

Sacred Rhythms in Busy Lives

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Well, I want you to start this morning by imagining music but without any rhythm.! In other words, without a drummer. There's a reason that bands have drummers. That's to keep! rhythm. Because if you had music without rhythm, if notes were just played any time without being in a set rhythm, the music wouldn't work. Rhythm, by definition, is a regular repeated pattern of something. And it is essential in music and many other things because without rhythm in music there would be chaos. It wouldn't be beautiful. You wouldn't be able to follow along. It would just be a jumble of noise. It wouldn't work. But do you know the same is true in our lives? Rhythm is necessary in our lives. If we don't have rhythms in our lives, rhythms of work and rest, rhythms of holidays and busy times, if we don't have rhythms in our lives, life doesn't work. Life becomes just a jumbled mess of chaos as well. We need rhythm in life. All of us need rhythms in life. In fact, that's the way God made us.

If we read about creation right at the beginning, we realize that God has knitted rhythms into this world, seasons and weeks and days. And if you look around at how creation is built, rhythm is deeply ingrained in creation, but rhythm is also deeply ingrained in us. God created us to live lives of rhythm. But that is, rhythm is actually getting lost more and more in modern society. I wonder if you've noticed. Sociologists have actually noticed that we no longer have the rhythms we used to in life. There were lots of rhythms that we had as society that we've lost. So, you know, back in the day, shops used to close at five. You used to go home from work. I remember my dad coming home on the train at six o'clock every day for his entire career. He came home on the same time. And when he was at home, there was no calls from work. Work stayed at work. Home stayed at home. And we had even scheduled

TV where you knew MacGyver was on on Friday night. And we would gather and we would look forward to that. And that was the weekly rhythm at home. We don't have that anymore, though, today, do we?

TV is on demand. You can watch what you want, when you want. And because we have constant connections through these little things, and because we can work remotely from our laptops or on our phones, so many older rhythms in life have become blurred. And we're living in this age where rhythms are losing their place. And that, I think, is why a chapter like Leviticus 23 matters for us today. You see, this is not just ancient rules about Jewish holidays. But behind it, as we dive into it, we're going to see that there's a wisdom of God's rhythms that he wants his people to have in their lives in this chapter.

And the Israelites, who he's initially giving this law to, they had lost their rhythms in Egypt. So God had rescued them out of Egypt, but they had been slaves in Egypt for a long time, generations and generations. They had been slaves 24-7. They didn't have the right rhythms in their life. But now God redeems them from Egypt, right? We read about that in Exodus. He redeems them to this new life. But what he does, we realize in Leviticus, he also redeems their time. He doesn't just redeem them and bring them to a new land, but he builds a new calendar for them. And he builds into their calendar these rhythms of sacred time.

[3 : 53] which it turns out is actually essential for them, not just for their well-being, but for their relationship with God himself. There are these needed rhythms in their life to have a healthy relationship with God. And the same is true of us. That's where the principle is the same. Even thousands of years later, if we want to keep growing in our relationship with God, each one of us, which I'm sure we want to do. That's why you're a church, I hope. That you want to keep growing in your knowledge of God and growing closer to this God that we are in relationship with through Christ.

But if we want to do that in a world that wants to keep us busy all the time, this idea of setting aside, carving out sacred time in our lives is probably more important than it ever was.

And so we're going to learn about some principles of that from Leviticus 23 as we consider this idea of sacred time in our lives. So in Leviticus we've already learned there was a special place that God had established for humans to meet with him, to actually come close to their God, the God of creation.

It was the tabernacle that God had arranged would be built. And nowhere else in the world was it possible at this time to meet with God like the Israelites could at the tabernacle. And the reasons that that was the only place to meet with God is because of the sacrifices that took place there and the priesthood that God had set up to make it possible for sinners to approach a holy God. We've been seeing that in Leviticus so far. There was this holy place. And we've read a lot about the geography and the spaces and coming close and where they had to be and the limits and the borders and stuff of this holy place. But what we read now in Leviticus 23 and towards the end of the book is that there's only just as much as there was a holy place there's also a holy time. So God sets aside a particular place to meet with him but he also sets aside a particular time to meet with him. There was this holy time to approach God in a special way. Even the priests themselves could not just come and approach God whenever they wanted to. We read back in Leviticus 16 verse 2, the Lord said to Moses, tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the most holy place. In other words, there was a time and place to meet with God and God had established when that would be and where that would be. Now let's think, is that true for us today? Is that true for us? Is there a special time and place to meet with God? Well let me tell you, no there isn't. Jesus changed all that when he came and we need to understand when we read all of these rules in Leviticus that we've got to read them through the lens of Jesus. All of the Old Testament needs to be read through the lens of Jesus if we're going to understand how it applies to us today. And what we've already seen in Leviticus is actually everything in Leviticus, all of those old rules that the Israelites had to follow, the sacrifices, the priests, and the sacred time, all was meant to point forward to Jesus in some way to help us to understand what Jesus does for us who was going to come and bring something much better than any of these Leviticus rules. And so right off the bat, before we dive into these holidays, which I think there's a lot for us to learn in them, we've got to be clear that we don't have to keep the rules like the Old Testament Israelites did. If you think, if people tell you we've still got to keep the old rules from Leviticus, or we've got to still keep the Jewish holidays, we've got to keep rules about Sabbaths and holy days, which by the way a lot of Christians still think in some way or another that we've got to keep these rules, either by observing the Jewish feasts, or by applying these rules directly to Sunday today and have our own set of rules just like they had back then about what we're allowed to do and what we're not allowed to do. If we think that, and if people tell you that, they've actually missed the whole point of what Leviticus is trying to tell us.

[8 : 33] Let me read to you from Colossians, because Paul makes this very clear. He couldn't be clearer, actually. In Colossians he writes this. Colossians 2 from verse 16 to 17, he says, Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. This is a very important verse to understand. The rules about these holy days and these Sabbath days were only ever meant to be what Paul describes as a shadow, a shadow of something better. Think about that. They're a shadow. These Sabbath rules are a shadow of Christ.

Now, a shadow is not the real thing, right? That casts the shadow. I don't hug my wife's shadow when she comes into the room. I've got something better, her, herself, to hug, right?

Well, Jesus brings something infinitely better than these special times that we read about in Leviticus. Because by dying to make permanent purification that the sacrifices in Leviticus point to, and by ascending to heaven to be the permanent high priest who is always interceding for us, you know what that means? That means that through him, access to God, coming close to God is now possible for anybody, anywhere, and at any time. And that is amazing. If you think about it, if you just stop and realize how amazing that is. How an Israelite would have been shocked if they knew what kind of access you and I can have with God. Anytime we want to, without the tabernacle and without the priests and without the sacrifices, you can have direct, intimate access with the God of the universe through Jesus Christ. And that is amazing. The God who is far more powerful and

influential than any president or king that has ever lived that we would never hope to be able to have an audience with today, that God makes himself available 24-7 to you. You can have that kind of access with the God of the universe at any time. That is incredible. And we've got to let that just sink in. How amazing it is what

Jesus has achieved for us. That the Israelites in the Old Testament wouldn't have ever even dreamed of having the kind of access we can have to God now. At any time we can approach God. And yet we don't. Because we get distracted by life. We get sucked in to the things that are going on around us and the demands and the deadlines. But you know what we don't do? Most of our week and most of our day we do not take advantage of this incredible access that we have.

[12:01] And that is why Leviticus 23 is still important for us. Not that we're under its laws like they were. We're not under law like they were where you have to obey rules about what we're allowed to do and not allowed to do on certain days. But Leviticus 23 still has knitted into it the wisdom of sacred rhythms in our lives.

And carving out sacred time to meet with God in a special way. But also using these sacred times to do something else that we very often neglect in our day-to-day lives.

which we see God wanted his people to do back then and also wants us to do today. Which is to take time to remember your salvation. That's one of the main reasons that God commanded his people to take these holidays. Is that they had to stop and remember that they were saved people. Which they would have forgotten if they didn't take time to remember it. All of these feasts if you look at them and you read them carefully. There were seven by the way. Seven feasts throughout the year.

And they had different details, different requirements. Some of them were pretty bizarre. There was one time, one of the feasts, Festival of Tabernacles, they had to leave their homes and pitch these weird makeshift tents and live in them for a number of days. So they were all, they all had these strange details.

But they were all there to remind the Israelites of their salvation in some way or another. In fact, there were three particular categories of holiday. Three particular ways that God wanted his people to constantly remember their salvation. Either the festival would help them remember something about the past. Or the festival would celebrate something in the present. Or it would anticipate something in the future.

[14:08] Those were the reasons they had these holidays. Not unlike secular national holidays today. We've got like Freedom Day. We've got other, you know, we look back. A lot of our holidays look back at something in the past.

We've got certain holidays that celebrate the present. Mother's Day, we celebrate mothers because we often, you know, neglect celebrating people in our lives. And so sometimes we've got to have holidays to remind us of that. And some, some holidays that we celebrate look into the future. New Year's Day looks forward to a new year.

But you'll find all of these religious holidays, the same principles applied. Some looked back. Some looked at the present. Some looked forward. And so let's look at them in turn. Firstly, the holidays that remembered the past.

So I'm going to read from verse 4 in Leviticus. These are the Lord's appointed festivals, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times.

The Lord's Passover begins at twilight on the 14th day of the first month. On the 15th day of that month, the Lord's festival of unleavened bread begins.

[15:17] For seven days, you must eat bread made without yeast. Very strange holidays. But now, if we know Old Testament history, we know the significance of those, right?

And then later, there was another one called the Feast of Tabernacles. I've mentioned it. The one where they had to live in tents. Let me just read to you what it says from verse 41. Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.

Celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in temporary shelters for seven days. All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters. So your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt.

So that was the point of all these festivals. The Passover, the unleavened bread, the festival of shelters were all to look back on how God rescued his people from Egypt.

He wanted them every year to stop and essentially reenact their exodus, reenact their salvation from being slaves in Egypt so that they don't forget it.

[16:28] Because you know what? Forgetting things is a very real risk for God's people back then and today. We are very forgetful creatures. And they were then, and that's why God wanted them to take this regular time to remember what he had done for them.

Let me read to you from Deuteronomy 8. God says this. He says from verse 11 of Deuteronomy 8, Be careful, talking to his people, be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws, and his decrees that I'm giving you this day.

Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and gold increases, and you have all that you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud, and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

See, God knows something about his people. He knows if they don't stop regularly and remember what he's done to save them, they will forget. They will become proud.

And the same is true of us today. It is very easy to take what we have for granted, isn't it? Maybe that's why God commanded his people to go camping once a year.

[17:54] You know, there's nothing like camping to show you what you take for granted in life, in ordinary life. We go camping probably once or twice a year. And let me tell you, when I'm standing there for 20 minutes waiting for the kettle to boil over our little gas stove, just so I can have my cup of coffee in the morning, I'm longing for the kettle back home.

And I just, I realize how much I take for granted the ability just to switch on the kettle and have a boiling, you know, boiling water just a few minutes later. We take things for granted, and sometimes we need to stop and realize what we take for granted.

Various things in life we can take for granted. But it's also, you see, easy for us to take our salvation for granted as Christians. If we're saved, we can get used to that, and we can start taking it for granted, what God did to rescue us from sin.

We start taking that as a given, and we don't think about it too much. We assume, as Christians, we get into this state of just assuming, when I come to God and confess my sins, He will forgive me.

And that's a beautiful, wonderful truth. Okay, but when we start just assuming God's going to forgive me, God's going to forgive me, but we forget the reason why, then we actually, we miss out and we lose something very important about our salvation.

[19:25] And what we tend to do then is that we start treating sin lightly, and sin in our lives just becomes, oh, it's okay, God will forgive me, God will forgive me, because we take it as a given, but we forget why He forgives us.

We forget the reason, which is only, the only reason that the Holy God can forgive our sins is because His Son came here and died and suffered to take those sins and all of God's wrath for those sins on Himself.

And that is sobering, when we actually stop and remember what it took for our sins to be forgiven.

It's a very simple thing for us to come to pray to God, forgive my sins, and know that He does.

We do it every Sunday. We ask for His forgiveness, and we get promises from His Word once more, assuring us. But when we stop and realize just what it cost for God to say yes to that prayer, when we ask for forgiveness, the cost that Jesus paid for our forgiveness, well, then it's sobering.

And that's why, you know what, God does not want us to forget what happened. That's why He wants us, still as Christians, to reenact our salvation every time we take the Lord's Supper.

[20:45] He's commanded us to take the Lord's Supper as our reenactment of Jesus dying on the cross, to remember, to take time and regularly remember what it cost for God to forgive our sins so that we never take that for granted, we never take our sins lightly.

You see the importance of looking back and stopping and remembering what God has done for us. So that's the first thing He wanted His people to do, the first types of holidays that they celebrated back then.

But the second type was taking sacred time to appreciate the present. That's the second type of holiday. So the Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, which appears from verse 15 onwards, that was a feast where they celebrated the first harvest that came through of the year, when it properly came in.

There was another celebration, first fruits, which was before that, but the Feast of Weeks was when all their harvests were coming in. And they stopped and they celebrated that and they gave God thanks for that.

But also then, later on, there was the Day of Atonement from verse 26. And this was a day in autumn that they celebrated once a year to remind them that they were cleansed of their sins and their sins had been sent away.

[22 : 10] We did that a few weeks ago, the Day of Atonement, very special holiday for the Israelites, to remind them that they were in right relationship with God, that their sins were washed away.

And so just these two things that they had to celebrate about the present, the harvests they were enjoying and the forgiveness they were enjoying, were two benefits of being in relationship with God.

That now, in relationship with God, we've got the provision for our physical needs and we've got pardon for our sins. Now, it's no coincidence that thousands of years later, after Jesus came and died and rose again and ascended into heaven, He sent His Holy Spirit as an amazing blessing on His church, on His people, and He chose to do that on the Day of Pentecost, on the ancient Israelite feast day, which Christians still remember, it's still in our church calendar today.

Not just to remember the provision that God gives us of our daily food, like they did back then, but also to remember the much greater daily provision that God gives us of His powerful presence in our lives, through His Holy Spirit.

But how often do we actually stop and give Him thanks for that, and actually stop and appreciate the benefits of being in a right relationship with God?

[23 : 44] How often do we stop and just think about that, and thank God for it? That all, realize all that God is giving me today, both physically in provision, but also spiritually in His Spirit.

In other words, how often do we stop and appreciate that God is involved in our lives? That He chooses to be involved in our daily lives, by providing for us our needs, our daily needs, but also by being involved in our lives through His Spirit.

How often do we stop and realize that? We often don't realize and appreciate that, what God is doing today in my life.

Sometimes a day will go by when we haven't even thought about that. One of the ways, though, therefore, to be more conscious of that is through a simple but profound Christian discipline of thankfulness.

Something that, both in the Old and the New Testament, God reminds His people to do on a regular basis. Not just, you know, not because He likes to hear thanks, but because He wants us.

[24 : 58] Because it changes our brain chemistry, actually, when we get into this discipline of realizing what we have today and giving thanks for it.

God knows it's good for us to do that. In Colossians 2, the passage we read earlier, you know, Paul says, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness, is what a Christian should be.

Someone who realizes what they have in relationship with God should be, He says, overflowing with thankfulness. It should be part of our daily lives.

1 Thessalonians 5.18 also says, give thanks in all circumstances. All circumstances. In other words, in every part of life, in every circumstance, find something to be thankful for.

This discipline of thankfulness for our present blessings is a very important thing for us to get right in our lives. That's why, for example, we do, as Christians, simple things like saying grace before meals.

[26 : 07] You know, it seems like just some tradition, but it's actually a way to program our minds to stop. And before we enjoy something nice, realize where it comes from. Realize why it is that we can have these things that we enjoy, because God is richly providing for our needs.

Because, you know, it is so easy, if we don't discipline ourselves to do that, you know what we're going to do? We're going to fixate on all the stuff we don't have.

Don't we? Isn't that what we naturally do? We fixate on what we don't have. We fixate on what we want, but don't have. We fixate on what's going wrong in life. That's the natural.

We don't have to discipline ourselves to be negative. We do that naturally. We fixate on the things that are going wrong. But what we do need to do is discipline ourselves to think about what we have

and what we can be thankful for.

Because when we do that, when we develop this discipline of thankfulness for our daily blessings, what it does is it takes our minds off what we don't have, and it reminds us of what we do have, which is actually far better, especially those of us in Christ.

[27 : 17] All the amazing blessings we have. Paul, at the beginning of Ephesians, he spends most of the first chapter of Ephesians just saying, consider the amazing spiritual blessings you have if you're a Christian.

He lists them, and he lists them, and he lists them. Because we've got to be disciplined to think about those things. But if we don't take time to do that, we never will. So that's the next thing God wants His people to do is stop, pause, and appreciate in thankfulness what we have in Him, in Christ.

And then finally, there were these holidays where God's people took sacred time not just to look back on the past, not just to appreciate the present, but then to anticipate the future.

So 50 days before the Feast of Pentecost, there was this festival called the Festival of Firstfruits. We see it in Leviticus 23, verse 10.

Speak to the Israelites and say to them, when you enter the land, I'm going to give you and reap its harvest. Bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. That's literally the word firstfruits.

[28 : 25] And it referred to that before the crops came in their fullness, there would be these first crops that came. They would be sparse, but they would be the indicator that the rest of the harvest was coming.

And in the agricultural community, like the Israelites were, they were largely agricultural. This was a huge moment when the firstfruits came in, in the sort of spring season.

Because they just had a long winter, eating stale, stored up food for the whole winter. And now this first fresh food was the sign that a new harvest was coming.

It pointed forward to a good year ahead. And it was a very significant moment in their calendar because it looked forward to what was coming. But that wasn't the only way these festivals pointed God's people to the future.

In fact, there was a much more profound future that they all pointed to. I wonder if you picked up, as Dylan was reading the passage earlier, the repeated reference to the number seven.

[29 : 40] Did you notice that? If you read this chapter, there's a lot of sevens. In fact, I counted them. And there's no less than 19 mentions of the word seven in this single chapter.

Why? Why is God so fixated on seven? Seven sacrifices had to be made on this one day. The seventh day of the month, in the seventh month, at the beginning of the seventh month, they had to do this.

On the seventh day each week. Why? What's so important about seven? Well, it should take us back to Genesis, shouldn't it? It should remind us of creation. And on the seventh day, after God made all the amazing things in creation, the seventh day, God rested.

He instituted this idea, the Jewish idea of shalom, of rest. And what that was meant to be, the seventh day was meant to be the intent of the first six days of creation.

God made all of these things so that he and his people could now stop and rest and enjoy everything that he had made. Not just on one day, but that was meant to point to the future.

[30 : 51] God's intent for everything he had made is to be in this perfect world that is at perfect rest. Without scarcity and stress that we face in this world.

We are not in that rest now because of the fall, because of our broken relationship with God as humans, we have fallen out of the rest that God intends for us to live in. We're in this world with stress and scarcity and wars and poverty and unemployment, all because we are not in that state of shalom that God intended us to live in.

But, he intervened in history through the nation of Israel and ultimately through his son Jesus Christ to bring us back into relationship with him so that one day we can experience everything that he intended for us to experience.

True rest in a new restored creation. Not that we won't work, but that our work won't be labor. It'll be work and resting at the same time. It'll be like doing your favorite hobby on holiday.

You know, that's work technically, but it's work you enjoy and you want to do it and you choose to do it. That's what work will be like in the new creation when we're in this permanent seventh day rest and God wanted his people even right back in Leviticus by reminding them seventh, seventh,

seventh, to remember and to look forward to what's coming, to be thinking forward to his intent for creation and because of Jesus, that future for us today that rest to come is even more certain than it ever was.

[32 : 31] We have our own first fruits to celebrate. Let me read to you from 1 Corinthians, what Paul writes. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 20, listen to what he says.

He says, but Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

You see what he's saying there? He's saying, just as that first harvest for the Israelites guaranteed what was to come, so the resurrection, the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees all who are in him through faith what's coming for them, that it's real.

Resurrection into a new restored creation is real and the resurrection of Christ is the first fruits of that. It proves that it's coming so that we can look forward to it with absolute confidence.

And when we take time to do that, when we stop and take time to think about the future that God has planned for his people, you know what it does? It puts all our present troubles in perspective.

[33 : 43] Just as, you know, when you're at work and you've got a holiday coming up, maybe you're, you know, the last day of work, I've actually got leave coming up in a couple of weeks. And you know what that does?

It keeps you going through those last weeks where you're feeling really kind of drained and you've got no energy but you know holiday's coming so you can keep going no matter what happens today.

It's okay because I'm going on holiday tomorrow. Well, it's the same with those who are looking forward to the new creation, who are really, who are stopping in their lives and thinking about it and looking forward to it deliberately.

Now, I'm not going to lie. Okay, life is hard. Life here is hard. It's frustrating. There is a lot of pain in this life we have to live.

There is a lot of grief. It hurts. We just had a funeral this week and there are more to come. But you know, Christians don't need to be defeated by all the pain and the difficulty and the grief of this life if we take time to remember where we are going and to stop regularly and to rejoice in that, to take time even in the midst of all the grief and the pain to stop and just rejoice in what's coming.

[35 : 01] That is a mark of God's people throughout history is that even when they're going through difficulties, Paul, the apostle Paul was a great example of this. He was in prison and he was singing.

How could he do that? How could he rejoice in the middle of suffering? Because he looked forward. Because he knew the future that God, that Jesus had guaranteed for him. And that is why we need to do the same.

We need to carve out these sacred rhythms in our lives for all of these reasons. Otherwise, we won't do these things by nature unless we take time to daily meet with God in daily devotions which we encourage and we try to give you ways to do it easily in this church.

It's such an important and if you do it you'll realize just how important it is in your daily life before anything else to stop and meet with God which he allows us to do through Jesus Christ.

Don't let your life be too busy to do one of the most amazing things a human is now able to do and Jesus came and died to make possible for you to do every day.

[36 : 16] But then also weekly to take seriously the rhythm of church and growth group that we have here at St. Mark's. Don't let the world crowd out and get in the way of these special times we can take each week to be with each other to meet with God together to go over his word together.

Don't let life be so busy that you that you skip church or you skip growth group because of other let's be frank less important things. Rather as someone else once said great advice make church the reason for missing everything else.

Make church the priority not because it's a rule you have to keep but because you realize just how essential it is for your life in this busy world each week to stop and to take time to remember all that God has done to realize and thank him again for all that he is doing and to rejoice in the future that he has secured for his people.

Well let's pray. Lord we praise you and worship you for all that you have done that we are reminded of when we gather like this together and all that you are doing in our lives when we meet together in growth group and we pray for each other and we look at your word together and we get revived and

refreshed again by looking back by appreciating all your grace in our lives again and then Lord we thank you that you have given us an amazing hope to look forward to help us regularly to stop and to look forward so that we would keep rejoicing even in the midst of difficulty in this life and that that light would shine out of us and draw others to you we pray this in Christ's name
Amen