

# Shutting Down the Idol Factory

## Part 6—Living in Real Time

Exodus 20:8-11

Jim Zazzera, Faith Presbyterian Church, 1 March 2014

I thought I would introduce our reflections today by showing a short film called “A Briefer History of Time.” See if you find this is helpful as we think about time, calendars, and schedules.

VIEW VIDEO: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fD58Bt2gj78>)

*As you can see time may give us control, but time also controls us. That is the promise and the curse of this idol, this false God. Time promises to make us masters, time also makes us slaves.*

The past few weeks we have been talking about Idols that we create in our lives. As a way of understanding them, we have been looking back to ancient Gods. As you might know, there is a Greek God named Chronos. And it is from this God’s name that we get the words “chronology,” (an orderly list of events), “chronograph” (a watch), “chronicle,” (a running account of history) and “chronic” (an ongoing situation).

Chronos is sometimes celebrated in our present day as well. Though originally portrayed as a snake with three heads (those of a bull, a man, and a lion), Chronos is typically portrayed as a wise old man with a long grey beard and is sometimes referred to as “Father Time”.

Chronos is the personification of Time. This Greek god both represents and controls time in all its manifestations - the past, the present, and the future. Chronos brings blessings with the progression of seasons and helps people move on from hardship. Chronos represents mortality for individuals and all humanity. It is said by the Greeks that Chronos was the first god to exist, in existence even before the great Zeus.<sup>1</sup>

*It is easy to see why this God is said to be so powerful. Control time - and you control it all.*

However, in thinking of time, Christians and Jews will immediately think of Genesis 1 where it is the God of the Hebrews, the God we proclaim even to this day, who created time. Remember that it was this God who...

*...called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.  
And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.<sup>2</sup>*

And time as proclaimed by these ancient people continues. It was this God who was creator and ruler over time. Days, nights, weeks, months, and years are in the hand of this God. Yet the God we proclaim throws something unique and transformative into the mix. Time doesn’t just march on without a break. God wants something else for the people. Listen again to Genesis:

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.umich.edu/~engtt415/myth/chronos.html>

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:5, NRSV

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.<sup>3</sup>*

Something interesting is happening here. God doesn't just create without ceasing. God doesn't just bless working and making. God gives honor to and a holy place to the practice of rest. *God gives us Sabbath.*

In fact, we find that later in the Hebrew scriptures that God commands this Sabbath rest:

*Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.<sup>4</sup>*

Something new and different is going on here. Everything rests. Everyone stops. God introduces something into our world that radically redefines the nature of time. Rather than simply linear time, rather than just chronology, God is introducing a regular rhythm into the lives of God's people.

The practice of Sabbath is so important that to this day it is a fundamental aspect of Jewish life. As you might know, many Jewish people go to great lengths to avoid work on this day. Though somewhat overlooked in our day, this practice has been a fundamental part of Christian spirituality over centuries.

Sabbath was so important that it was a major point of contention between Jesus and the religious leaders of his time. Though Jesus never undoes Sabbath, he does ask people to rethink their own practice. He tells the religious leaders of his day:

*The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.<sup>5</sup>*

Sabbath is for us. Have you ever thought about why Sabbath is so important? Have you ever thought about why "rest" is so crucial in the Christian & Jewish traditions? Is it just because God needs to have ten commandments instead of nine? *Probably not.* Is it because rest is a way of caring for the body and spirit? More likely. But think about it this way. Maybe Sabbath is God's way of reorienting all of time, all of our activities, all of our anxiety, all of our need to control.

Because without Sabbath, who is in charge of our lives? *The clock! The God Chronos!* Sabbath is our way of saying no to the control of schedules, activities, endless labor. Sabbath is God's way of reorienting our lives.

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:1-3, *NRSV*

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 20:8-11, *NRSV*

<sup>5</sup> Mark 2:27-28, *NRSV*

Taking Sabbath is certainly a command that comes from God, but it may be one of God's most radical and powerful gifts! Think of how countercultural it is to rest, to play, to do nothing! Is that difficult for you? Think of how it rubs up against our Protestant work ethic. Think of how it challenges our need to be always be useful and have a purpose. (Is there such a book as *The Sabbath Driven Life*?) Sabbath is truly a reorientation of our lives. It calls us to depend on grace. It calls us to depend on the reality that no matter what we do we are loved! This is incredibly Good News!

So have you welcomed the Good news of Sabbath into your life? When do you experience it? (And let me remind you, Sabbath is not just the observance of a particular day.)

Let me tell you when I experience Sabbath most often. *When I play with a little child.* I lay on the floor and stack block upon block, or sit in the rocker and read a funny book, or stand in the middle of the living room and do a silly dance. Sometimes I have to overcome my own impatience and distraction, but living "as a child" in this way is critical.

Think about it, a little child doesn't care about your schedule. A little child doesn't care about your achievements. A little child doesn't worry about the future. A little child is not captive to the God Chronos. A little child doesn't need to check her email. A little child child is content in the moment.

God invites us into this kind of space—that is what Sabbath is about. Sabbath is about saying "No." "No" to all your achievement, to all your work, to all your worries. Sabbath is made for humankind. When we practice it we proclaim that we can trust God with our time. When we practice it we affirm that we believe God is in charge.

In a way, sabbath is a little like silence. When we practice silence we are saying "no" to sound, "no" to speaking, "no" to the control we exert with our words. Silence (and Sabbath) is a saying "no" to everything that holds you captive.

Listen to what author Richard Rohr says about silence:

*Silence precedes, undergirds, and grounds everything. Unless we learn how to live there, go there, and abide in this different phenomenon...We are in danger of becoming just a shell with less and less inside, and less contact with the depth and reality of things—where all the lasting vitality is found...God is always found at the depths of things, even the depths of our sin and brokenness. And in the depths, it is always silent.<sup>6</sup>*

Silence (and sabbath) are things that can get us to the depths. Sabbath maybe one of the only things that really opens us to God!

There is another fancy Greek word. It is not the name of a God, but in some ways it is the opposite of the concept of *chronos*, it is the opposite of linear time. The word is *kairos*. Yes, like in our Kairos Quest Sunday school experience. *Kairos* is another word for time.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Rohr, "Finding God in The Depths of Silence," *Sojourners*, March 2013.

But *kairos* time is not minutes and hours and days and years. *Kairos* is God's time. A *kairos* moment is a moment where God breaks into your life. To live *kairos* time is to live expecting God to be present.

Maybe you have experienced it. That Wednesday evening when a sunset brought you to tears. That Saturday afternoon when you confessed your ugliest sin and found it forgiven. That Monday morning when you discovered you needed to take a new path in life. That week you revealed a secret you had been keeping for years, and still found yourself loved. That September when you faced challenge after challenge, but found you had the strength to go on. That year that you would not want to relive, but transformed you into the person you are today. That time when you had to let go of the person you loved more than life itself, yet you discovered you still had reason to live. If you have ever had anything like this happen, you experienced *kairos* time.

None of these things depends on the clock or a schedule, they all happen because of God's desire to break into you life.

So Sabbath rest is God's invitation into this new way of experiencing time. Sabbath rest is God's invitation into a new way of living life. God want to release us from slavery to Chronos God wants to dispel the illusion that we are Masters of our world. Forsaking the idol of *chronos* time, we open ourselves to *kairos* time, to God's time.

The Psalmist reminds us:

*Be still, and know that I am God!*<sup>7</sup>

Being still is only possible if we take sabbath. Now maybe that happens for you on a Sunday morning, maybe it happens on a Tuesday night, or maybe on a Friday afternoon. Being still is only possible if we find silence, if we have sabbath, if we just stop.

Some of us may hear sabbath as a commandment, and it is—but sabbath is first and foremost a gift to us. A way of reminding us who is creator and who is creature. A way of reminding us where comfort, care, and meaning come from. It is a critique of our schedules, our clocks, our deadlines. It is an undoing of *chronos* time, and affirmation of *kairos* time, God's time. You could say it is a celebration of "real time!" Sabbath is good news.

As Jesus says:

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*<sup>8</sup>

All of us, all of us—are invited to this rest, to this Sabbath, to this *kairos*.  
All of us. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Psalm 46:10, *NRSV*.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 11:28, *NRSV*.

## *Next Step Questions*

1. Read Exodus 20:8-11 again. This is a familiar passage, a familiar commandment. Is there any thing you notice that you had missed before? Why is this a commandment?
2. Think about your schedule. In what ways does “the clock” hinder your life? In what ways does it help you? Have you experienced time differently at different points of your life?
3. What do you think of when you hear the word “Sabbath?” Can different days and occasions be a “Sabbath” in our lives?
4. Is it hard for you to take a “Sabbath?” Is it difficult to simply stop working, doing, creating in your life? If so, why is that so?
5. Jim commented in his sermon that “God introduces something (Sabbath) into our world that radically redefines the nature of time.” How does taking a Sabbath put everything else in perspective? What does taking a Sabbath say about God? What does it say about us?
6. “Chronos” implies time that is linear and can be divided and measured. “Kairos” time is a way of talking about how and when God enters our world. “Kairos time” is those occasions when God “breaks into” our lives. Have you ever had one of those moments? Describe it.
7. How is practicing silence a little bit like having a Sabbath? Is taking time in silence and inactivity something you do regularly? Why or why not?
8. In Psalm 46 the writer reminds us to “be still and know that I am God.” What does being still have to do with knowing God?