

THE SEVENTH DAY

Ellet J. Waggoner



The Seventh Day

by E.J. Waggoner

Resting with the Lord

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made." (Gen. 2:1-3)

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it." (Ex. 20:8-11)

This is the grand summary of creation, and the account of the celebration of it. The days of creation are sufficiently designated by being numbered, but the day that celebrates creation complete is honored by having a name. The name of the seventh day is "Sabbath." Thus a double purpose is served. By the naming of the

seventh day it is distinguished from all other days, and by the numbering of the others without naming them, the fact that the Sabbath is a definitely-recurring day is made prominent. But the text tells its own story as to the day which is the Sabbath; and it is one of the sure commandments of God, which "stand fast forever and ever." (Ps. 111:8) What we are to do here is to call attention to the spiritual lessons to be learned from the giving of the Sabbath to man.

Christ, as we well know, is the great Creator. He is the wisdom of God, and the power of God. "For in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers; all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." (Col. 1:16-17, R.V.) "Without Him was not anything made that was made." (John 1:3) When the record says that in six days God made the heavens and the earth, it means God in Christ, for Christ is the only manifestation of God that is known to men. Therefore, also, we know that it must have been Christ who rested upon the seventh day, after completing the work of creation, and that it was Christ who blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it. Thus the Sabbath day is in an emphatic sense the "Lord's day."

Why was the Sabbath made? "The Sabbath was made for man." (Mark 2:27) It is for him, in the sense that it is not against him. It is not an arbitrary thing imposed upon man,- something for him to keep simply because God says so,-but something that is given him

for his help. It is a blessing that God has bestowed upon him. It is among the "all things that pertain unto life and godliness," (2 Peter 1:3) which His divine power has given unto us.

Why was the Sabbath given? The Lord, through the prophet, gives the answer in these words: "And hallow My Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God." (Ezek. 20:20) Mark, it is a sign by which the people are to know God. Therefore there is no room for the supposition that the Sabbath was simply for the purpose of distinguishing the Jews from other people. It was made before the Jews had any existence. It was that they might know God; and that which would serve to make them know God would serve the same purpose for all other people. It was given to Adam in the beginning for the same purpose,-that he might know and remember God.

But how would the Sabbath be a sign that men might know God? The answer to this is found in the Epistle to the Romans: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from [or, ever since] the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." (Rom. 1:19-20) We have only to recall some of the things noted in the preceding pages to see how God is known by His works.

Yet again the question comes, how does the Sabbath make us know the true God? Why, we have just read that the eternal power

and Godhead of the Creator are seen from the things that He has made; and the Sabbath is the great memorial of creation. The Lord rested upon the seventh day, after the six days of creation, and He blessed and sanctified the day, because that in it He had rested from all His works. So we read, "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honorable and glorious: and His righteousness endureth forever. He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion." Some versions give, more literally, "He hath made a memorial for His wonderful works." (Ps. 111:2-4)

The one thing necessary for man to learn in this life is God. The poet may tell us that the proper study of mankind is man; but the Lord tells us that the proper study of mankind is God. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jer. 9:23-24) Knowing Him, we have all that is worth knowing, for He is the truth, and all the truth. Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God, and in Him are contained "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 2:3)

The Sabbath is for the purpose of keeping in mind the creative power of God, which is His distinguishing characteristic. But creative power is the power of the gospel, so that that which celebrates creation also celebrates redemption.

Christ is the Redeemer, because in Him were all things created. He bestows the grace of God to men by His creative power. The power that saves men is the power that created the heavens and the earth. So when the psalmist says that the Lord has made a memorial for His wonderful works, he immediately adds, "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion." In Christ the grace of the Father is revealed. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) He imparts His grace, which affords help in time of need, by the same mysterious and mighty power by which He created the earth; by the same power by which the sun's rays impart life to the plants on the earth.

Note how inseparably Christ is connected with the Sabbath. It is by Him that all things were created, and that they all are upheld. But the works of God reveal His eternal power and Godhead; and Christ is the power of God, and in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Therefore the works of creation show the power and divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Sabbath is the great memorial of the wonderful works of God in Christ, and so it is the great sign of the divinity of Christ. To keep the Sabbath as God appointed it at creation is to acknowledge the divinity of Christ. Just to the extent that one fails to keep the Sabbath of the Lord in spirit and in truth, does he fail to recognize the divinity of Christ, and to receive the benefit that comes from the fact of His divinity.

This is indicated in the words of Christ to the Pharisees who unjustly accused Him and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath, because they satisfied their hunger on that day, and because He healed a man on the Sabbath. Said He, "The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day." (Matt. 12:8) It is no small thing that He is Lord of the Sabbath day. To be Lord of the Sabbath day means that He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth-that He is Lord of all.

There is a special blessing connected with the Sabbath. It is true that very many who profess to keep the Sabbath do not receive that blessing; but that is because they do not really know of it. The statement of the Scripture is, that God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it. He blessed the day. There is no day of the week when men may not be blessed by the Lord. Indeed, both good and bad are alike the subjects of the blessings of God every day. Not only so, but those who seek the Lord may find special blessings at any time. The Lord is always near at hand, and is always ready to bless; but there is a blessing that goes with the Sabbath day that cannot be found anywhere else. It is the Sabbath blessing. God has put His blessing upon the Sabbath, and the Sabbath blessing goes only with the Sabbath. Nobody can find a thing where it is not. The Sabbath blessing has not been placed upon any day except the seventh; therefore it cannot be found anywhere else.

What is this blessing for?-It is for the same purpose that all the blessings of God are given. "Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." (Acts 3:26) God blesses men, not because

they are good, but in order that they may become good. All His blessings are for the purpose of turning them away from sin to Himself. If men do know the Lord, then the blessings that He bestows are for the purpose of drawing them still closer to Him. So it is with the Sabbath. It is to turn men to God, by reminding them of His goodness and of His gracious power. The power of creation is the power of Christ. Christ is of God, "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." The power by which He gives us these things is the power by which He created the worlds. Therefore we find a deeper meaning in the words of the Lord, "Moreover also I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them." (Ezek. 20:12) The blessing of the Sabbath is the blessing of sanctification. As the Sabbath is the memorial of God's creation, so is it to make known to us the power of God, to make us entirely new creatures in Christ.

Sabbath Rest

The word "Sabbath" means rest. It is the untranslated Hebrew word signifying rest. So where we read, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God," it is the same as though it read, "The seventh day is the rest of the Lord thy God." That this is so will be plain to any one who recalls the statement that on the seventh day God rested from all His works which He had made.

Now let it be remembered that it is the Sabbath of the Lord that we are called upon to keep. In these days we hear such terms as

"The Jewish Sabbath," "The Continental Sabbath," "The Puritan Sabbath," "The American Sabbath," "The Christians' Sabbath," etc.; but the only Sabbath that the Bible tells of is "The Sabbath of the Lord thy God." "Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep." (Ex. 31:13) The Lord speaks of the Sabbath as "My holy day." (Isa. 58:13) Therefore it is the Lord's rest that we are to keep. Not merely are we to abstain from our own work on the day on which the Lord rested, but we are to keep His rest. What does this mean? Let us see.

The Saviour tells us that "God is a Spirit." (John 4:24) More exact is the marginal reading of the Revised Version, "God is Spirit." He is not merely one of a number of spirits, but He is Spirit. He is a spiritual, not a physical, being. Does that mean that He is only a shadow? Not by any means. The only enduring things are those that are spiritual. God is substance, for it is declared that Christ is "the very image of His substance." (Heb. 1:3, R.V.) It is a mistaken idea that we are so prone to get, that spiritual things are unreal. "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." (1 Cor. 15:44) Christ's body after His resurrection, the body with which He ascended to heaven, was certainly a spiritual body; yet it was very real and tangible. We cannot tell what a spiritual body is, but we know that it is infinitely higher and more perfect than our physical bodies. It is not subject to the limitations that natural, physical bodies are.

God is Spirit, therefore the rest that He took after creation was spiritual rest. There was no physical weariness incurred in creating

the earth. "The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary." (Isa. 40:28) Creation was not a physical work; it was wholly spiritual. God spake, and it was. And His word is spirit. Therefore, to keep God's Sabbath, or rest, is to enjoy spiritual rest. The Sabbath is not designed for mere physical rest, but for spiritual. It has a higher meaning than is commonly attached to it. True, we are enjoined from doing our own labor on that day, but the cessation from physical labor on the Sabbath day is but an emblem of the spiritual rest which God gives to those who accept Him as the Creator of all things. Without spiritual rest there is no true Sabbath-keeping. The Lord says that they who turn away their feet from the Sabbath, and do not do their own ways on His holy day, but call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable, shall delight themselves in the Lord. (Isa. 58:13-14) A man may refrain from labor on the seventh day as scrupulously as ever the strictest Pharisee did; yet if he does not know and delight in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is not keeping the Sabbath of the Lord. True Sabbath rest can be found only in Christ.

Let it not be forgotten that the Sabbath was given to man in Eden before sin entered into the world. Work was given to Adam, but it was not wearisome labor. Labor is no part of the curse, but weariness from labor is. It was not until after the fall that it was said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake: in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou

return." (Gen. 3:17-19) All this was because he had sinned. If he had remained loyal to God, the earth would have yielded bountifully only that which is good, and labor would have been a pleasure. Yet the Sabbath would have been observed, not as a rest for the body, which would never have become weary, but as a season of delightful communion with God.

A practical lesson may be learned right here in regard to Sabbath legislation. If the Sabbath were merely for the purpose of giving men physical rest, in order that they might be able to begin the next week's pursuit of wealth the more eagerly, it would be possible for the government to require all men to keep the Sabbath. But since the rest of the Sabbath is a spiritual rest, the impossibility of compelling anybody to keep the Sabbath must be apparent. Spiritual pertains to the Spirit of God. The rest of the Sabbath, being spiritual, is the rest which only the Spirit of God can give, and the Spirit of God is not subject to acts of parliament, or the decrees of courts. Even though the seventh day, the day which the Lord Himself blessed and sanctified, were the day sought to be enforced, the result would be the same. God does not use compulsion, and He has not authorized any man or body of men to use it in His place. The Sabbath is for man; it is the greatest blessing that God has for man. It is that which shows him the power by which he may be saved. To compel men, therefore, to keep the Sabbath, would be the same as to compel them to be saved. Christ says that He will draw men to Him, but He does not drive them. He is the Good Shepherd; as such He goes before His sheep, and leads them by His voice, but He does not drive with a club.

It is clear that mere bodily recuperation is not the object of the Sabbath day, and that merely refraining from bodily toil does not at all constitute the sum of Sabbath-keeping. Yet entire cessation from our own work, of whatever kind it may be, is enjoined on the seventh day. This, not alone for the purpose of giving us time to contemplate the works of God without interruption, but to impress a much needed lesson of trust in God. As we cease all our labor by which we earn our living, we are reminded of the fact that God supplies us not only with spiritual blessings, but also with all temporal necessities. We thereby acknowledge that although, in obedience to His command, we labor for our daily bread, we are as dependent upon Him as though we did nothing.

A proper understanding of the Sabbath and its object, therefore, would forever set at rest the inquiry that often arises in the minds of persons who are convinced that they ought to obey God in the matter of Sabbath observance. The question is, "If I should keep the seventh day, how could I make a living? I shall doubtless lose my position, and since comparatively few people keep that day, and it is the principal business day of the week, I shall not be able to find employment. What can I do?" I say such a question will never be asked by one who knows the nature and object of the Sabbath. He will know that the Sabbath itself points out the answer. The very idea of Sabbath observance is that of perfect trust in God, whose power brought the universe from nothing, and upholds it, and whose love for His creatures is equal to His power to do them good.

It will also solve the question, or rather prevent its arising, as to whether a man should in an extremity labor on the Sabbath in harvest, when that seems to be the only hope of securing the crop. He will know that the God who alone can make the corn grow, is fully able to protect it, or to make ample provision for him in another way if it should be destroyed. But all will understand that perfect Sabbath-keeping is consistent with bestowing all needful care upon the afflicted; for the Sabbath itself reminds us that God is "gracious and full of compassion."

The Rest That Remains

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them [the Jews]: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as He said, As I have sworn in My wrath, if they shall enter [they shall not enter] into My rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all His works. . . . There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His." (Heb. 4:1-10)

The rest that is here spoken of is evidently the rest that remains for the people of God in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and

Saviour Jesus Christ. It is rest in the earth made new, which the ancient Jews did not obtain because of unbelief. That which they received in the land of Canaan was only a shadow of the real rest which God had promised them. The same gospel of the kingdom, which is preached to us, was first preached to them. But what has the seventh day to do with that eternal rest in the kingdom of God? We shall see.

The Sabbath is the memorial of creation, as we have seen. But let it not be forgotten that the Sabbath was given at the time when "God saw all that He had made; and, behold, it was very good." So the Sabbath commemorates a perfect creation. It reminds us that the earth was not always in the condition in which we now see it. Then, since no word of God can fail, and every purpose will be carried out, just as surely as the Sabbath reminds us of a perfect creation completed for the dwelling-place of man, it assures us that the earth will be renewed, and made fit for the dwelling-place of those who shall be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

"They shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end. For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else."
(Isa. 45:16-18)

God made the earth, and placed man upon it. When man was created, he was upright; therefore God intended the earth to be inhabited by a race of perfect beings. To these beings He gave the Sabbath, that they might keep in mind their Creator, and thus retain their perfection. That perfection was not merely physical perfection, but it was spiritual as well. Man, in perfection of character, was made in the image of God. So he was to observe the Sabbath, as a reminder of the spiritual perfection that he had received from God, and that could be preserved by Him alone. Now it is to that perfect condition that the Lord is going to restore the earth, and through the gospel He is preparing a perfect people to inhabit the restored earth. Although man has fallen, and the earth has been defiled, the Sabbath still remains, a fragment of Eden, both as a reminder to man of what God prepared in the beginning, and as a means of lifting him up to that high position, so that he may enjoy it when it is restored.

The rest that remains, therefore, is the earth renewed and Eden restored. The works were finished from the foundation of the world. That is, as soon as the earth was created, it was man's rest. Man was given work to do, but it was not wearisome work. A strictly literal rendering of Gen. 2:15 would be, that God caused man to rest in the garden which He had planted. He gave man rest in the earth that was ready for his enjoyment. The proof of this is found in the words, "And God did rest the seventh day from all His works."

Then the Sabbath was given to man as a sign that he was to rest to all eternity with the Lord. That is, he was to enjoy spiritual rest,--perfect freedom from all sin.

During the six days God had been speaking the words that brought the earth to its perfect condition. Then He rested. He ceased speaking, and His word, which liveth and abideth forever, continued to uphold that which was created. So God rested upon His word. He could rest from the work of creation in perfect confidence that His word would uphold the universe. So when we keep the Sabbath of the Lord, we simply take the rest that comes from settling down upon the promises of God.

Thus it is that "we which have believed do enter into rest." And he that hath entered into rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His. Before men fully accept the simple word of the Lord, everything is from self. The works of the flesh are only sin; and even though men profess to serve God, and have earnest desires to do right, their own works to that end are failures. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." (Isa. 64:6) But when we realize the power of the word of God, and know that it is able to build up those who trust it, then we cease our own works, and allow God to work in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Then all our works are wrought in Him, and they are right. This is indeed rest. The rest that comes when we realize that salvation does not come from ourselves, but from the word which made the heavens and the earth, and which upholds them, is the rest which the Sabbath brings to us when it is kept as the Lord designs.

Notice that we are to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. It is holy, and so we are to keep it. We are not to make it holy,

for that would be impossible; only God could do that. No act of ours can add to, or detract from, its holiness. Neither are we to make ourselves holy, so that we may keep it properly. That we could not do. But the same power that sanctified the Sabbath day will sanctify us. That power is the power that made the universe. It is creative power by which we are to be sanctified, for Christ is the Creator, and He is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. God has given us the Sabbath,--the memorial of His creative power,--that we may know that He is the God that sanctifies us.

This is the rest that Christ gives to all that come to Him. He says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matt. 11:28-29) We are to come and rest upon the word that upholds the universe. This is what the Sabbath means. It commemorates creation; but redemption is simply the power that created all things, working to restore them. So the Sabbath marks the highest gospel attainments.

We have seen that the Sabbath was given in Eden, and that it is a part of that rest upon which God entered. When kept in spirit and in truth, it is a bit of Eden preserved for us, through all the changes wrought by the curse. And as God made not the earth in vain, but formed it to be inhabited by the same class of people whom He first placed upon it, so it will yet be. Therefore the Sabbath is not only a portion of the original Eden preserved for us, but it is also identical

with that rest that will be enjoyed by the saints of God throughout eternity. Heaven does indeed begin upon earth for those who fully accept the Saviour, and who give themselves to Him without reserve. The Sabbath- a fragment of paradise-spans the chasm from Eden lost till Eden restored, and as it is the memorial of the first, it is the pledge of the second.

Is not the Sabbath, then, indeed a delight? Can anyone who understands what it means regard it in any other light than a blessing? The man of God has given us a song for the Sabbath day, in which he shows how it is to be regarded, and what it is to do for us. "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High: to show forth Thy loving-kindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night, upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound. For Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through Thy work: I will triumph in the works of Thy hands." (Ps. 92:1-4) We are to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. We are to be overcomers "through Him that loved us." So when we are beset with temptation, we have only to think of the power of God,- the power that made the worlds from nothing,-and know that it will be put forth for our deliverance if we will but accept it. Nothing is too hard for the Lord, and there is nothing able to withstand Him. All the hosts of Satan have no power when engaged in a contest with the Lord. Christ has "spoiled principalities and powers." (Col. 2:15) So when we rest ourselves on that power, the victory is already won. The things that God has made remind us of His power,

and so we triumph in the works of His hands. This glorious victory is what the Sabbath is intended to bring to us.

So as the Sabbath is the sign of a perfect creation, it is the seal of a new creature in Christ. It is therefore the seal of God, ministered by the Spirit of God. As it came from paradise, and is a part of the rest of paradise, so it shows that those who keep it in spirit (not in form merely) are, through the mighty power of God, destined for a place in paradise. And thus it will come to pass that, in the ages to come, when Eden is restored, all flesh shall come together from Sabbath to Sabbath to worship God, whose love and power and kindness in Christ have brought them to share the glories of His presence. And as they assemble on those thrice-blessed Sabbath days, they will sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." But the redeemed host will not be alone in their praises. All the works of God praise Him even now, while groaning, and waiting for the redemption; but then, when every trace of the curse will have been removed, and the gospel has brought back the original creation, "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them," will in perfection unite as with one voice in saying, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." (Rev. 5:12-13)