Completion and Rest

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[0:00] The reading this evening is from Genesis chapter 1, starting from verse 31. So Genesis chapter 1, reading from verse 31, and it's page 4 in the Church Bibles.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.
By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing. So on the seventh day, he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.
Amen. Let's pray as we sit. May the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight.
O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. I think I should be in the middle, shouldn't I? There we are. Never mind.
[1:30] We're back on Genesis 1 tonight with those exciting four verses. A very short reading, but a very rich one. It's one that...

Several things may have struck you as you heard it read. So if you've got it open on page 4, that will be helpful. These are the things that struck me, and we'll be expounding on them in a moment.
But firstly, it was this. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. We've heard something like that in the previous part of the chapter, but it goes a bit further this time.
The second thing that struck me as I heard it read, and perhaps would have struck you, was this note of completion and finishing. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.
By the seventh day, God had finished. That's a whole theme we'll be looking at this evening. And the third thing that will have come across to you strongly is this note of the words seventh.
[2:39] By the seventh day, God had finished the work. Then God blessed the seventh day. Those are the things that struck me and which we're looking at tonight.

And that's what formed my acronym that doesn't work terribly well, but never mind. A for all, C for completed, R-E for rested, and S for seventh.
That smells acres, of course, because God saw all that he had made, acres of it, and behold, it was very good. When one's friends look at one and look sad, it's always discouraging, but never mind. We shall cope. So, as we think about all first, in verses 9, 12, 18, and 21, and 25, God saw that it was good.
Everything was good. But the point is that the completed work, it was very good. Up to that point, every day was better. Now God sees the whole creation, and it's finished, and it's very good.
[3:54] Is it worth perhaps spending a moment thinking about that word good? It's just as broad, I think, in Hebrew as it is in English, as a word.

It speaks of high quality. It speaks of fit for purpose. And so we think of our world, which has been created by God, good, because he is good.
And we want to hold that, because just at the moment, with COP26 coming up, and this sort of thing, we're always aware of what's wrong with our world.
We're aware of the plastic in the sea, we're aware of the polluted air, we're aware of a warming climate. But Genesis 1-3 enables us to understand, through its talk about the creation, and then the fall, how our world is both good and spoilt.
And at this point in the story, it's not spoilt, it's just good. All made, all good. So as we come into chapter 2, thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.
[5:11] The exciting thing is that they're complete. There are lots of famous unfinished projects around. I don't know which is the one you think of first, but you might think of McCaig's Tower in

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Oban.

If you stand in Oban, you look up on the hill, and there's this magnificent shell of a building. I think it's supposed to look like the Colosseum in Rome. It was going to have a museum and a tower. But McCaig died, his heirs disputed his will, and there's just a shell. You can see right through it. Literally. Everyone can see it.
In fact, it's not usually called McCaig's Tower. It's called McCaig's Folly. Now, if you're building a team, you want different sorts of people in your team.
You want, I think some people are called initiators, and some people are called completer finishers. Now, I think I'm a completer finisher. I do initiate things, but I like to do them for such a long time that people forget that I ever was an initiator, and that basically I'm always trying to finish things.
[6:18] I derive pleasure from things wrapped up well. But I'm quite a disappointing completer finisher. If you've ever been in our house, you'll observe that some of it hasn't been decorated since we moved in 25 years ago.

If you know me well, you'll know that I'm trying to write a biblical languages book, but it's still not published. I would love a beautiful garden, but actually, well, in the end, I rushed around to Dobby's and bought 100-and-something bedding plants and planted them in a little corner, so at least I had one bit that was nice.
And so afterwards, do chat to my wife Susan, but don't ask her about my many unfinished projects. Because that would be, well, it'd be fun for her, but not fun for me.
But the great thing is that God, as we discover from Genesis 1, is both the initiator, he speaks and it is so, but he's also the finisher.
When he creates the world, it's done. There's nothing left over at this point in chapter 2, verse 1, nothing to be done on a rainy day, nothing planned to be done in the winter, nothing that we might do next year.
[7:39] God's done it all. It's finished. And that note of completion comes so often in the Bible. When John records Jesus' words on the cross, Jesus says, it is finished.

What he planned to do has been done and our sins have been borne. Tonight at communion, we remember Jesus' one oblation of himself once offered, the finished sacrifice.
Nothing more required. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. Sat, completed, job done.
If you look at the creed up on the wall, there are the words, he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father. One day, Jesus says, he'll return in glory.
And this will happen, for God will finish what he plans. He always does. And the wonderful thing is that God's finishing, completing work doesn't only apply to the universe, it applies to individuals.
[8:54] Paul wrote to the Philippians, God is the great finisher, the great completer, in creation, and in his children.

All good, a completed work, that's C, which shows what God is like and gives us encouragement for the future. And that brings us to our second great theme.
I've only really two big themes this evening. He rested. On the seventh day, God rested from all his work. He blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.
We've already had quotations in the service from Matthew 11, verse 28. Come to me, says Jesus, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
[10:24] It's not so much do as come. Come to me, says Jesus, and I will give you rest. God calls us into rest.

We're designed for rest. The goal of creation is fulfilled in our rest. As I rushed around preparing to preach tonight over this last week, I thought of the hypocrisy and how much, how bad I was at resting, but how I'm being called to rest and the message that comes to me before it even comes to any of you.
And that theme of rest is the theme of Sabbath, the foretaste of our future rest. Now the Sabbath, of course, is Saturday, the seventh day, and some of you who know me, you know I'm a mathematician, so when I look, think about the theme of seven in Genesis 1, verse 1 to 2, verse 3, I found, as I did in the commentaries, several ways in which number seven appears.

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In Hebrew, there are seven words in the first verse in Hebrew. God saw that it was good, very good, or saw the light that it was good.
That's seven times we have the word good. And most excitingly of all, since it involves multiplication, God appears 35 times, five times, five times seven in those verses, 1, 1, 2, 3.
[12:04] Don't count it in the NIV, but there are 35 in the Hebrew, because I did count it, because I tried in the NIV and there were 32, and I was very, I think, I can't remember how many there were, but it wasn't 35, so I was disappointed.

It sometimes says he in the NIV, but it's 35. So, there is something special about the number seven, there is a divine pattern of six days of creation, and then one on which God rested.
And that word could equally be translated, he ceased. He ceased his work and blessed the seventh day. Now, one of the interesting features of my passage, of course, is it doesn't contain commands or instructions.
It doesn't tell us how we should use the seventh day, whether that's Saturday or Sunday. I mean, you can look up on the wall and you'll see the fourth commandment.
Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day, in it thou shalt do no manner of work, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.
[13:14] There it is on the wall from Exodus. And we might think about the question as to whether that's a law for us. And if you're sitting there waiting to judge me, I'm not going to give you the answer to that question.

I certainly don't think we're going to find the answer in this particular passage. On the one hand, it has been pointed out that it's the only one of the Ten Commandments that's not really reaffirmed in the New Testament.
Most of the others, all the others are reaffirmed, in some cases extended. Some people look at Mark 2, verse 27, when it says, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.
In Luke 6, Jesus rebuked those who objected to healing on the Sabbath. And some people look at Paul's words in Romans, chapter 14, verse 5, which isn't necessarily relevant, but I will read them.
One person considers one day more sacred than another. Another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. If that's talking about the Sabbath, then that would mean that there are different acceptable views about it.
[14:36] However, to be quite honest, that passage in Romans may be speaking about special feasts and fast days, more like our Ascension Day and Ash Wednesday and that sort of thing. But whether you regard that, the commandment to be done literally today, or whether you interpret it in a different way, I'm not going to answer.

But what I do want you to do, wherever you stand on that particular issue, is to see Sunday as a gift from God. Sunday is a wonderful gift of God.
The passage we've read tonight is, I think, the basis for the seven-day week. I mean, it's not obvious that weeks should have seven days. The Russians tried a five-day week from 1929 to 1940.
1940. And the idea was that if some people worked, I don't think you necessarily did more hours, but if you all worked shifts, then you could produce more production.
But in reality, it led to total misery because there was no time when everyone was off. So it was really depressing for families who never were together.
[15:53] The French tried a ten-day week from 1793 to 1805. They had the idea you could decimalise everything, and that included the week.

But that was very unpopular because weekends were rarer. So people didn't like that. And that failed in 1805. It's difficult to achieve decimalisation in a year that has 365 and a quarter days if you want to decimalise everything.
But I'm not going into that. We do live in a highly pressured world. We do need rest.
The ten-day week was too tiring. Seven-day weeks are made by God. The Sabbath was made for man. When I was an undergraduate, Christians were clearly expected to take Sunday as a day for church, and chapel, for hospitality, walks, and no academic work.
And I think we did so almost entirely and found a great blessing in it. It was good for us. It's a good pattern. I still avoid my paid work on a Sunday.
[17:09] Sunday. I still almost always avoid supermarket shopping, since I'm unnecessarily preventing others from taking a day of rest, in my opinion.

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But I'm leaving it to you to work out what you think. But Sunday is a cessation of work, and that's really important.
important. But it's more even than that. The Christian Holy Day moved from Saturday to Sunday, because Sunday was the day that Jesus was raised from the dead, the first day of the new creation. You remember the story of that unforgettable Sunday in Troas, when in Acts 20, verse 7, on the first day of the week we came together to break bread, and Paul spoke to the people.
It's unforgettable, of course, because it's the one where Paul spoke on and on. Eutychus fell asleep and out of the window, and then he died, but was raised by Paul.
[18:22] Eutychus, I've always thought, this is a wonderful story. In these days of somewhat exotic Christian names, it's disappointing that I don't know anyone called Eutychus.

So, as far as worship is concerned, Saturday moved to Sunday. Now, my final and sort of more complex cross-reference is going to come on the screen, and that's the Psalm 95.
And I'm going to look first at the end, the last bit. It's known to Anglicans as the Vanity. The first bit of the psalm, which we'll come to in the end, starts with praise.
But then in these last four verses, we have these words that start today, if only you would hear his voice. The psalmist is looking back to the children of Israel in the wilderness.
He says to the people of his generation, don't harden your hearts as you did in the wilderness. wilderness. That generation was faithless.
[19:31] It never got into the promised land because it wasn't faithful. God declared on oath in his anger, they shall never enter my rest.

Now for that wilderness generation, God's rest was to be the promised land. land. They longed to be there, to experience that rest.
But because of their unbelief, nearly all of them never got there. In one sense, it was never a complete rest in any case.
And this psalm was written hundreds of years later. And the writer says, today, if you would hear his voice, he challenges them, afresh in David's generation, to hear his voice, to think about what happened then, about the importance of faith, and the importance of entering into God's rest.
And that's what the writer to the Hebrews gets excited about in a chapter and a half of quite complicated text, which you can look up for yourselves, and I'm not going to go through in detail tonight.
[20:49] But the writer of the Hebrews makes this point that the psalmist is saying, today, don't harden your hearts.

You want to get into God's rest? Well, be faithful. God's rest is to be with him forever, to have finished our strivings, to be with God and enjoy him forever.
I will give one quotation from the writer of the Hebrews I'll read out. Chapter 4 and verse 9, there remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.
Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. The challenge to us is to be faithful.
We enter into God's rest by faith. We are called to faithful obedience. And Sunday is a foretaste of that eternal rest.
[22:08] If we go back to the first verses of Psalm 95, do you want to pick a couple of things out of that? They'll come up on the screen. It starts, come, let us sing for joy to the Lord.

What's exciting about Psalm 95 is that we speak to each other. In some Psalms we speak to God, in some he speaks to us, here we speak to each other. Again in verse 6, come, let us bow down in worship.
We are encouraging one another in praise of our great God. The Lord is the great God, the great king above all gods. We're thinking particularly about creation in this time, running up to COP26.
But the great God is our God. We are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. And so there's one other thing I want to have on the screen, it's going to come up now, and it's my favourite communion hymn by Horatius Bonner, written in the middle of the 19th century.
And as we come to communion tonight, some of the phrases there that I find really helpful, encouraging. Here, O my Lord, I see thee face to face, here would I touch and handle things unseen, here grasp with firmer hand the eternal grace, and all my weariness upon thee lean.

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[23:34] Here would I feed upon the bread of God, here drink with thee the royal wine of heaven, here would I lay aside each earthly load, here taste afresh the calms of sin forgiven.

It's that sense of rest that we can experience for a few minutes now, maybe for a whole Sunday, as we look forward, it comes in the final verse, feast after feast, thus comes and passes by, yet passing points to the glad feast above, giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy, the Lamb's great bridal feast of bliss and love.
We sometimes speak of Christian summer camp as a foretaste of heaven. Many of us will have experienced that fellowship, the sense of the Lord's presence, but that hymn reminds us that that can be true of Sunday too.
Some of us here tonight, I look at people who are full time working for the church. They may feel that Sunday is not much of a day of rest for them.
They may need to find some rest elsewhere. And rest means different things to different people. It may be sitting quietly with a book. Maybe it means being out on the hills.
[25:07] But however we think about rest, let's not throw away the Sabbath blessings. Let's enjoy physical rest. Let's enjoy gathering for worship, both as a foretaste of what is to come in heaven, and also a time to remember our creator, who made all very good, who completed creation, whose son completed his work on the cross, who will complete everything when he comes again, who will complete his work in us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you that we can meet in this place on this your day.
Thank you for the calms of sin forgiven, the joy of rest, the chance to meditate on your finished work.
So as we come, as we move from your word, your sacrament, we pray that you would keep us meditating on you, on your work, and looking forward to your purposes for us.
For we ask it in Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen.

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