

THANK GOD IT'S SUNDAY

Scriptures: Exodus 20:8-11; Genesis 2:1-3

Have you ever wondered where we got the idea of a week? Nothing in nature corresponds to a week. A day is the time it takes the earth to rotate once on its axis. A year is one revolution of the earth around the sun. A month is roughly equal to the time it takes the moon to go around the earth. But there is nothing in the movement of the earth or the moon or the stars that equals a week. So where did we get the idea of a seven-day week?

The answer is from the Bible. No other ancient religion had anything that corresponded to a seven-day week. If you have ever thanked God it's Friday, thank the Jews.

Basically the idea of a week comes from our first scripture lesson. In six days God created the heavens and the earth, then Genesis 2:2-3 says, "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from the all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it"

This, of course, has created a problem with science. Most scientists agree that the universe as we know it developed gradually over billions of years; it did not just appear complete with stars, planets, vegetation, and human beings in seven 24-hour periods.

Let me point out, however, that even in the Bible the term "day" is symbolic. If you read Genesis 1 closely, you will discover that the sun is not created until the fourth day. Genesis 1:14 says, "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for season and for days and years.'" That happens on the fourth day of creation. So what did a "day" mean before that? It could not have meant a 24-hour time period if the sun had not yet been created. It must have a symbolic meaning.

There are numerous places later in the Bible where the Bible talks about "the day of the Lord." The day of the Lord is not a 24-hour period, it is an era—the time in history when God will reign and justice will prevail. The days in Genesis 1 have a similar meaning. Each day in Genesis 1 represents a new era in the story of creation, and the story culminates on the seventh day. The Bible describes creation as happening over seven "days" in order to show us that creation is going somewhere; it is unfolding toward a completion, a fulfillment. Did you notice what Genesis 2:2 said? It said, "And on the seventh day God *finished* the work he had done." Creation is headed toward a finish, a goal, a goal called the *Sabbath*. The Sabbath is a day of rest, a day of peace, joy, and gratitude in the presence of God. That, according to the Bible, was the purpose and goal of creation from the very beginning.

There is an old Calvin and Hobbes comic strip where Calvin and his pet tiger Hobbes are lying awake in bed, and Calvin says, "I wonder why people were put on earth. What's our purpose? Why are we here?" Hobbes looks at him and says, "Tiger food." After that Calvin cannot go to sleep.

That is one way to look at the world: that life is nothing but a battle for food. Either I eat you or you eat me. But the Bible suggests a different purpose for life: that God intends the creation to live in peace, joy, and gratitude in the presence of God. That is the meaning of the Sabbath, the seventh day of creation. The goal of creation is the Sabbath—the day when all creation will rest and celebrate God’s precious gift of life.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, one of our Presbyterian confessions of faith, begins with this question: “What is the chief end of man?” What is the purpose or goal of human life? Answer: “The chief end of man (the purpose and goal of human life) is to glorify God and to enjoy God forever.”

That is what the Bible symbolizes when it describes creation unfolding over seven days. It means that creation, the very fabric of life, is headed toward the seventh day—the Sabbath. It is headed toward the day when all creation will be able to rest, when all creation will be able to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

Now with that in mind, let’s look at the fourth commandment. The fourth commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” To make something holy means to set it apart for a special purpose. The Sabbath day is a day set apart to remind us why we are here and where we are going.

Have you ever had this experience? It happens to me all the time. I go out to the garage to look for something, I get there, and then I can’t remember what I was looking for. Shall we have a show of hands? I have figured out why that happens. It happens because while I am going out to the garage, my mind starts thinking about other things. I start thinking about other things I need to do that day. Then I wonder if I will finish them before the Seahawks game. Then I wonder if the Seahawks will make the playoffs. Then I wonder if the Seahawks can make the playoffs if Shaun Alexander breaks his other wrist. It just goes on and on. And by the time I get to the garage, I can’t remember why I am there.

Does that ever happen with your life? You get up in the morning and your mind races over all the things you need to do that day: the people you need to call, the places you need to take your kids, the appointments, the projects at work, the tests at school, whom you will ask to the homecoming dance, or who will ask you. You go through the day thinking about all these things, and gradually you forget why you are there. If you go on like that day after day, there will come a day when suddenly you can’t remember why you are doing all this stuff. You will wonder, “What’s the point? Why am I here? Does my life really matter to anyone?”

Sometimes when I can’t remember why I was going out to the garage, I have to go back to the place where I started to remember what I needed. The same thing may be true of your life. To remember why you are here, you need to go back to where you started. You need to go back to the creation. And that is why God gave us the Sabbath. To remember the Sabbath day—note that word *remember*—to remember the Sabbath day means to stop what you are doing long enough to go back to the beginning, to go back to the creation and remember why you were put here and where you are going and what God wants for you and for the whole creation. If you

don't take time to do that, you will end up out in the garage unable to remember why you are there.

Now let me clear up one other question. If the Sabbath day is the seventh day, why do we worship on Sunday? Jews ask that; so do Seventh Day Adventists. Why do we worship on the first day of the week, if the Sabbath day is supposed to be the seventh day of the week?

The short answer is Easter. For us as Christians, Easter was the beginning of a new creation. When Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, on the first day of the week, he showed us that God has in mind a new life for us even after this life passes away. The Sabbath day, the seventh day, is important because it reminds us why God put us here. But for us as Christians, the first day of the week is even more important because it reminds us of the future that God has in mind for us. It reminds us that this life is not all there is. It reminds us that even if we die, the things we do to serve God in this life will not be wasted.

Actually, the particular day of the week that you set aside to remember God is not that important. That's why we can have church on Wednesday night. It is not which day of the week you set aside but that you set aside some day, sometime period each week to remember why you are here and where you are going. Once a month isn't often enough. That's why God created the week.

Recently I read this little quote: "The one who wins the rat race is still a rat." If your life is so frantic that you have no time at any point during a week to worship God, to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, then you may be the one who needs it most.

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