and Caleb, the Lord took them in. But before they went in, before Moses died, Moses didn't get in the Promised Land, before Moses died, he gave them the book of Deuteronomy and he gave them the second giving of the law. And he gives them the same commandments but it's interesting when you read Deuteronomy 5:12, that when the Lord gives the commandments he changes something really interesting. The same commandment. He says, "Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter," etc. Skip on down to verse 15, "You shall remember," now remember it said, in Exodus it said, "for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth." So stop your work and rest in God's finished work of creation. But here he says something different. He doesn't say, "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth." He wants them to think about something else. Verse 15, "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day. You're to observe the sabbath day, you're to stop from your work and you're to completely rest and delight in My work of redemption. Not My work of creation. Yes, My work of creation but also My work of redemption. Look what I did. Look what I do for people who look to Me. Delight in that."

That is the beauty of the sabbath principle. That's the gospel. It's so important and so often I think people in churches like ours miss this. It's something that's elusive, it's because of our great pride, our desire to in some way contribute something. And if you're trusting in anything but the finished work of Jesus, you are not going to be in heaven. It's Jesus Christ alone. You must stop working and rest in his finished work. Only trusting in him. That's the point that he's getting at at the end of the chapter when he says in verse 14, 15 and 16, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the

heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore," this is what it means to enter rest, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." It means that this is the faith that is the essence of saving faith. It is the faith to draw near to God in spite of all of the problems that you see in yourself, all of the wickedness, all of even the lack of desire, the lack of repentance. Don't let that stop you from drawing near to God. You draw near to God not based on anything in yourself. No attitude, no right emotion. You draw near to God based on the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and him alone. You draw near with boldness not because of anything in you, because we have a great High Priest who's done everything, and because of that, I lay hold of the promise you save wicked and evil people like me who have not repented as I ought. You save unrepentant people and then you make us repentant because that's what happens, repentance is the other side of salvation. It's always got to be there but you don't get repentance by trying to repent, you get repentance by resting in Christ. And when you come to understand, "He loves me even though I am so wicked," your heart is captured because you're entering into the warmth and the unspeakable delight of the communion with a holy God though you are utterly unworthy. All because of Christ.

That's what changes us but you can't try to get the cart before the horse. This is why, listen, as a Christian we continue to have to wrestle with this. So when you're getting up in the morning to read your Bible like you're supposed to do to cultivate this habit and you don't want to read your Bible, do you try to act like you want to read your Bible because I want to fool God? Well, you can't fool God. You know you can't fool God so I'd better not read my Bible because I don't want to read my Bible. No, what you do is you say, "Lord, I don't want to read my Bible. Help me! I want to do something else beside. I would rather look at my phone." But ask him for help. Come to him empty-handed and say, "But I have a High Priest who always wanted to be in Your presence and I come asking You to make me more like Him. I'm not going to pretend that I want to, I need You to change me." He's not only our justification, he has been made our sanctification in Christ. It's a gift. Receive it and drawing near to the throne of grace and resting is always looking to Christ. You look at yourself to see what's wrong and then you run to Christ. Always running to Christ.

That's the sabbath rest and, you know, the reason we have to build this into our lives is because isn't that so easy to forget? It's just so second nature to start trying to do in our own strength, pretending. We have to set aside time where nothing else is happening, we're in the word even when we realize we're not, our hearts aren't there, so often that's the case but, "Lord Jesus, Your heart is there. It was always there and You're my righteousness. Help me." And we just keep slogging away, reading our Bible, we keep praying but all the time if we're resting, we are abiding in Christ and, "If you abide in Me, you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing." The Lord is so good.

That's the most wonderful news in the world. Every single person on the face of the earth no matter how wicked and vile they are, they can be accepted by God by coming to

Christ. Don't have to work anything up, they just have to stop, stop trying to work and rest. Now once they rest, they're going to be different. You can't come into the throne room of God in truth and not on the other side begin to be different. Now listen, as Christians you can get yourselves all worked up and worrying, "Am I different enough?" And the Bible does tell you to examine yourself because it understands that there are many times where people are self-deceived. We think we're in Christ but we're not. So examine yourselves, see is there fruit in your life, but listen, you've got to stop examining fruit from time, I mean, you examine fruit but you don't stop there. It's like you keep examining, "There's no fruit. There's no fruit. There's no fruit. There's no fruit." There's not going to be any fruit if you keep doing this. "There's no fruit. There's no fruit. There's no fruit. There's no fruit." Look to Christ. "Lord, look at this, there's no fruit here. Lord Jesus, You always loved. You're my righteousness. You're the One who will love through me. Love through me now." And when we keep learning to look from the absence of fruit to Christ, we're being rooted in Christ, and when you're rooted, then you're going to have fruit over time.

So resting, resting, resting. That's what God's calling us to.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.