

## BUSINESS AS USUAL

NEHEMIAH 13:15-22 | In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. <sup>16</sup> Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! <sup>17</sup> Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day?" <sup>18</sup> Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

<sup>19</sup> As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day. <sup>20</sup> Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. <sup>21</sup> But I warned them and said to them, "Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath.

<sup>22</sup> Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.



What a difference a day makes. One day in seven. A different day that makes a difference

in all other days. A day spent with God. Not eating and shopping (ISA 58:13-14). But resetting our hearts on things that are eternal and invisible. On things that matter more than making money. A day to reorient our spirit, soul, and body to the Source of our being.

God rested on the seventh day, not because he was tired. But in order to hallow that day for us. *The Lord has given you the Sabbath* (EX 16:29). To refuse the least of God's gifts is snobbish. How much more when we spurn his sacred gift of the Sabbath.

Sabbath-keeping is an act of faith based on the conviction that we belong to God and that he will supply our needs. Back in the wilderness, God gave Israel a double portion of manna on the sixth day so that they could rest on the seventh day (EX 16). The Sabbath is a resounding declaration before heaven and earth that our survival, security, and success do not depend on human striving and self-securing, but on God's gracious providence. *God works in us while we rest in him. Beyond all grasping is this rest, the creative work of the Creator. This rest shines forth as more productive than any work* (PETER OF CELLE | ADAPTED).

During Israel's national day of repentance, they swore to keep the Sabbath (NEH 10:31). But when Nehemiah returned from Persia, he found the sacred day under wholesale desecration. It was not just business as usual. But more business than ever. A shopping extravaganza! For Nehemiah, the Sabbath is an essential spiritual boundary that sets God's people apart from the world. It's even more important than the wall around Jerusalem. Why have a wall, if what goes on inside is no different from the outside?

Sabbath-keeping is a voluntary self-isolation that establishes our identity as a community of faith. When we close and guard this gate, we create a sacred space in which to fulfil our vocation as God's holy people (NEH 13:19-22; 1 PET 2:9-10; MANFRED OEMING). Man was not made to work, shop, and sell but *to glorify God and enjoy him forever* (WESTMINSTER CONFESSION). *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy* (EX 20:8).

## WALL OF DUTY

■ Think about it. The Sabbath originates, not in the Law of Moses at Sinai, but in the heart of God at Creation: *So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy* (GEN 2:3). Since the Sabbath is intrinsically holy, it should not be lightly dismissed as irrelevant or outdated. The Early Church replaced circumcision with baptism, Passover with Communion, and the Sabbath with *The Lord's Day* (REV 1:10). Shouldn't we, therefore, take Sabbath-keeping at least as seriously as

baptism and Communion? Ponder and pray.

■ Obey and thrive: *'If you watch your step on the Sabbath and don't use my holy day for personal advantage, if you treat the Sabbath as a day of joy, God's holy day as a celebration, if you honour it by refusing 'business as usual,' making money, running here and there—then you'll be free to enjoy God! Oh, I'll make you ride high and soar above it all. I'll make you feast on the inheritance of your ancestor Jacob.'* Yes! God says so!

(ISA 58:13-14 | THE MESSAGE).

■ Confess and repent: Lord, we have not taken the Sabbath seriously. Often, we treat it like any other day—business as usual! Instead of seeking you and finding rest in you, we over-schedule ourselves. We wear ourselves out running to and fro in our restless world of trivia, hurry, and noise. Online and offline, we are unstoppable. We are addicted to busyness because it makes us feel important and needed. We repent. We acknowledge that our survival, security, and success do not depend on our restless striving, but on your gracious provision. *Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him* (ISA 64:4 NIV).

■ Commit and consecrate: Lord, we resolve to set apart Sunday or at least one day a week as a day to delight in you. To celebrate your work of Creation, your new creation, and your future creation (ISA 66:22; 2 PET 3:13). To reset our hearts on things above, things invisible, and things eternal. To rest in your presence. To meditate on your Word. To assemble with fellow believers. To worship you in the splendour of your holiness. To listen to your Word. To present our offerings to you. To partake of your body and blood in the gifts of bread and wine. We resolve to *close and guard the gates* around this sacred time and space. *You have made us for yourself. Our hearts are restless until they rest in you* (AUGUSTINE).