

“It Was All Very Good”

Genesis 1:31 - 2:3

To my own frustration, I have to admit that many projects that I start, I don't finish. I have a tendency that I share in common with many other men, of being quick to start something and slow to finish. I fight against that, but it is often a great battle. There are still projects awaiting completion that have been unfinished since we moved to our house almost 7 years ago. Too often in the past, I finished ongoing projects on our house because we were preparing to move.

Projects at church tend to fall into the same pattern also, for every week I am compelled to finish my sermon preparation and print the bulletin, but other projects are too often and too easily passed on to the next week. Sometimes that next week turns into next month, or even next year. And that frustrates me. I expect that most of you know at least some of that frustration. But the perfect God and creator of heaven and earth has no such frustration.

We return to Genesis this morning after a two month delay—I had a week's vacation, then a snow day, an ordination service, a reading week off, a sermon on fasting, and an Easter sermon last week. So an obvious review—we've been studying God's great work of creation. That work took six days to complete, ending with the creation of man which we studied seven weeks ago. This morning, we read a summary conclusion of that work,

1:31 “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.”

And when God finished his work, he rested. So we read of the

seventh day of creation,

2:2 “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

God finished what he started. He completed what he had determined to do. “The heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.” All their host mean all the armies of the heavens and the earth were created, perhaps referring to all the stars or all the angels. Everything that would be created was created. In the space of six days.

And upon that completion, God did something else that I am seldom, if ever, able to do when I complete a project--God evaluated his work and found it to be very good.

v.31 “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.”

Seldom do I ever survey a project that I've completed with the ability to enjoy it's perfection. When I finish a project, usually I'm already discovering what improvements need to be made, what imperfections already exist. God had none of that.

I. WHEN GOD FINISHED THE WORK OF CREATION, IT WAS ALL VERY GOOD.

Six times, through these six days of creation, six times God has declared that his work was good. Six times we have read in Genesis 1 these words of evaluation, “God saw that it was good.” And now, upon the completion of his work, God magnifies his own self-approval. We read in verse 31, “...very good.” Exceedingly good. Gloriously good. Perfectly good.

With that evaluation of all that he had made, the sixth day ended. The work of creation was finished. So what should we learn about this evaluation that “it was all very good?”

I'll emphasize two things, two important and practical lessons. First,

A. Every part of the material, physical world was perfect in goodness.

Now, what I mean by that is that the physical world is not evil, nor unspiritual. And we should approach the material, physical world around us as being created in perfect goodness. Not everyone believes that. For a specific application, turn to,

1Tim. 4:1 “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

Some people will say that you it is more spiritual not to marry, and therefore not to engage in the physical relationship of marriage. Some people would say that there is something “not good” about the physical relationship in marriage, something shameful or at the least, unspiritual. And Paul says “NO.” “For everything God created is good,” including marriage and the enjoyment of the physical expression of the oneness of marriage. It's good. In fact, to stress the point, God will say to Adam that “it is not good for a man to be alone!” God created marriage as something good, and he created the sexual relationship of marriage as something good! Shame only entered in after sin

entered in!

Likewise, as Paul writes to Timothy, some people say it's more spiritual to abstain from certain foods, foods Paul says “God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”

Certainly, there is no freedom in those verses to use illegal habit-forming drugs, for we are told not to allow anything to control us. Certainly there is wisdom, even to the point of obligation, in abstaining or reducing the intake of foods that cause damage to our health and physical bodies, but food, in and of itself, is good. And ought to be received with thanksgiving. So it is with what we drink.

The material, physical world is not evil. Thus, with proper self-control and with the proper restraints of God's laws, we should enjoy everything in the physical world which God gives us. In a similar way, Paul writes to the Colossian church,

Col. 2:16 “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

He goes on to say,

Col. 2:20 “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— 21 “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

In other words, we are not required to take vows of poverty or chastity, we are not obligated to abstain from all the physical, material things of this world. Harsh treatment of the body isn't a sign of deeper spirituality. Human regulations of strict restraints on food consumption don't demonstrate a deeper love for God. Because every part of the material, physical world was created perfect in goodness.

Therefore, we ought to give praise and worship to the creator of all these good things! For example, the words of,

Ps. 104:24 "O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions—25 This great and wide sea, In which are innumerable teeming things, Living things both small and great. 26 There the ships sail about; There is that Leviathan Which You have made to play there. 27 These all wait for You, That You may give them their food in due season. 28 What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good."

So learn to enjoy the good things God has created. And give him thanks for them. The second lesson, related to the fact that everything was good, is that by the end of the sixth day of creation,

B. No part of the material, physical world was affected by disintegration or death.

Again,
v.31

In other words, at this point, after the six days of creation, there was no struggle for existence, no disease, no pollution, no physical catastrophes, no imbalance or lack of harmony, no disorder, no sin, and above all, no death.

Even Satan was still good at this point; his rebellion and fall must have come later. Therefore, to reemphasize a crucial point, any theory of creation which states that there was death during these first six days has to be false. Specifically, if these days of creation were long ages of millions of years, the time necessary to produce the fossil record, as we are so often told, then there was death during those six days. For fossils are a record of dead things buried in the ground!

But at the end of the sixth day, before the fall, everything was all very good! There were no fossils at the end of the sixth day. There were no dead things buried in the ground at the end of the sixth day, for, "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day." Then moving into chapter 2, "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished."

No death. So when DID death enter? When Adam and Eve sinned. We read in,

Rom. 5:12 "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Just as God threatened.

Gen.2:16 "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Until that point, there was no death! And the significance of that truth is made obvious when we realize that Paul's point in Romans 5 is that since death came through one man, Adam, life also comes through one man, the last Adam, who is Jesus Christ.

He writes,

Rom. 5:15 “But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. 16 And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. 17 For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) 18 Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”

When God finished his work of creation, it was all very good. Then we read that,

II. WHEN GOD FINISHED HIS WORK OF CREATION, HE RESTED FROM HIS LABORS.

v.2-3

Do you think that God was tired out? Do you think that God felt like you do after a long, hard week of work? I’ve been known just to sit down in our reclining sofa, turn on a show on television, and gradually lose consciousness without even knowing it. Falling asleep just because my body is relaxing and not working. That’s not such a good idea when Sharon is trying to talk to me.

Was God’s reaction to creation something like that? Simple answer, NO. God wasn’t the least bit fatigued or worn out. To even imply that would be blasphemous. God is all-powerful, and

the command to create light didn’t reduce his power one tiny little bit.

But God did rest. The Hebrew word is the word sabbath. And God’s example gives us a great insight into the meaning of “sabbath.” Sabbath means to bring an activity to a close, it means to cease, or to put to a stop. It means to stop doing whatever you are doing.

And with God, particularly, the stopping came with completion. For God, it was the sabbath rest of work completed. And so we read that,

A. God brought an end to his work and rested.

v.2

What a glorious thought. God finished his work. From week to week, few of us are ever really able to enjoy a sabbath day with that sort of finishing. For if you are like me, you take a break from your work, but plenty of it remains and waits for you tomorrow. But for God, no work of creation was left. Nothing was left for the second week. It was finished.

Though we might not have that perspective on the sabbath from week to week, that is to be our overall approach to life, for our death is, in truth, the beginning of our sabbath rest.

We read in,

Rev. 14:13 “Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.’”

Paul explains how that should apply to you when you

contemplate your own death.

2Tim. 4:6 “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

The basic idea of the sabbath rest is bringing to an end the work which God has given to you. God set the pattern which we are to follow, six days work and one day of rest from that work. Indeed, it is this pattern which God established which lays the foundation for the fourth commandment later given to Moses,

Ex.20:8 “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

God Almighty brought an end to his work. God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, rested in the joyful completion of the tasks which he had undertaken.

And Scripture gives us an even greater insight into this rest into which God entered. Consider,

Exod. 31:16 “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. 17 It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.”

Now, that last word “rested” is not the word “sabbath.” The

Hebrew word “sabbath” is translated “he abstained from work.” The word translated “rested” is a word which means “refreshed.”

God was refreshed. That thought has always intrigued me, and amazed me. God was refreshed.

That word “refreshed” really means to take a breath. It refers to the refreshment of being freed from responsibility or pressure, freed from the obligation to perform some certain task, and just to take a deep breath of enjoyable relaxation. Some people never learn to do that. God did.

B. God was refreshed as he rested.

To me, this idea of refreshment is the real heart of sabbath rest, and of the sabbath day. You don’t have to listen to me very long or very often to realize how important the sabbath day is to me. And it is this idea of refreshment is what keeps my teaching about the sabbath day from becoming legalistic.

The sabbath day is not simply a day when you can’t do certain things! Unfortunately, we get all hung up on those sorts of things. People might listen to me and think, “Oh, no. I can’t go shopping, I can’t eat out. I can’t watch football or NASCAR racing. I can’t get caught up on my work. I can’t even read the paper.”

If you don’t listen closely, you might think that’s all there is. But it isn’t. The sabbath rest, following God’s example, is the rest of refreshment. It is a delight!

I love the sabbath day, and the sabbath rest. Even with the works of ministry which I do on the Sabbath Day, I still love the refreshment of it. I love it so much that I want others to enjoy it to, which is why I don’t go out to eat or shop. I love the freedom which those prohibitions give me. I take delight in the opportunity

to be refreshed. And I need that opportunity desperately.

There are so many obligations in life. So much pressure. Such frequent difficulties. Stress. Fatigue. Anxiety. A rest, even a temporary one, is such a delight.

The most important thing about the sabbath day is not the list of things which you are forbidden from doing. The one thing that needs to be communicated above all others is this idea of refreshing delight. Note the language of,

Isa. 58:13 “If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, 14 then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Call the day a delight! And honor it by not going your own way. “Then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.”

Oh what a delight to ride on the heights! And in order to enjoy just that, God offers us a vacation one day in seven. God rested from his work and was refreshed. And in his infinite love and grace, he calls upon us to imitate his example. For,

III. WHEN GOD RESTED FROM HIS LABORS, HE SET APART THE SABBATH DAY AS A PERMANENT PATTERN FOR MANKIND.

v.3

Note something extremely important in that verse. Analyze the sentence. You children in school should be able to do that. And you adults. What is the subject of that sentence? God.

God blessed the seventh day. God did it. Not me. Not this church or our Session. Not the OPC. Not the Westminster Confession. God blessed it. God made it holy.

Now let me tell you exactly what that means. God set it apart. To make something holy is to set it apart from everything else around it. To make the sabbath day holy is to set it apart from the other six days.

A. God set apart the Sabbath Day to be separated from the other six.

But how? How did God set it apart?

v.3b By resting “from the work of creating that he had done.”

God's pattern is a permanent pattern for us to follow, for God's pattern set apart one day in seven. God's pattern for all mankind is six days of work and one day of rest.

This principle is often the best guideline for determining some of those does and don'ts. And that list is different from different people. The basic idea is that whatever you do the other six days, you ought not to do on the seventh! And that's true for housework just as surely as it's true for professional office work. Now, I'm not going to get into all the details and exceptions, for Jesus recognizes a certain degree of necessary work and a certain degree of works of mercy, but as a general rule, let the sabbath day be set apart. Because God set it apart!

v.3

And one final point. There was a reason WHY God set apart

the Sabbath Day. One specific goal clearly stated in other places in the Bible.

B. God set apart the Sabbath Day as a continuing sign for his people.

When God made the Sabbath Day holy by resting from all the work of creating that he had done, he created a sign that would identify his people. A sign that would be the continuing mark of his true people.

It is, therefore, a sign of our salvation. It is a sign of the covenant.

Exod. 31:13 “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy. 14 Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you...’16 The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. 17 It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.”

Also,

Ezek. 20:12 “Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy.”

Ezek. 20:20 “Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.”

The sabbath rest is a sign that God is our God and we are his people. We have another sign this morning, another sign of the covenant. And so, as we call this sabbath day a delight by worshipping God together tonight, as we demonstrate the sign of

the sabbath, may we receive in a worthy manner the elements of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. This is a holy day. And this is a holy meal.

And there is nothing more delightful that we could possibly be doing at this very moment than eating this communion meal together. On this holy day, enjoy this holy meal, to the nourishment of your souls.