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Deuteronomy 5:12-15 – *Sabbath as Freedom*

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This morning we're looking at Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy means "second law" ...

The second giving of God's law.

The first time the law was given was at Mt. Sinai...

Right after the Hebrews are freed from slavery in Egypt.

Now they've journeyed 40 years in the wilderness...

Finally coming to the edge of the Promised Land.

And before they cross over the Jordan into the Land...

Moses makes sure they know why they're here and who they serve.

Instructions for their life in this new land God is giving them.

We pick up at 5:12-15...

The commandment to observe the Sabbath.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹² "Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ 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 male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

"A land flowing with milk and honey..."

Is the description of the Land of Canaan throughout the Old Testament...

This land west of the Jordan that God promises his people.

“A land flowing with milk and honey...”

What do you think this means?

This is going to be good, fertile land...

A land that will produce for the people:

Rich harvests and good for raising livestock.

Simply put, it means that the people will have abundance.

After spending over 400 years in Egypt serving as slaves—

After spending 40 years wandering in the desert—

The Israelites are licking their chops...

Ready to live the good life...

Ready to live a life of abundance.

God is leading his people into a land flowing with milk and honey—

A land of abundance—

And he knows that there will be temptations.

These people are transitioning from the back-breaking labor of Egypt...

7 days a week making bricks without any rest—

They are transitioning from life in the desert...

Where the Lord gives them the manna, quail, and water they need...

The exact amount they need—

Now to a land of abundance...

A fertile land without limits as to how much can be produced.

What's the temptation of living in a land without limits, a land of abundance?

The allure of *more*.

“The more I work, the more the land produces.”

“The more that is produced, the more I have.”

“The more I have, the happier and safer I feel.”

So, the goal of life becomes to acquire more. (Brueggemann)

Two very bad things are going to happen:

It's going to change their relationship to God;

And it's going to change their relationship to their neighbors.

First, dependence on God will fade.

Their focus will be on the land and producing more...

Instead of on the God who gives the land.

They will forget about this God to whom they belong.

Second, their attitude toward their neighbors will change.

How does the 'allure of more' change the way I view the people around me?

They lose their humanity and become objects for manipulation:

They become either barriers or opportunities.

They are either competitors...

People who stand in my way of acquiring more;

Or opportunities...

People I can use to acquire more.

Competitors or servants...

They lose their human element.

They are no longer neighbors—

People living as brothers and sisters under the same
covenant with God—

Now they are objects to be overcome or exploited.

The 'allure of more' will be detrimental to God's people in this new land.

So, before the Israelites cross over into this land of abundance—

Before they are seduced by the temptation of living in a fertile land—

The Lord provides this law...

This command of grace:

“Observe the Sabbath day.”

“You, don't do any work on this day.”

“Don’t let your helpers or animals do any work.”

“Take this day to rest and remember who you are...”

“Remember where you’re coming from.”

“Remember that I, God, brought you out of slavery in Egypt.”

Here they are...

Standing opposite this fertile land...

Ready to cross over the Jordan.

And Moses restates these words of the 4th commandment...

Words that are nearly identical to the words given the first time at Mt. Sinai.

But the difference is crucial for these people about to possess the new land.

Here’s the difference between the two...

Here’s what’s added in Deuteronomy:

“...so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do.”

“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.”

God gives this command addressing these two important relationships:

The people and God;

And the peoples’ relationship with each other.

The people and God.

“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt...”

“And that I brought you out.”

Listen to how Exodus describes how the Hebrews are treated in Egypt:

“The Egyptians put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor...”

“The Egyptians worked them ruthlessly...”

“They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields...”

“In all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.” (Exodus 1:11-14)

The Hebrews fell victim to Pharaoh’s pursuit of ‘more.’

They were used to build cities that served as storehouses for Pharaoh's abundance. (Ex. 1:11)

More and more bricks for more and more buildings to hold more and more abundance.

God is saying:

“Remember that I freed you from this...”

“I freed you from this system of endless production and work.”

“Pursue me...not abundance.”

God commands them to take a day to come away from production...

Come away from the endless pursuit of more...

“Come away so that you can remember me.”

“Don't get sucked into the same system.”

“You are no longer slaves...”

“You are my people.”

This command also addresses the peoples' relationship with each other.

The Sabbath day was the great equalizer:

“Don't let anyone work, so they may rest *as you do*.”

When it comes to production...

Not everyone is equal.

Some are able to work harder and more efficiently, produce more.

When it comes to consumption...

Not everyone is equal.

Some have greater access to consumer goods. (Brueggemann)

But value systems in production and consumption economies judge on this...

Your value is dependent upon how much you can produce and consume...

And this creates “haves” and “have-nots”.

The Sabbath day served as a correction to this system.

Not everyone can produce the same...

But we can be sure to rest the same.

Everyone has equal value and equal worth...

So everyone is to rest:

Sons and daughters, servants, animals, and refugees.

Everyone is of equal value and worthy of rest.

God gives the Sabbath command to these people about to enter into the new land:

A land that will try to seduce them back into production and consumption mindset;

A land that will pit neighbor against neighbor;

A land that will tempt them to forget their God.

So God gives this command in grace and wisdom...

Remember to observe the Sabbath.

Up until this point in our Sabbath series...

We've been talking about Sabbath as it benefits *us*...

Those privileged enough to rest.

If we are *willing* to come away from our work...

We are able receive this gift of rest with God...

It's up to us to receive it or not.

What about those who are longing for rest but cannot get it?

Not because their desire to produce and acquire gets the best of them...

But because they're caught up in a system of someone else's pursuit of more.

What about those who are new to Canada or those living at or below the poverty line...

Who are unable to find good paying jobs...

Who must work 7 days a week to feed their families....

Those who are caught up in this cycle of unsustainable wages but still needing to provide.

When are they allowed to rest?

What about moms (or sometimes dads)—

Single or not—

Who are tasked with caring for children 7 days a week.

When are they allowed to come away to rest?

Think of all the people around the world...

People who are caught up in oppressive systems of exploitation:

Child labor, sex trafficking, and forced labor.

When are they allowed to rest and experience freedom?

In the 4th commandment—

Especially as its written in Deuteronomy—

We see that God is concerned with all people...

Not just the land owners...

But the servants and foreigners too...

A time where everyone is equal.

Sabbath is not just for our own personal time with God...

It's given to keep *people* valued!

To put *people* first—

Not systems of producing and consuming...

Not ventures and pursuits where we acquire more...

Not just a time to look after our own needs—

But time to remember how God wants things to run...

How God wants *all* people to experience life and freedom and worth...

A glimpse of Paradise for all people.

So how do we join God in this?

The Heidelberg Catechism's treatment of the 4th commandment is helpful for us here:

Q&A 103 asks: What is God's will for me in the 4th commandment?

First, that we worship God and we make it about him...

We learn about God and his Son and celebrate our relationship with him.

Second, that every day of our lives we rest from our evil ways...

And let the Lord work in us through his Spirit.

It must begin with the first one:

Making our lives about him.

Remember that we too were slaves at one time...

Slaves to sin and corruption.

Seeing us in our slavery...

God had compassion on us.

God sent his Son to rescue us...

To break the chains that sin had shackled around us.

Jesus Christ set us free to new life in his death and resurrection.

God is the great rescuer who set us free!

Now, with our full lives...

We respond with worship and thanksgiving.

We remember that God loves us...

That we are free in him...

No longer obligated to come running when temptation calls...

No longer obligated to get sucked into the way the world operates.

We remember that we belong to God...

Not to anyone or anything else in this world.

We belong to God...

He is our loving Father.

And this equips us for the second response to the commandment:

Resting from evil ways and letting the Lord work through us.

When we rest from evil...

We refuse to participate in the oppressive systems of the world.

We ask ourselves the question: "What am I a consumer of?"

If we are consuming pornography...

We are adding to the oppressive systems of the world.

We are adding to the exploitation and objectification of women and children.

Resting from our evil ways means we get help.

We ask God to free us and we talk to someone about it.

We refuse to participate in someone else's slavery anymore.

If we own a business or are in a position of leadership...

The temptation may be to make it all about the bottom line...

Where people again become objects...

Objects we use to meet certain ends.

We're participating in the world's economy...

Falling captive to the allure of more.

What does it look like to rest from our evil ways?

What does it look like to pull out of this cycle...

Where we view people as opportunities to make more money?

What does it look like to let your workers "rest as you do"?

One aspect of this is resting from evil...

Turning from sin that leads us and others into slavery.

But the other aspect is more positive...

Letting the Lord work in me through his Spirit.

With this, think of the question, "How can I bless this person?"

"I see this woman in my life running on all cylinders...

With a job and taking care of kids at home."

"How can I bless her so that she can rest?"

Maybe it's offering to pick up her groceries.

Maybe it's offering to watch her kids for an hour or two.

When you go out to eat and are being served by someone, ask the question:

“How can I bless them?”

Maybe it’s a generous tip that they can put toward taking a day off...

Not because we’re satisfied with how they’ve served us...

We don’t value them based on their work...

But based on their human value.

Or maybe someone in your life is the primary caretaker of someone ill or disabled...

Someone who doesn’t get many opportunities for rest.

“How can I bless them?”

Maybe it’s making a meal so that they don’t have to cook.

Maybe it’s filling in for a few hours.

Maybe it’s mowing their lawn or offering to do their laundry.

The Lord is a God who sets free...

But we live in a land of abundance...

Always being drawn away from his design and intentions for life.

So, may we live out this Sabbath rest...

Every day of our lives.

May we rest from evil—

And allow God to work through us—

So that others might experience the rest and freedom he’s offering.

Amen.