

THE UNIQUE WORK IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

(Friday—Afternoon Session)

Message Six

Keeping the Principle of the Sabbath in Relation to the Work of Building

Scripture Reading: Exo. 31:12-17; Matt. 11:28-30

- I. In Exodus 31:12-17, after a long record concerning the building up of God's dwelling place, there is a repetition of the commandment to keep the Sabbath:**
- A. The fact that the insertion concerning the Sabbath follows the charge for the building work of the tabernacle indicates that the Lord was telling the builders, the workers, to learn how to rest with Him as they worked for Him.
 - B. If we only know how to work for the Lord but do not know how to rest with Him, we are acting contrary to the divine principle:
 - 1. God rested on the seventh day because He had finished His work and was satisfied; God's glory was manifested because man had His image, and His authority was about to be exercised for the subduing of His enemy, Satan; as long as man expresses God and deals with God's enemy, God is satisfied and can rest—Gen. 1:26, 31—2:2.
 - 2. Later, the seventh day was commemorated as the Sabbath (Exo. 20:8-11); God's seventh day was man's first day.
 - 3. God had prepared everything for man's enjoyment; after man was created, he did not join in God's work; he entered into God's rest.
 - 4. Man was created not to work first but to be satisfied with God and rest with God (cf. Matt. 11:28-30); the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).
 - C. Exodus 31:17 says, "In six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed":
 - 1. The Sabbath was not only a rest to God but also a refreshment to Him.
 - 2. God rested after His work of creation was completed; He looked upon His handiwork, at the heavens, the earth, and all the living things, especially at man, and said, "Very good!" (Gen. 1:31).
 - 3. God was refreshed with man; God created man in His own image with a spirit so that man could have fellowship with Him; man, therefore, was God's refreshment—v. 26; 2:7; cf. John 4:31-34.
 - 4. God was a "bachelor" before He created mankind (cf. Gen. 2:18, 22); He wanted man to receive Him, love Him, be filled with Him, and express Him to become His wife (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25); in eternity future God will have a wife, the New Jerusalem, which is called the Lamb's wife (Rev. 21:9-10).
 - 5. Man was like a refreshing drink to quench God's thirst and satisfy Him; when God ended His work and began to rest, He had man as His companion.
 - 6. To God the seventh day was a day of rest and refreshment; however, to man, God's companion, the day of rest and refreshment was the first day; man's first day was a day of enjoyment.

- D. It is a divine principle that God does not ask us to work until we have had enjoyment; after a full enjoyment with Him and of Him, we may work together with Him:
1. If we do not know how to have enjoyment with God, how to enjoy God Himself, and how to be filled with God, we shall not know how to work with Him and be one with Him in His divine work; man enjoys what God has accomplished in His work.
 2. On the day of Pentecost the disciples were filled with the Spirit, which means that they were filled with the enjoyment of the Lord; because they were filled with the Spirit, others thought that they were drunk with wine—Acts 2:4a, 12-13.
 3. Actually, they were filled with the enjoyment of the heavenly wine; only after they were filled with this enjoyment did they begin to work with God in oneness with Him; Pentecost was the first day of the eighth week; therefore, concerning the day of Pentecost, we see the principle of the first day.
 4. With God it is a matter of working and resting; with man it is a matter of resting and working.
- E. In doing God's divine work to build the church, typified by the work to build the tabernacle, we must bear a sign to indicate that we are God's people and that we need Him; then we will be able to work not only for God but also with God by being one with God; He will be our strength to work and our energy to labor:
1. We are God's people, and we should bear a sign that we need Him to be our enjoyment, strength, energy, and everything so that we may be able to work for Him to honor and glorify Him.
 2. The Sabbath means that before we work for God, we need to enjoy God and be filled with Him; Peter preached the gospel by the infilling God, the infilling Spirit; therefore, Peter had a sign that he was God's co-worker, and his gospel preaching was an honor and glory to God—v. 14.
 3. As God's people, we must bear a sign that we rest with God, enjoy God, and are filled up with God first, and then we work with the very One who fills us; furthermore, we not only work with God but also work as those who are one with God.
 4. In our speaking to God's people, we must always seek to bear a sign that our Lord is our strength, our energy, and our everything for ministering the word—2 Cor. 13:3; Acts 6:4.
- F. Keeping the Sabbath is also an eternal agreement, or covenant, that assures God that we shall be one with Him by first enjoying Him and being filled with Him and then by working for Him, with Him, and in oneness with Him—Exo. 31:16:
1. It is a serious matter to work for the Lord by ourselves without taking Him in and enjoying Him by drinking and eating Him—cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; John 6:57.
 2. As Peter was speaking on the day of Pentecost, he was inwardly partaking of Jesus, drinking and eating Him.

- G. The Sabbath is also a matter of sanctification (Exo. 31:13); when we enjoy the Lord and then work with Him, for Him, and by being one with Him, spontaneously we are sanctified, separated unto God from everything that is common and saturated with God to replace everything that is fleshly and natural.
- H. In the church life we may do many things without first enjoying the Lord and without serving the Lord by being one with the Lord; that kind of service results in spiritual death and the loss of the fellowship in the Body (vv. 14-15).
- I. Everything related to God's dwelling place leads us to one matter—to the Sabbath with its rest and refreshment of the Lord; in the church life we are in the tabernacle, and the tabernacle leads us to rest, to the enjoyment of God's purpose and of what He has done!
- J. The building work of the tabernacle and all its furniture should begin with the enjoyment of God and continue in intervals with the refreshment by enjoying God; this will indicate that we do not work for God by our own strength, but by the enjoyment of Him and by being one with Him; this is to keep the principle of the Sabbath with Christ as the inner rest in our spirit.

II. “Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”—Matt. 11:28-30:

- A. To toil here refers not only to the toil of striving to keep the commandments of the law and religious regulations but also to the toil of struggling to be successful in any work; whoever toils thus is always heavily burdened.
- B. After the Lord extolled the Father, acknowledging the Father's way and declaring the divine economy (vv. 25-27), He called this kind of people to come to Him for rest.
- C. Rest refers not only to being set free from the toil and burden under the law or religion or under any work or responsibility, but also to perfect peace and full satisfaction.
- D. To take the Lord's yoke is to take the will of the Father; it is not to be regulated or controlled by any obligation of the law or religion or to be enslaved by any work, but to be constrained by the will of the Father.
- E. The Lord lived such a life, caring for nothing but the will of His Father (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38); He submitted Himself fully to the Father's will (Matt. 26:39, 42); hence, He asks us to learn from Him.
- F. To be meek, or gentle, means not to resist opposition, and to be lowly means not to have self-esteem; throughout all the opposition the Lord was meek, and throughout all the rejection He was lowly in heart.
- G. He submitted Himself fully to the will of His Father, not wanting to do anything for Himself or expecting to gain something for Himself; hence, regardless of the situation He had rest in His heart; He was fully satisfied with the Father's will.
- H. The rest that we find by taking the Lord's yoke and learning from Him is for our souls; it is an inward rest; it is not anything merely outward in nature.

- I. The Lord's yoke is the Father's will, and His burden is the work of carrying out the Father's will; such a yoke is easy, not bitter, and such a burden is light, not heavy.
- J. The Greek word for *easy* means "fit for use"; hence, good, kind, mild, gentle, easy, pleasant—in contrast to hard, harsh, sharp, bitter.
- K. The yoke of God's economy is like this; everything in God's economy is not a heavy burden but an enjoyment.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SABBATH

Some may think that the significance of the Sabbath is merely to cease from work. This is not the real meaning of the Sabbath in the Bible. The Bible emphasizes the fact that God rested on the seventh day. Genesis 2:2 says, "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."

According to the book of Genesis, to God the Sabbath is the seventh day, but to man it is the first day. In six days God created the heavens, the earth, and everything necessary for man to exist for the fulfillment of God's purpose. After all things were made, man was created on the sixth day. This means that as soon as man came forth from the creating hand of God, his first day, which was God's seventh day, was about to begin. Thus, what was the seventh day to God was the first day to man. The significance of this is that to God the Sabbath was rest after work, but to man it was rest first and then work. God first worked for six days and then He rested on the seventh day. But man rested on his first day and then began to work.

God's Refreshment

I am happy that Exodus 31:17 tells us that "on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." This indicates that the Sabbath was not only a rest to God, but was also a refreshment to Him. Both Genesis and Exodus tell us that God rested on the seventh day. But in 31:17 the words "and was refreshed" are added. This reveals that even God needs to be refreshed.

To rest is one thing, but to be refreshed is something further. For us to rest we do not need anything in particular. It is sufficient either to sit down or to lie down. But to be refreshed we need something to eat or drink. We often refer to food and drink as refreshment. The point here is that if we would be refreshed, we need something to be a refreshment to us. The same is true of God. God needs something to refresh Him. Do you know what God's refreshment is? What is it that refreshes God?

Perhaps you have read Exodus 31 a number of times without ever being impressed by the fact that God needs to be refreshed. I can testify that I have expounded the book of Exodus more than once, but only recently have I seen the significance of the word "refreshed" in 31:17. The Bible reveals that after God's work of creation was completed, He rested and was refreshed. On what did God rest? He rested on His creation. To illustrate, suppose a craftsman spends a long time making a very special chair. When his work is finished, he may rest on the very chair he has made, enjoying it and thinking about it. I often experience this kind of rest after I have finished my work of writing. When I have finished writing something, I may sit back, look at what I have written, and enjoy it. I particularly enjoy the light I have received from the Lord through His Word. Likewise, sisters who make their own clothing may enjoy a good rest after they have finished making a particular garment. In the same principle, after God created man, He rested. He could look upon His handiwork, at the heavens,

the earth, and all the living things, especially at man, and say, "Very good!" Then God could rest and be refreshed.

With what was God refreshed? God was refreshed with man. Man was God's refreshment. God loved man. He created him in His own image with a spirit so that man could have fellowship with Him. Man, therefore, was God's refreshment.

According to Genesis 2:18, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." This word has a significance in typology, and indicates that it was not good for God to be alone. Before God created man, God could be compared to a bachelor. Some may criticize us for using the word bachelor to speak of our holy God. But I believe that God is happy to hear this word used with respect to Himself. Perhaps God would say, "My child, this word touches My heart. I truly was a bachelor before I created mankind." The Bible reveals that in eternity past God was a "bachelor." But in eternity future He will have a wife, the New Jerusalem, which is called the Lamb's wife (Rev. 21:9-10). Therefore, according to the revelation of the Bible that the New Jerusalem is the wife of the Lamb, I have the boldness to use the word bachelor with respect to God.

When God saw the man created by Him, He could rest and be refreshed. Man was like a refreshing drink to quench God's thirst and satisfy Him. When God ended His work and began to rest, He had man as His companion. To God, the seventh day was a day of rest and refreshment. However, to man, God's companion, the day of rest and refreshment was the first day. Man's first day was a day of enjoyment.

A Divine Principle

It is a divine principle that God does not ask us to work until we have had enjoyment. God first supplies us with enjoyment. Then after a full enjoyment with Him and of Him, we may work together with Him. If we do not know how to have enjoyment with God and how to enjoy God Himself, we shall not know how to work with Him. We shall not know how to be one with God in His divine work.

We do emphasize the matter of working with God and not working for God by our own strength. Yes, we should work with God and even by God. But according to what the Bible reveals, it is not even sufficient merely to work with God. We need to be one with God in His work. This requires that we enjoy Him. If we do not know how to enjoy God and be filled with God, we shall not know how to work with Him, how to be one with Him in His work.

A very good illustration of this principle is found in the New Testament. The New Testament ministry of the apostles began with the enjoyment they had on the day of Pentecost. The disciples did not work for six days and then enjoy the Lord on the day of Pentecost. The actual situation was that the Lord had told them to wait until the Spirit came upon them to fill them. With what were the disciples filled when they were filled with the Spirit? No doubt, they were filled with the enjoyment of the Lord. Because they were filled with the Spirit, others thought that they were drunk with wine. Actually they were filled with the enjoyment of the heavenly wine. Only after they had been filled with this enjoyment did they begin to work with God. This is the way to work with God, the way to work in oneness with Him. When Peter stood up with the apostles to preach the gospel and thereby do a work for God, they all were one with God in His work.

The day of Pentecost was the first day of the week. Pentecost denotes the fiftieth day after a period of seven weeks, or forty-nine days. We know from Leviticus 23 that the day of Pentecost was fifty days after the feast of firstfruit. This means that Pentecost was the first day of the eighth week. Therefore, concerning the day of Pentecost, we see the principle of the first day.

To man, the day of rest has always been the first day. According to the Old Testament Sabbath, the day of man's rest was his first day. Likewise, according to the New Testament, the eighth day, the day of rest for man, was also the first day.

According to the principle in the Old Testament, man's day of rest is a day that comes after God's work has been completed. Man does not rest after his own work is finished; he rests after the completion of God's work and enjoys it. God works, and man enjoys. Man enjoys what God has accomplished in His work.

As soon as man was created, he needed air to breathe and water to drink. God had already created the expanse, the atmosphere, on the second day because He knew that without air man would not be able to live. He had also prepared water and food for him. This is the reason the seventh day was a day of rest for God: He had worked for six days to make everything ready for man to enjoy. When man came forth from God's creating hand, his first day was God's seventh day. Therefore, he had enjoyment with God, he lived with God, he walked with God, and eventually he was ready to work with God. God had put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it (Gen. 2:15). Perhaps after enjoying rest with God on his first day, Adam worked to care for the garden for another six days. Then on what was his eighth day, another first day, he again rested with God. This is a cycle that would continue again and again with intervals of resting and working. With God it is a matter of working and resting; with man, a matter of resting and working.

After God gave the revelation concerning the tabernacle and the furniture, and after God selected the builders and gave Moses a charge regarding them, He went on to speak again of the Sabbath. It seems as if God were saying, "Do not forget My Sabbath. Don't take the excuse that you are not laboring on your own business, but are doing a divine work. You should not think that because you are working to build My dwelling place, you can work every day continually. No, even in doing My divine work, the work of building the tabernacle, you must still bear a sign to indicate that you are My people and you need Me. Therefore you need to enjoy Me first. Then you will be able to work not only for Me, but also with Me and by being one with Me. I will be your strength to work and your energy to labor. But if you work in yourself and by yourself, that will be an insult to Me. You must do the work of building My dwelling place with Me, by Me, and in oneness with Me. I shall be very happy if you work in this way. But if you try to do a good work for Me by yourselves, leaving Me aside, that would be an insult to Me, for that is a sign of the Devil's people. You are My people, and you should bear a sign that you need Me to be your enjoyment, strength, and energy. You need Me to be your everything so that you may be able to work for Me. By working in this way you honor Me and glorify Me. This is to bear a sign indicating that you are My people."

A Sign That We Are One with God

We all need to learn a basic lesson regarding the Sabbath. When I was young, I argued with others about which day, the eighth day or the seventh, should be kept as the Sabbath. Now I would say that that kind of argument is altogether a waste. The Sabbath means that before we work for God, we need to enjoy God and be filled with Him. If we have enjoyed God and if we have been filled with God, then we are ready to work for Him. Such work will not be by ourselves; it will be by God. Consider Peter's situation on the day of Pentecost. When Peter stood up to preach the gospel, he did not preach by himself. He preached by the very God who had filled him up. In preaching the gospel, Peter was not empty. He preached the gospel by the infilling God, by the infilling Spirit. Therefore, Peter had a sign that he was God's co-worker, and his gospel preaching was an honor and glory to God.

The people of the world all work by themselves. They do not have a sign on them that

indicates that they belong to God. They do not enjoy God, they do not rest with God, and they do not work with God. Our situation is altogether different because we have a sign. What is the sign we bear? The sign is that we rest with God, enjoy God, and are filled up with God first, and then we work with the very One who fills us. Furthermore, we not only work with God, but we work as those who are one with God.

I can testify that every time I stand up to minister the Word, my unique prayer is that I would be one with the Lord in my speaking. I pray repeatedly, "Lord, in my speaking I want to practice being one spirit with You so that my speaking will be Your speaking. Lord, it must be that You speak in my speaking. If You are not one with me, I will not speak anything. I would never speak in my empty self. That would be a blasphemy to You, an insult to You. Lord, I would speak not only with You, but also by being one with You. Those who listen must have the impression that while I am speaking, You are one with me. Lord, my speaking involves the practice not only from my side, that I am one spirit with You; it also involves the practice on Your side, that You are one spirit with me." If we would speak this way, what an honor and glory it would be to the Lord! This is the sign of the Sabbath. In my speaking I always seek to bear a sign that my Lord is my Sabbath. He is my rest, my refreshment, my energy, my strength, and my everything for ministering the Word.

In Exodus 31:12-17 we see that the builders of the tabernacle were charged not to begin working until they had rested with the Lord and had been refreshed. Then they could work for Him and with Him. However, this work would not go on continuously. Rather, it would be a work in intervals of six days of labor and one day of rest. With every interval, the beginning is a day of rest, followed by six days of work. Then there would be another interval beginning with rest and continuing with work.

We have emphasized that to God the Sabbath is the seventh day and to man, the first day; that God worked for man's enjoyment and rest; and that man enjoys what God has accomplished in His work in order to work with God. Man in his first day enjoyed what God accomplished in the previous six days. Then in the following six days man worked with God. After six days' work, man again first enjoyed what God had accomplished, and then he worked again the following six days. This proceeds as a cycle. This cycle is a sign that we are one with God.

An Eternal Covenant

Keeping the Sabbath is also an agreement or covenant. When we begin to keep the Sabbath, this indicates that we have signed an agreement, a contract, that assures God that we shall be one with Him in this way. We would be one with Him by first enjoying Him and then by working for Him, with Him, and in oneness with Him. This is an eternal covenant. It is not merely for one age, dispensation, or generation. It is an eternal agreement between us and God.

A covenant is stronger than an agreement, an agreement is stronger than a promise, and a promise is stronger than ordinary words. God wants us to sign a contract with Him that assures Him that from now on we shall enjoy Him and be filled with Him before we go to work for Him, with Him, and in oneness with Him. Once we sign such a contract with God and give God the assurance that we intend to keep it, we should not break the contract. If we break our agreement with God, He may take us to the heavenly court and blame us for not keeping our contract. It is important for us to see that the Sabbath in relation to the building work of the tabernacle is both a sign and an eternal covenant, a covenant that cannot change.

It is a serious matter to work for the Lord by ourselves without praying to Him and without trusting in Him. Actually, what we need is not mainly to trust in the Lord, but to take

Him in and enjoy Him by eating Him. On the day of Pentecost Peter was not only trusting in the Lord; he was filled with the Lord, even drinking Him. Do you not believe that as Peter was speaking, he was drinking of the Lord and eating Him? This means that while Peter was preaching Jesus, inwardly he was partaking of Jesus. In fact, he preached what he had been eating. He testified what he had been enjoying. Peter had signed the agreement with the Lord. He had made a covenant with Him. Both parties, the Lord and Peter, had to keep their part of the agreement. If Peter was eating the Lord and the Lord left him, the Lord would have broken the contract. But if He were supplying Peter everything he needed, and Peter turned aside from the Lord, Peter would have broken the contract. The crucial point here is that the Sabbath is a sign and also a covenant, a contract, an agreement.

A Matter of Sanctification

The Sabbath is also a matter of sanctification. The Sabbath day sanctifies us, designates us, marks us out. When we enjoy the Lord and then work with Him, for Him, and by being one with Him, spontaneously we are sanctified. We become holy, separated from what is common. (*Life-study of Exodus*, pp. 1822-1829)