



L LIBERTY

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY SERMON

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The title of John's sermon is
"Give Them Rest"
and the text is Exodus 5:5.



You can access both the written and video versions of this sermon at www.southernunion.com/campaign

Give Them REST
By John Ashmeade

And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens.

Exodus 5:5

Apple Inc. is the most valuable company in the world. This economic juggernaut has enjoyed an almost monopolistic control over the smart phone and tablet markets. In the great controversy between smart phones, you are either apple or android. Each year, millions of consumers eagerly wait for the latest model phone or software upgrade to their phones. Few appreciate the work that goes into building these products. Many are unaware that the iPhone and the iPad are not manufactured in the United States. These products are either manufactured in factories in China, India, or Taiwan.

There have been ongoing reports that the work conditions in these overseas factories are troubling. Workers work six to seven days per work and often are forced to work up to 12 hours per day to meet the insatiable consumer demands for these phones. Not only do these workers work long hours, they do so for low wages. They are forced to live on factories campuses away from the families. From time to time, there have been reports of high suicide rates among these workers. Workers complain of facilities with poor ventilation, ongoing exposure to hazardous chemicals and being forced to work for weeks without a day off. These conditions leave workers tired and exhausted and if they complain they are terminated.

Apple made the decision to manufacture its products in China to take advantage of labor laws that permit them to hire a cheap and skilled labor force, where workers can be compelled to work long hours without dealing with labor unions, the costs of health care, worker's compensation claims, anti-discrimination laws, pregnancy leave requests, family leave requirements, all of which cut into corporate profits. These benefits protect American workers from exploitation. They give rest to the weary. When I think about the grueling work schedule of these factory workers in China, I get tired.

Have you ever been weary, exhausted, tired from working hard? Have you ever needed rest? I have seen it and experienced it. Young mothers know what I am talking about. I remember when my daughter was born. Soon thereafter, they discharged mother and daughter home. The hospital discharged her with no manual or instructions. I did not know what to do. My wife did not know what to do. This was learning on the job. She was a crying, eating and pooping machine in those early days. Round the clock. Every two hours something had to be done. Thank God, most of that work fell to my wife. I am not gonna lie y'all. I pretended to be fast asleep a few mornings when the crying monster began to roar. My poor wife had to wake up, change her and feed her only to have to do this non-stop over a 24-hour period. That workload will break any man. My wife endured. I was just exhausted.

Have you ever needed rest from working hard? This is where God's people, found themselves in the text. They had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years, and they were tired. They were exhausted. They needed rest. Physical and spiritual rest had been taken from them.

The bible does not say how many hours per day the people were forced to work, but one can assume they worked long hours with limited time for leisure. The Hebrews worked 7 days a week with no rest. This is implied by Moses' request to Pharaoh to let the people go into the desert for three days of rest and sacrifices.

The Egyptian task masters employed physical force, intimidation, and harsh treatments to compel work and slaves who failed to meet the daily quotas experienced terrible punishments. Indeed, it was due to Moses witnessing the harsh treatment of a fellow Hebrew that he intervened, killing an Egyptian taskmaster.

We do not know the life expectancy of the enslaved Hebrews but we know that the Slaves in the United States lived for an average of 36 years, compared to 50 for the non-enslaved population. For the American slave, this shortened life expectancy was attributed to poor living conditions, poor nutrition, and of course long exhausting work hours.

It is no wonder that Moses sought to teach the Hebrews to rest. Here is a word from the pen of inspiration on this issue: "God reserved the seventh day as a period of rest for man, for the good of man as well as for His own glory. He saw

that the wants of man required a day of rest from toil and care, that his health and life would be endangered without a period of relaxation from the labor and anxiety of the six days." 1T 532.1

But, when you read text, Pharaoh bristled at the thought that Moses taught the people to rest. This rest needed by the Hebrews was not just physical rest. Moses and Aaron pleaded with pharaoh for a physical rest so that Hebrews could offer sacrifices to God, in other words, spiritual rest.

In confronting Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron were asserting on behalf of the Hebrew people, the universal fundamental right that exists for planet earth. If there was a heavenly bill of rights, rest would be the principal and primary right. There is, in God's universe, a fundamental right to rest. EGW notes the following: "God has given man six days in which to do his own work and carry on the usual business of life; but He claims one day, which He has set apart and sanctified. He gives it to man as a day in which he may rest from labor and devote himself to worship and the improvement of his spiritual condition. What a flagrant outrage it is for man to steal the one sanctified day of Jehovah and appropriate it to his own selfish purposes!" 4T 249.2

Rest? Yes rest. The bible tells us that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He created light out of darkness. He then divided the light into day and night. He then created land and water, green grass and fruit bearing trees. Not content with the light of the Sun, he created the stars and the lesser lights to govern the night. He then filled the waters with animals, littered the skies with birds and spread animals across the earth. Then, he decided to make a creature in his own image. He then made man and woman in his image and gave them dominion over the earth but not over each other.

When God had finished six days of labor, working day and night, 24-7, the account tells us that he blessed the seventh day, sanctified it, and then rested.

God set in place a universal pattern for man to emulate. 6 days of work and one day of sanctified and blessed rest. The seventh day he called the sabbath. This was given to the man and the woman. But it was not just given to them. It was a gift to all creation. It was a gift to the animals, it was a gift to the land, it was a gift to the earth itself. 6 days of work and then rest.

Can I just say parenthetically, I love the sabbath. You see my wife can struggle with me on Sunday, be mad on Monday, terse with me on Tuesday, war with me on Wednesday, tussle with me on Thursday and fight with me on Friday, but on the Sabbath, thank God almighty, when we come to church, she gotta rest. On the sabbath, she has to study war no more, sweet rest. What would our families be like if we experienced full physical and spiritual on the sabbath.

Even when sin emerged, the Sabbath was an ordinance of rest that bound all to yield control to the one who owns all creation. Each sabbath mankind was called to rest. We were to rest from all our labors. The sabbath was the great equalizer, rich or poor, male or female, all yielded to the power and authority of the creator of the universe.

When confronted with His defiance of the will of God, Pharaoh doubled down and increased his harshness towards the children of Israel. Pharaoh's attack against God's rest was physical and spiritual. I want you to understand the nature of pharaoh's strategy to defy God and deny his people their rest. The Bible tells us that he increased the work load, made the work longer and harder and then scattered the people around Egypt. He then gathered the Hebrew leaders and beat them and told them the reason the work is harder is because these trouble makers demanded rest and sacrifice.

Pharaoh knew that when God's people are divided, they can be conquered. Pharaoh knew that when God's people are fighting, they can be controlled. This time-honored strategy continues to the present. The pharaohs of our day, whether government, corporate or religious continue to divide us by race, gender, class, and nationality.

God's effort to give his people rest resulted in the creation of the first labor union in the history of the world. They advocated for rest, physical and spiritual. I want you to understand that the first resistance movement recorded in scripture was about rest and the last will also be about rest.

The path to rest is not your work. Here is what God instructed Moses to say to the children of Israel, a word the resonates to all the oppressed through all the ages: "Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a

stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD. Exodus 6:6-8.

The Bible tells us that there is a work that only God can do. In the beginning, he created. The world is not the product of random chance operating by natural mutation but life is the product of the mind of God. He spake and it was done. Israel's redemption was not the product of the military mind of man but by the mighty word of God, who spoke and plagues fell and who breathed and seas opened and by his might alone an empire fell and by his power alone his people received rest. All God wanted them to do is rest.

God redeeming act brought Israel both physical and Spiritual rest. By taking his people out of Egypt, God gave his people physical rest. They were longer slaves to the Egyptian empire. By bringing his people out of Egypt. God gave them Spiritual rest, the Sabbath. They could now worship God every seventh day. In other words, the Sabbath is the great symbol of God rest given to mankind. Every time we rest, it opens the door to worship God. Every time we rest on the sabbath, we acknowledge God. Every time we rest on the sabbath, we honor God. It is an ongoing and perpetual reminder to all mankind to remember God as creator. This is why God reminded Israel of the following: 15 remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day. Deuteronomy 5:13-15. The sabbath is a symbol of every slave, servant, bondsman, day laborer, farm hand, and blue-collar worker. God can redeem you by his mighty hand.

If there is any theme that I want you to take from this message is this, rest precedes worship. Before you worship God, you must first rest. If you don't first rest, you cannot worship. When you come to worship you must lay aside the labor of the week, ignore the worries of the week, forget the stress of living in a sin sick world, place your problems at the foot of the cross, put down the wars of the week and take the shoes of your feet so that you can worship the God whose presence lit up a mountain and who glory outshone the sun. Far too often, when we come to worship, we remain connected to things that cannot save us or redeem us. We remain distracted by these devices we call cell phone, the fruit of restless work, where we worship data and information rather the God who is the source of all knowledge.

In the passage for our meditation, Moses pleads with Pharaoh to let the people rest so that they may go into the wilderness to offer sacrifices unto the Lord. I want you to understand that God expects us to exercise this right. He calling you to rest. In the face of oppression. You must rest. In the face of disenfranchisement. You must rest. When the powers that be seek to enslave you, you must rest.

I know some of you are struggling with this concept right now. Rest seems passive. Rest is not resistance. Ahh but that is exactly what it is. The story is told of a young woman, named Rosa Parks. After a long day of work as a seamstress she was sitting on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. The law required her to give up her seat to a white person in accordance with segregation laws. But she was tired. And she decided to rest. Her rest led to her arrest. And her arrest led to the civil rights movement that culminated in the civil rights act of 1964. Rest, is resistance. Her rest transformed America. And God is calling us to rest. On 24 October 1975, Icelandic women went on strike for the day to "demonstrate the indispensable work of women for Iceland's economy and society" and to "protest wage discrepancy and unfair employment practices". It was then publicized domestically as Women's Day Off. Participants, led by women's organizations, did not go to their paid jobs and did not do any housework or child-rearing for the whole day. Ninety percent of Iceland's female population participated in the rest. Iceland's parliament passed a law guaranteeing equal pay the following year. There is real power in Rest. Last year, the Oakwood University Basketball team had to forfeit a playoff game that was scheduled to begin during the Sabbath hours. These young men chose to rest. Their petition to the local athletic association to reschedule the game to a time after the sabbath was denied. Their stand for sabbath rest resulted in an invitation from the governor of Alabama and national publicity for a group of young men taking a stand for their faith. The PARL department for the GC got involved, filed suit and the athletic association settled with the promise to accommodate sabbath rest going forward. God is calling us to rest, then worship.

The Hebrews heeded God's call to rest. They followed Moses out of bondage. They left behind their slave masters, they left behind the land of the Pharaoh, they left behind the God's of Egypt and entered into their rest. They began their

journey to the promise land. But before the journey, they met God at Sinai and rested, physically, and spiritually. I want to you understand that if we are to worship God, we must first rest. Where there is no rest, there can be no worship and where there is no worship there can be no deliverance.

Let's fast forward to this country we call the United States of America. For 246 years enslaved Africans had no rest. In many instances the enslaved Africans worked 6 to 7 days per week. While slavery lasted early Adventist advocated to end slavery by voice, vote and defiance of laws that sought to keep men and women made in God's image in perpetual bondage.

The war to end slavery and the ratification of the 13th amendment was the first step to freedom for those excluded from rest. Following the end of slavery, workers, whether black or white, worked 12 hours per day six days per week. In other words, from sun up to sun down. In many instances children found themselves working long hours in factories and fields across the country. Next, a bloody fight between organized labor and corporate monopolies began. Labor Unions acted by any means necessary to fight for laws that would benefit workers and bring them rest. Their tactics were so bad at times that EGW warned Adventists not to join these movements while at the same time she condemned those corporate, monopolistic powers that would not allow workers to rest. The unions would compel workers to strike against their will and the corporate monopolies who would deny them rest against their will. It was not until the late 1930 when the fair labor standard act was passed limiting work hours to 40 hours per week that many employees got their rest. But that rest did not lead to sabbath worship, it led to leisure. However, by 1950, life expectancy in the US increased from 50 years to 68 years. Today, Loma Linda is a blue zone. The average life span is 89 years for men and 91 for women. It pays to rest. Ironically, it was the advocacy of unions and not the work of the church that finally brought rest to an over-worked and tired nation. Because the laws in the United States now protect rest a new form of unrest has been shipped overseas by Corporate giants like Apple, Microsoft, Amazon and the like where workers are being exploited at factories when they work from sun up to sun down.

This year we celebrate Gerald Groff, an evangelical Christian who believes the Sunday should be devoted to rest, and Alan Reinach, an Adventist attorney who has devoted his life to defending Adventist who seek to rest on God's holy day, the sabbath, for challenging The United States Postal Service and their business partner's decision, in violation of the civil rights Act of 1964 to deny his request to rest on the day he call holy. In doing so, Mr. Groff has brought chance for rest to thousands of Adventists who year lose their jobs on a yearly basis because employers across the nation refuse to grant them rest. This joint stand of a Sabbath keeper and Sunday keeper resulted in a unanimous decision by Supreme Court, both liberal and conservative to affirm the power of rest in an age where corporate pharaohs continue to increase the workload on an exhausted nation and world.

The legacy of slavery continues to haunt our world today and rest remains the battle cry for the oppressed. Our political divisions are largely driven by the fight between these corporate giants and labor. There is a concerted effort to destroy union power, give massive tax cuts to corporate giants deregulate government control over the actions activities that work against the interests of the laborer.

As Adventists, we understand that the final battle in earth's history will be over rest and worship. Our pioneers understood the role this country would play in taking rest from the earth. They concluded that the United States was the land beast of Revelation 13 because of slavery. They understood that the final battle will be over both physical and spiritual rest. They knew that physical rest gives mankind the means to prepare for spiritual rest. They knew that physical rest must first be diminished and when this occurs, spiritual rest would be under attack. With divine insight, Ellen white connected the fight for rest between laborers and corporate powers as leading the societal divisions that would elevate a few men at the expense of the dignity of the masses. In other words, men would gain dominion over each other to the detriment of the nation.

As a consequence, the SDA church predicted that Christians would seek to elevate Sunday, as man's effort give rest while protecting corporate interest. This forced rest would not lead men to worship but would remove freedom of conscience. Men cannot give what only God can ordain. However, our pioneers knew that those faithful to God would defy

the man-made rest for the rest that only God could give, and a final generation would rise and honor God's sabbath and remember him as creator.


Martin Luther King offered these words during the fight for civil rights: "I am tired of fighting; I am tired of fighting for what should have been mine at birth." I am here today to tell you that now is not the time to grow weary, we have got to keep fighting for rest.

In closing, I want us to remember these seven things today:

1. We are made in the image of a creator who made the world in six days, and then rested. He set the example for resting after working. God created the sabbath so that we can rest.
2. Because we are made in the image of the creator, we do not have dominion over each other. Each person, male or female, is equal in God's sight. We have dominion over nature. Consequently, no man or woman has the right or power to take rest from us.
3. God made rest for all mankind and nature. It is the first fundamental right that supersedes the claims of all governments, and corporate interests.
4. We must teach our children to rest and our families should rest together. A family that rests, stays together.
5. If you do not rest, you are a slave. Slavery destroys sabbath rest and the image of God in each human being.
6. Sabbath rest, is the great symbol of liberation for all peoples who find themselves enslaved, be it by chattel slavery, Ecclesiastical dominion or the modern corporate slavery. God calls us to physical rest so that we can worship. Our mission is to bring physical and spiritual rest to world. This is why the early Adventist pioneers fought against slavery and identified the United States as the final beast power that would take rest from the earth.
7. The final battle in earth's history will be over physical rest that will take away spiritual rest and worship. In this final battle, God and those who are faithful to him will be victorious. We must join this fight for rest by resting, preaching, marching, protesting, putting our money where our mouth is. This is our calling. The liberty offering should be the largest offering in each church every year.

Right now, there is a case pending before the Supreme Court, a defining case in the battle for rest where our church and other communities of faith are advocating for the Supreme Court to protect the rest of a postal worker seeking to rest on Sunday. If he wins, we win. Rest is rest. You can't preach the sabbath unless you are willing first to fight for rest. Physical rest precedes spiritual rest. And spiritual rest leads to worship. You cannot worship unless you are at rest. If there is one consistent mission for our church, it is to give rest to the world. Tell an overworked and spiritually deficient world that that has forgotten the creator, that there is a God who wants to give them rest. God is calling us to take and stand for rest, to tell the world about rest, to fight for rest, but most importantly, to rest. When we rest, God will take defeat pharaohs of all kinds, lead us from slavery to freedom, redeem us from physical and spiritual bondage and shall enter in a communion with the God who lead us to the promised land, a city whose maker and builder is God.

As God called the children of Israel out of Egypt, that they might keep His Sabbath, so He calls His people out of Babylon that they may not worship the beast nor his image. The man of sin, who thought to change times and laws, has exalted himself above God by presenting this spurious sabbath to the world; the Christian world has accepted this child of the Papacy, and cradled and nourished it, thus defying God by removing His memorial and setting up a rival sabbath. — Selected Messages, book 3, pp. 405, 406.



Are you ready for Religious Liberty Sabbath?

Tips and Resources for Planning a Religious Liberty Campaign in Your Church

Every year since 1906, when the first issue of *Liberty* magazine rolled off the press, Seventh-day Adventist congregations across North America have come together to support the religious liberty mission of our church. Back then, powerful political voices in America were calling for a national Sunday observance law. In response, Adventists worked tirelessly—and successfully—to call attention to the dangers this law would pose to all people of faith.

Today, the threats to religious freedom may look different but they're just as troubling. Now, more than ever, we need to share our unique, biblical perspective with people of influence in society—lawmakers, judges, community leaders, and leaders of other faiths.

On **Sabbath, January 13, 2024**, a special offering will be collected in the churches of the North American Division to support religious freedom. This is the time each year when the religious liberty work of the church is highlighted in a very special way, and it's a wonderful opportunity to engage the support of church members. The funds raised through this special offering help us to:

- » **Defend religious liberty in the courts.**
- » **Advocate directly with lawmakers in Congress and state capitals.**

- » **Support church members who face religious discrimination in the workplace.**
- » **Send *Liberty* magazine to judges and elected officials across the nation.**

As your church's religious liberty leader, we're grateful to you for carrying this message to church members.

We've assembled this Campaign Kit to make planning a religious liberty campaign in your church as easy as possible. All the resources contained here—plus many more—are also available online at www.religiousliberty.info/campaign.

There are many ways you can plan an effective Religious Liberty Sabbath program.

- 1. Use the sermon included as part of your online resources. You can either use or adapt the written version of the sermon, or simply play the video version.**
- 2. Before the offering is collected, play the short video offering appeal. This year our video tells the story of a tremendous Supreme Court win that has strengthened protections for Sabbathkeepers and other people of faith within America's workplaces.**



**Experiencing religious discrimination? Call the
Religious Liberty Helpline: 877-721-3700**