

**Rest to Reload:**

*A Theology and Practicum on the Place of Leisure in the Life of a Believer*

Mark 3:1-21

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**Introduction:**

Welcome to the good ole summer time. School is ending and baseball is underway. Summer has become the time for celebrating the place of leisure in the life of a busy American. We live for summer.

- What is the place of leisure in the life of a busy American Christian?
- What does our pursuit of leisure communicate about our operative roles and goals? What drives you?
- What does our pursuit of leisure communicate about our functional center? That is, what does it say we are living for? What is ultimate for you?
- Is there anyway we can develop a Gospel-centered, God-glorifying theology for the place of leisure in the life of a believer?
- Is there a place for novels, movies, T.V., swimming pools, etc. in the life of a believer?
- How can we redeem rest, vacation and hobbies?

**Setting the Stage**

1. Understand that one of the dimensions of the Gospel is restoration. God is out to redeem all things to himself. This means that through the work of Christ, all things are renewed to their rightful place. This includes rest.
2. As you listen to my sermon this morning, I will use the word “rest.” I use the word in a categorical sense. Thus, when I use the word “rest,” I want you to hear in it all of the subcategories of rest: sleep, vacation, weekends / day-off, hobbies, down-time (free-time), and holidays. I think these represent the different subcategories of rest.
3. I am assuming that you agree with me that growing Christians are intentionally, deeply and personally self-scrutinizing. The more proficient we are at self-scrutiny probably reflects the degree of spiritual maturity.

I begin this morning with a theological presupposition that you need to see. If you are reading through the Bible this year using the church’s plan that is in the bulletin each week, then you read this week the dramatic story of Elijah on Mount Carmel. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a competition to determine which god was better, or which God was real. You know the story how he mocked the inactivity of Baal and his lack of response to their prayers. One of the mockeries was that maybe your god is sleeping and needs to be roused. Gods do not get tired – by definition. This was Elijah’s presupposition. And the Psalmist says this plainly in Psalm 121:3-4

<sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot be moved;

he who keeps you will not slumber.  
<sup>4</sup>Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither  
slumber nor sleep.

What a confidence to know that God is always awake and on the job. God never gets tired and never needs sleep. And this is precisely how we get to our theology of rest because Jesus is God and he needed sleep. This means that Jesus is redeeming rest. That is, he is using sleep for redemptive purposes. In the gospel, Jesus is redeeming all things to himself.

***Thesis: Everything in creation, including rest and relaxation, can be used for redemptive purposes.***

I should like to examine Jesus' redeeming rest with four points under two headings: the Purpose of Rest and the Place of Rest.

Let's look to the life of Jesus

Mark 3:1-21 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. <sup>2</sup> And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. <sup>3</sup> And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." <sup>4</sup> And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. <sup>5</sup> And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. <sup>6</sup> The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea <sup>8</sup> and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. <sup>9</sup> And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, <sup>10</sup> for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. <sup>11</sup> And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." <sup>12</sup> And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

<sup>13</sup> And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach <sup>15</sup> and have authority to cast out demons. <sup>16</sup> He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); <sup>17</sup> James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); <sup>18</sup> Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, <sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

<sup>20</sup> Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, **so that they could not even eat.** <sup>21</sup> And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, **“He is out of his mind.”**

This passage is the last of a list of five conflict stories given to us by Mark in chapters 2-3. He is demonstrating beyond all doubt that Jesus was continually embroiled with conflict. This much we know. But have we thought deeply enough about the place of conflict in Jesus’ life and how he responded to it? Be careful lest you too quickly write it off with a response like: “He was a sinless God who doesn’t relate to me in conflict.” No. Instead, Jesus redeems for us the various ways and means we can respond to the stress produced by conflict.

The rest that comes by way of daily sleep or occasional holiday comes as the result of pressure. We all need the release from the pressure. We know what it is like to nearly explode beneath the pressure of life. We just need to get away. ***Don’t gloss over the reality that Jesus knew pressure.*** However, for Jesus, rest and holiday were not an escape from pressure. Sleep is a way of avoiding stress and pressure. Vacation can easily become an escape. But this is not how Jesus regarded rest. It was not merely an escape.

I think our text, and others like it, exist in our Bibles to demonstrate the frail nature of Jesus’ humanity. He was a man just as real as you and me. He knew pressure. In 3:5, the very words and categories are used when it speaks of Jesus being “angry” and “grieved.” This same word for *grieved* is translated almost everywhere as *distressed*. When these two concepts are taken together (anger and grieved) it reveals that Jesus knows frustration and stress that comes from life. But more than that, this text exists to demonstrate how Jesus redeemed rest.

Notice the various kinds of pressure this text displays in the life of Christ:

1. Jesus knew the pressure that comes from popularity (v.8 – *when the crowd heard all that he was doing...*). I recently saw a commercial for a news magazine show that was going to document how Michael Phelps is buckling under the pressure found with the demands of popularity. Can you imagine the demands of the people calling for you when you are a celebrity? I think some of you can. Like Jesus, mothers of little kids know the stress that comes from the demands of needy people. You can never be alone. The kids are always there with another need. It’s fine when they’re 6 months old, but when they are 4 years old and still demanding, the stress level is intense. Jesus knows this kind of demand.
2. Jesus knew the pressure that comes from wall-to-wall ministry (v.20 – *the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat...*). As believers you feel the need to be involved in others’ lives to some degree. The more you get in to other’s lives, the more rewarding it is. But the more you get in the more need you see. You could easily fill your days and nights with ministry. Up until the wee hours of the morning with someone and then again all day with others. Jesus knows this kind of pressure.
3. Jesus experienced pressure that comes from being neck-deep in theological controversy (v.2 – *they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the*

*Sabbath, so that they might accuse him...*). Is there no end to fighting for the truth? Jesus knows the pressure that comes from being misunderstood and maligned.

4. Jesus was continually under pressure from his enemies (v.6 – *The Pharisees immediately went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.*). There were people who truly hated him and vilified him. Growing Christians know that the more radical you become in following Jesus, the more conflict you create from those who oppose Christ. Many of you know the sting of sneers, the loneliness of isolation and rejection that comes from family members, neighbors, co-workers, and others.
5. Jesus knew the pressure of threatened plans and blown agendas (vv.11,12 – *And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.*). We all know this kind of pressure and stress. The demons threatened to blow God’s timetable. It was too early to announce Jesus’ claim to deity. It was too early because it wasn’t time to die. He had to silence the demons and get them to honor his timeframe. That’s frustrating. Have you had any demons blow your agenda or threaten your plans? That is very real pressure.

The point here is clear. Jesus knew pressure and stress. On top of this we add to our list the pressure and stress that comes as a result of our own sinfulness. But be clear on one thing. The greatest pressure that Jesus knew was also the result of sinfulness. Jesus knew that the most stressful moments of his life were going to come as a result of having his most intimate relationship ripped apart because of sin. As Jesus prayed in the garden, sweating as it were, great drops of blood, he was doing so beneath the load of stress that came with the thought of having the Father completely reject him. He knows stress. And the weight of his stress load could not possibly compare with yours as his pursuits were infinitely higher than ours.

### **The Purpose of Rest**

This brings us to our first principle:

#### ***Rest celebrates our weakness***

In our human frame we are limited. We are entirely insufficient for carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders. The need for rest is a continual reminder of our limited, finite, and sinful state. We need perpetual renewal.

Psalm 127:1-2 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> *A SONG OF ASCENTS. OF SOLOMON.*

*Unless the LORD builds the house,  
those who build it labor in vain.*

*Unless the LORD watches over the city,  
the watchman stays awake in vain.*

<sup>2</sup> *It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest,  
eating the bread of anxious toil;  
for he gives to his beloved sleep.*

Have you thought about this psalm? Sleep is a good gift from God to his creation. It celebrates our weakness. In vain we stay up late and rise up early – forgoing sleep as we try feverishly to get everything done in our little universe. “Vanity!” says the psalmist. Sleep is a gift from God designed as a daily reminder that God will keep the universe going while you completely shut down for the night. Your nightmares are the result of trying too hard to keep your brain engaged while you try to shut down your body. It is not designed that way. Go to sleep!

Sleep is a daily, weekly, periodic or annual reminder that we are not God. Instead, we need God. We need his sustenance – more than mere food, we even need rest. That is perhaps an obvious but drastically overlooked fact.

The sure sign that we have overlooked the place of rest in God’s created order is that we have now in our hedonistic culture turned rest on its head. ***We now have orchestrated a culture and an economy that lives for the leisure of rest.*** We live for holiday. We live for play. We live for hobbies. We live for vacation. We work to play. We work to reward ourselves with the ease that comes in slumber.

### ***Rest serves our pursuits***

Rest was not a reward for Jesus. Rest was a necessary means to a greater end. But this is not so in our American culture. We have turned rest and leisure into the end. Just look at the pursuit of the American dream that is supposed to be the reward in retirement, that ultimate get-away. Instead, Jesus provides us with this dramatic, counter-cultural revelation: rest serves our pursuits. Think about that. This is perhaps the biggest point on my heart today: Rest serves our pursuits. **Rest exists to aid you on your way in the pursuit.** What are we pursuing? Jesus demonstrated time and again that he was not pursuing leisure as his end-game. Here is how we know.

What keeps you from eating? Have you ever been so driven by something that you simply have no time or no desire to eat? My kids demonstrate this all the time in summer. We will be sitting down to eat and invariably a neighbor kid will be seen in the yard. Instantly, dinner is the last thing on their brains. It’s not time to be bogged down with food. We need to be about the real stuff of life – playing! Have you ever worked through lunch? Of course.

3:20 says that the crowds pressed Jesus so tightly and consumed in with their demands so incessantly that he could not even eat. His family had to go rescue him. Why? He would have been so driven and so consumed that he would have worked through mealtime. In fact, Mark is careful to record that they actually thought he was insane, crazy! They were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

But notice Mark 6:30-31, it is even more pointed:

<sup>30</sup>The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>And he said to them, **“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”** For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

Jesus demonstrated on numerous occasions that he was not driven by the pursuit of leisure – not even food. You recall what he said to the disciples in John 4:24 when he had gotten bogged down in a ministry opportunity with the Samaritan woman at the well.

The disciples came for mealtime and found him still busy at work. But his “food” was to be about the will of his Father who had sent him on mission. Mealtime and leisure, rest and relaxation are not the reward at the end of a long day, a hard and stressful week, or an intense season. They are a necessary means that serve our real pursuit – the mission of God as we seek first his kingdom. (This means that before you can ever have a real theology of rest, you have to have a clear grasp on your mission. How does your occupation fit into the mission?)

***Two test Questions:***

- The single greatest indicator that you have turned rest on its head and made it the end instead of the means is by whether or not you are willing to give it up. Can you be woken up from deep sleep by a troubled teen who needs to talk? Can you give up a day-off to serve a needy family? Can you use vacation for a mission trip?
- A second indicator that you have turned rest into reward is by examining the level of spiritual fervor you display when in “relax” mode. I call it “vacation mode.” How could you redeem the use of holidays? Can Labor Day weekend be more intentionally kingdom oriented? Or is it simply the reward of a hard summer? How can you serve your family while on vacation? What will be the spiritual temperature on vacation? Dad, do you have a plan?

**The Place of Rest**

Now, our second point is also crucially Christ-like. Where is rest found? Jesus demonstrates that rest comes most powerfully in two places (not exhaustive):

***Rest is found in the solitude of withdrawal***

Jesus needed time away (cf. 3:7; 6:30). He too, as the God-man, had a limited capacity. He came in the form of a sin-cursed human body. He is demonstrating the necessity of human rest. You need to get away on purpose. But getting away from it all is not an escape. As soon as rest is seen as an escape, escape becomes ultimate. Who would choose stress and pressure over leisure and reward? The answer is Jesus! He understands the perilous times. He understands the risks and heavy loads that come from going to war. The mission is a wartime mission. Rest only serves the mission. But you need to get away. You need daily sleep. You need weekly rest. You need periodic vacations and holidays.

***Rest is found in spiritual friendships***

I am struck by the fact that in the midst of all of this Jesus calls to himself those whom he desires (3:13). An entire sermon could be preached on spiritual friendships. But it is important to notice that Jesus lead his friends through the intense times and the down times with a God-glorifying, gospel-centered view of the mission. What kind of people do you surround yourself with when you are on down times? Do you redeem rest times for missional purposes? Do you find deep refreshment that flows from the kind of friends that bow to same altar as you? Yes and that altar must be Jesus.

Conclusion: