

THE BLESSING OF EDEN

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As George cultivated the rich Kansas soil he thought of his friends back in Argentina. He wrote them enthusiastic letters, not only about his life in a new land but also about his newfound faith, sending tracts and books about Bible prophecy, the coming of Jesus, and the Sabbath. In time he received letters from Entre Rios revealing that the gospel seed had fallen on fertile ground. But there was no one to teach them and to show them how to keep the Sabbath.

George Riffel was a man of prayer. He earnestly petitioned their heavenly Father for guidance. The answer came back, "Go back to Argentina. Return to South America as a lay evangelist."

After harvesting the crops in the fall of 1889, four intrepid families packed their trunks. To transport such a company of self-supporting missionaries from the prairies of Mid-America to Entre Rios, Argentina, was no easy task. After a long ocean voyage the weary travelers disembarked in Buenos Aires.

As they bumped along the rough road George pulled out his Bible and gave his friend a Bible study on the Sabbath doctrine. Reinhardt had heard about the Sabbath previously but had delayed obedience. Now he took his stand, and continued to keep the Sabbath until his death fifty years later. Cheered with this initial success, the Riffels set about to evangelize the community in the area of Crespo. Within a year, twenty people now keeping the Sabbath.

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."—Exodus 20:8. There is not a negative in that law of Ten Commandments, although it may appear thus to one who hasn't learned "the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:5). We have seen how the first three commandments are open gates to happiness, not vice versa. So is the fourth.

How can the fourth commandment become an assurance of rest for our souls?

It is a commandment that almost the entire world disregards. Why? Is it difficult to obey? No; God makes it possible for everyone to receive the Sabbath blessing that is wrapped within it. It's a part of the riches of God's grace He gives to anyone who is willing to receive. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . In it you shall do no work: . . . For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the

earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11).

There is no end of blessings wrapped up in this commandment! The blessing of Sabbath rest is for the whole world. No one is left out. God is speaking to you and to me, not just to the Jews.

In a family's kitchen there is an antique chest called a "pie-safe." The chest, about six feet tall, has a mellow, natural wood finish. But the chest was not always as lovely as it is now. When found twenty-five years ago it had a layer of white paint and over that a layer of pink paint and over that a layer of green paint. So they spent hours stripping paint and sanding to get down to the bare wood. Afterwards the wood was rubbed with oil to bring back its natural luster. They had to strip away about a quarter of an inch of accumulated dirt and paint to restore the chest to its original condition. The Sabbath is like a family heirloom, a beautiful piece of furniture that has been painted over by traditions. What Christ did was to restore the Sabbath for His people. He said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." "Man" means everyone.

We are to remember it all the time, everyday in the week. We are always to remember the sanctifying power which it reveals, in order that we may continually worship God "in the beauty of holiness." Knowing that only those who are holy can truly worship a holy God and keep a holy day, we must remember the Sabbath which makes known God the sanctifier, and then when the Sabbath day comes to us, we shall be ready for it.

It comes bringing a blessing; for God "blessed the seventh day." It is frequently said, with a view to avoiding the force of the commandment, that we may have a blessing at any time. Some say, "I keep every day holy." Now we not only may, but should, experience the blessing of God every day. But a blessing upon us, is not the same as a blessing upon the day. As we have already seen, we cannot keep any day holy except the one which God has made holy. Our motion or condition has no effect upon it; but the day is given to us to effect us. Do not forget that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." No man's holiness can impart holiness to any day; but the Sabbath was given that we might partake of the holiness of God, and be kept holy every day. While God blesses us every day, there is a special blessing on the seventh day, even the

blessing of the Sabbath, and this blessing assures to us all the blessings that we may have on any other day.

The Mud Puddle Kid gleefully stomps through one mud puddle after another until he's a mess. But no matter. Mom has Mud-B-Gone detergent. That will solve everything. Just see how spotless his clothes come out.

But it doesn't solve everything. Hardly is the boy scrubbed up and dressed in fresh, clean clothes when he goes out to play again and heads for the nearest puddle. Will the problem ever be solved until the boy learns to stay out of mud puddles—or, better yet, learns to hate mud puddles? God can forgive us and wash us in the blood of Jesus. He can teach us to hate sin and love to do right.

The Sabbath is a fragment of Eden that comes down to us untouched by the curse. It is the bridge by which men may pass from Eden lost to Eden restored, freed from the intervening curse. It is the rest to which Christ calls all who labor and are heavy laden. By it we become sharers of His burden, which is light, for He lays upon us only a "weight of glory." So the Sabbath, when kept in the Spirit, brings to us the glory of that new creation when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy," and is the pledge of the time when all the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Although Eden has been taken from the earth, that it might not suffer the effects of the curse, the reality of it is left us in the Sabbath, that we may come back to the beginning, and find in the beginning the end, "even the salvation of our souls." 1 Peter 1:9. The reason why now, at this time, we have the Sabbath made clear as never before in this world's history, is because Eden is about to be restored, and we must be made ready for the change. When Christ comes, He appears not as a stranger, but as one with whom we are well acquainted, and He will conduct us to Eden, not a strange country, but a familiar home. To this end God has given us the Sabbath, the essential part of Eden. There is to be a change now day by day, through the sanctifying power that the Sabbath makes us know and remember, so that at last when we get to Eden we shall not have to get used to our surroundings. Before the last day comes, we shall have drunk of the river of Eden, and eaten of the hidden manna. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures," or, literally, "the river of Thy Eden." Ps. 36:8.

The “rest” that is in Sabbath-keeping is what our human hearts have always yearned for. It is far more than merely taking a nap to achieve physical rest from labor. It is peace of heart. Billionaires would give everything for genuine Sabbath-rest!

God rested on the Sabbath day to bless it and hallow it for us. Rested? Was He tired? Anna got off her chair and went over to sit next to Fynn. She began, “Why did God rest on the seventh day?”

“I suppose he was a bit worn out after six days’ hard work.”

Anna said, “He didn’t rest because he was tired, though.”

“Oh, didn’t he? It makes me tired just to think about it all.”

Anna: “Course he didn’t. He wasn’t tired.”

“Wasn’t he?”

“No, he made rest.”

“Oh. He did that, did he?”

“Yes, that’s the biggest miracle. Rest is. What do you think it was like before God started on the first day?”

“A perish big muddle of a mess, I guess,” replied Fynn.

“Yes, and you can’t rest when everything is in a big mess, can you?”

“I suppose not. So what then?”

“Well, when he started to make all the things, it got a bit less messy.”

“Makes sense,” responded Fynn.

“When He was finished making all the things, God had undone all the muddled up mess. Then you can rest, so that’s why rest if the very, very biggest miracle of all. Don’t you see?”

This world may have been in a big mess when God started, but there certainly was no muddled up mess when He finished it, for “God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Because He has given the Sabbath as a gift to the world, it’s for us to enjoy. You never keep the Sabbath alone; you have fellowship with Him. “I am with you,” He says (Isaiah 41:10), and Jesus promised, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. ... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:18, 23). Jesus and the Father will move in with you! (And that means joy!)

Jesus promised, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20), but the Sabbath day brings us into a specially intimate closeness with Him. It’s like He makes an

appointment with us for a date; and if He is the object of our loving worship, then we will keep the date with Him. And it's not once in a great while; the Sabbath is the special seventh day of every week.

The Sabbath is the glue that holds all the days of the week together. It gives the reason for the week. No human being invented the week; it is what God gave the world in the beginning when He created the heavens and the earth in six literal days, as Genesis 1 tells us. The Sabbath is the memorial of His work of creation; evolution could never have come into the world to deceive so many people if the world had "remember[ed] the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Keeping the Sabbath is therefore the "sign" or "mark" of God's true people, for He says, "I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them" (Ezekiel 20:12). His "sign" is like His signature; it's like He says, "I have been looking for them, and here they are—My true people; they keep My holy Sabbath. That marks them as especially Mine!"

Jesus Himself especially enjoys having fellowship with His people every Sabbath day.

We seldom think of the joy that our Sabbath-keeping brings to Him! Isaiah says that "He shall see of the labor of His soul, and be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11). The Sabbath day is like a grand party of celebration; He invites us every week for this special time to meet with Him and with His people, and if you are not there, He is sad because He misses you.

There are no distractions on this "celebration" day. "In it you shall do no work," He promises us. Ezekiel describes the other days of the week as "the six working days" (Ezekiel 46:1). There are all kinds of intrusions on those worldly days—heavy burdens, business, making a living, buying and selling, TV and radio, cares and labor that weigh us down, news of disasters and crime. There is no "peace" in the world.

But on the Sabbath day all those distractions are laid aside; it's like we spend the day with Jesus in His house, as it were as guests; a day of peace of heart, freedom from worry, a harbor of refuge from the angry ocean storms, "a garden intersected with streams from Paradise, a cooling fountain in life's dry, dreary sand."

We are delivered even from our bills that come due. We lay them aside on the Sabbath day; we don't let them intrude on our peace with God because we trust that He will take care of us, He will

bless the labors of our “six working days” so that we shall have enough to pay our bills without worrying. The Bible tells us to leave our financial planning and accounts until after the Sabbath, and do all that work “on the first day of the week” (see 1 Corinthians 16:2). So this beautiful fourth commandment shows us how to enjoy the Sabbath with God, free from those tiresome, worldly intrusions.

The Sabbath becomes like a day of heaven on earth. Children especially love the Sabbath in a home where it is revered; they can’t wait until “next Sabbath comes.” When Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14), He meant: let them come on the Sabbath day. But if we don’t keep the Sabbath holy, they can’t. The true seventh-day Sabbath becomes the happiest day of the week.

On most calendars that are used worldwide, the seventh day is called Saturday. To make it doubly sure, we can check by reading Luke 23:54, which tells of the crucifixion of Jesus: “That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.” Millions observe Good Friday in honor of the death of Jesus; that pinpoints the true Sabbath, for the next day of the week is the regular weekly seventh-day Sabbath. (Incidentally, God has never asked us in the Bible to observe Good Friday in honor of Christ’s crucifixion—the Lord’s Supper is the memorial Christ appointed.)

And again we can pinpoint the true Sabbath day by reading the next verses in Luke: “The women who had come with Him ... observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment” (verses 55, 56). The next verses tell of His resurrection on Sunday: “Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they ... came to the tomb, ... But they found the stone rolled away” (Luke 24:1, 2). Christ had risen!

It is so clear a little child sees it immediately: “the Sabbath day according to the commandment” comes between Friday and Sunday. (“the Lord’s Day” of Revelation 1:10 is the Sabbath, for God calls the Sabbath “My holy day,” Isaiah 58:13).

That’s the reason why the seventh-day Sabbath is the happiest day of the week: it’s the day the Lord calls “My holy day.” His presence is in the Sabbath. To the extent that we love Him, we also love His holy day.

Sometimes when we talk about Sabbath-keeping, people will say, as though they were telling something new, "Oh, but keeping the Sabbath will not save us; we are saved by faith, not by works." Exactly; and that is what the Sabbath teaches us. We keep the Sabbath, not in order to be saved, but because we are saved. Sabbath-keeping is rest in God, the assurance of His finished work. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." By believing, we receive the perfect works which God Himself has prepared for us to walk in. These works were finished from the foundation of the world. Therefore whoever receives them must find perfect rest, because when the work is done and well done, rest must necessarily follow. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." It is the people of God who have the rest. "We which have believed do enter into rest," and they which do not believe, cannot rest. There can be no perfect Sabbath-keeping without perfect faith in God, which means perfect righteousness, because we are justified by faith. So the Sabbath means pre-eminently justification by faith.

Although there are many believers in Christ who observe Sunday, thinking it to be the Sabbath, it is nevertheless a fact that Sunday-keeping stands as a sign of attempted justification by works. It is the attempt of man to do the work which only God can do, namely, sanctify a day; for God never sanctified any day except the seventh day, so that all the sanctity Sunday has is what man has put upon it. He who can sanctify one thing can sanctify anything, because he must have the sanctifying power in himself. So the idea that man can make any day holy, involves the idea that he can make himself holy, that is, justify himself by his own works; its principle is that man has holiness in himself. Sunday-keeping is therefore the sign of the man of sin who "exalteth himself against God."

The Sabbath is rest; that is the meaning of the word. The word "Sabbath" is the untranslated Hebrew word for "rest." So we may read: "Remember the rest day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the rest of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work." How can anybody call this a burden? Rest is not a burden; to cease from labor is not wearisome; rest, absolute, perfect rest, the rest that cannot be disturbed by anything on earth, is the sum of all blessings. He who knows the Sabbath indeed can never count it a burden to keep it. Such an one will never say: "I could not make a living if I should keep the Sabbath," because the Sabbath reveals God, in whom "we live, and

move, and have our being.” It reveals Him who delivers from the power of darkness, and the curse and burdens and perplexities of this present evil world, and translates us into the kingdom of His dear Son, making known to us the power and the joy of the world to come. Then remember it, and keep it, that you may know the sweetness of rest in the bosom of the Father, and delight yourself in the Lord.

There are many sincere people who do not see this truth.

Has God changed His holy Sabbath day? No, There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that He made any change in His holy law. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:7). Why should He change anything that is “perfect”?

Jesus regularly kept the seventh-day Sabbath, for we read in Luke 4:16 that “He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” Yes, when He said to the Jews, “I have kept My Father’s commandments,” He told the truth (John 15:10).

That is a delightful way to keep the Sabbath, “from evening to evening,” sunset to sunset. If you try to keep it from midnight to midnight, you’re asleep and you can’t consciously welcome God’s holy day! How could you welcome some special visitor who came at midnight while you were asleep? On Friday evening at sundown the family gathers to sing, read a Bible story, and in prayer to welcome another precious Sabbath day.

Why do many observe Sunday, and not the holy Sabbath day that the Lord “blessed and hallowed”?

It is simple: someone without the authority of God changed it. He instructed His holy prophet Daniel to predict that this would happen. In chapter 7 the prophet described the rise of four world empires in history (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome), after which there would arise another great power, the “little one [horn] ... speaking pompous words” (verse 8) that would combine church and state and would “intend to change times and law” (verse 25). Both Daniel and Revelation state that he would exercise his great power for 1260 years.

Paul described the same power in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 as one “who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

John's book of Revelation describes the same power: "And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies ... And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb" (13:5-8).

We have to decide then which "power" we will follow—the holy One who created the earth in six days and sanctified His holy Sabbath for us to keep, or the one who has dared to change God's law and direct people to observe Sunday instead.

Let us not be afraid to be different than the majority.

Jesus said: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matthew 7:13, 14). All through the history of the world that principle has been true; Jesus is real, He's alive and watching, and He always identifies with those few who follow Him.

The good news is that He loves us far more than we think! He paid a supreme price to redeem us; He can never forget us. He still loves us so much that He wants us to spend eternity with Him. He is lonesome without His people! We live in the last days. Now, as our great High Priest in God's sanctuary in heaven, He is working night and day, worldwide, to prepare a people to be ready to meet Him when He returns.

But they need a special preparation, like children going to school. He will be our Teacher, and we can be in His "class." Therefore, Sabbath after Sabbath around the world, He meets with His people who follow Him as the Lamb of God, and by His Holy Spirit He teaches and prepares them to be ready in that great day when He will soon appear. Nothing that is happening on earth is as important as that special work now going on!

When Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," He was inviting the world to enjoy His Sabbath-rest. After creating the world and us in six days, He rested on that first seventh-day in Eden. But "we" were created on the sixth day of that first week, so for "us" the sabbath was a celebration of all the work that God had done and had "finished." "We" had done nothing!

The Sabbath is still a "sign" of our resting "in Christ" and thanking Him for what He has done, not glorying in anything we have

done in saving ourselves. It follows that true Sabbath-keeping is possible only when we understand and appreciate what it cost the Son of God to save us by His great sacrifice. Only when we permit that agape to “constrain” us can our Sabbath-keeping be devoid of the polluting love of self in some way.

To appreciate “the width and length and depth and height” of that love (*agape*) of Christ will make keeping the Sabbath day holy the greatest joy of your life. And children will learn to love the Sabbath also. If Christ's “yoke” is thus set before them as “easy” and His burden as “light,” they will get so they can't wait for another Sabbath day to come. They will enjoy being “guests” in the “house of the Lord.”

As the most precious gift of repentance is received by His people, they will be endowed with the ability to proclaim the Sabbath more fully, so that many dear ones now scattered in what Revelation calls “Babylon” will be able to hear the “voice” from heaven that says, “Come out of her, My people.”

Just now the Holy Spirit is calling people worldwide to keep holy His Sabbath day; for that's the special day when He meets with them to teach them. And His great fourth commandment assures all who will believe, they will know the joy of Sabbath-keeping rest “in Christ.”

On a recent visit with my father he requested, could we go to Chicago and visit the Wurlitzer Company. I want to sell my violin. It's probably worth \$6,000. I said, That's a family heirloom. He said, Well you know it's an antique. The date on it is from the 1700's.

Now you have to know that violin has been played by my father throughout all his ministerial career for Sabbath worship, evangelistic meetings and weddings, as well as with mother accompanying on the piano. That violin evokes memories of good family experiences like no other memorabilia.

Likewise, the seventh day Sabbath reminds us of where we came from and to whom we belong. Don't sell the Sabbath for any price.