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“Keeping Time”

Sermon Series: “ Keeping Your Edge”

Sunday, September 30, 2007©

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Scripture Lesson: *Leviticus 23:3*

Do you have the time? Try leaving some for the Lord. Let us pray.

Father God, you are the Author of time and the Maker of our redemption. We pray this morning that by the power of the Holy Spirit you would redeem this time you have given us so that we may be transformed and renewed by it. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In one of my favorite movies—an action movie believe it or not—the hero has a philosophical discussion about the nature of time with the villain. The villain finally says, “Ah, but who has the time. Of course how can we ever have the time, unless we take the time?”¹ It seems like we are taking lots of time these days; time to work, time for sports practice, time for bake sales, garage sales, class trips, community organization fundraisers, church meetings, neighborhood associations, swim lessons, music rehearsal, paying bills, returning e-mails, and the list goes on and on. We are taking lots of time, but it seems like we have less than ever because we are clearly trying to make the most of the time we have.

A couple weeks ago I was driving home along Switzer and I as looked in the car next to me, I saw a lady driving an SUV talking on her cell phone as she held it to her ear. I barely noticed. I probably shouldn't, but I do the same thing all the time. I did take notice when I looked over at her again and she had the cell phone clamped between her ear and

her shoulder, with one hand on the wheel, using her other hand to hold up a travel mug to her lips. This was starting to get a little interesting. I looked over again as we were stopped at the light, and she still had the cell phone clenched between her should and her ear, but now she was holding up a bowl to her mouth and eating from it what appeared to be noodles with a fork. When the light turned green, she quickly dropped the bowl into her lap and slammed down the gas pedal. I have no idea if the noodles stayed in the bowl or not.

Even as we try to make the most of the time we have, we are finding we have less and less. If we ask someone how they are doing, we are just as likely to hear “I'm busy,” rather than “I'm fine, how are you?” Fifty-four percent of people surveyed reported feeling overwhelmed in the last month with work. One in three employees reports being chronically overworked. More people than ever are working while on vacation. Rates for cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and depression—all related to stress—are on the rise. High school students rank “not having enough time with parents” as one of the first things they would change about their life. Colleges report, especially at the more competitive schools, that overscheduled students are arriving at college burnt-out and prone to anxiety, depression and addictions.²

We are taking lots of time and it simply isn't working. We are harvesting the field of our time right up to very edge and we are finding

our crop is not what we want it to be. We shouldn't be surprised at this because Scripture tells us that if we want to have time, we must leave some time for The Lord. *Leviticus 23:3* is just one the many instances in Scripture where we are taught about the Sabbath. "*Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places.*" The whole of Hebrew society was organized around the idea of Sabbath. God wanted to be sure that His people partnered with Him by resting in His strength. Every seventh year was a Sabbath year in which the land was supposed to not be planted. Every fiftieth year was called a year of Jubilee where the land was left unplanted for seven years. The first day of every month was known as the festival of the new moon and there was to be no work on that day either. The Sabbath is taught upon in the Old and New Testament, 144 times. That is more teaching than upon lying, stealing, murder, adultery, coveting and honoring parents.³ And breaking the Sabbath was no mere trifle. In fact the Old Testament tells us a couple of times that the punishment for not keeping the Sabbath was death! There is an episode recounted in *Numbers 15:32-36* that when the Israelites were in the wilderness that a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath. He was caught, brought into the camp, and eventually stoned. Now this sounds harsh, but it does send out a clear message; "*Honor the Sabbath. Respect that God is our partner.*"

Let me give us a definition of Sabbath to work with this morning, and I would like to spend the rest of the sermon working on this. Sabbath is any moment where we rest in God's strength rather than ours. We like to think that we can have the time by taking the time. But the lesson of the Sabbath is that we have the time, by leaving the time for God.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-10 teaches about the folly of being busy: "*What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with.*" I want to spend the rest of the sermon talking about a couple of ways that we are too busy—that we are harvesting our field right up to very edge and taking the time, rather than leaving the moments to rest in God's strength rather than ours.

We are taking the time to seek success. Earlier this year Michael Bloomberg, the millionaire mayor of New York, told the graduating class at the City University of New York the recipe for getting ahead. The Mayor said, "If you're the first one in the morning and the last one to leave at night and you take fewer vacation days and never take a sick day, you will do better than the people who don't do that. It is very simple," he says. He also praised his father, William H. Bloomberg, who the mayor said, "worked seven days a week his entire life until he checked himself into the hospital to die."⁴ But that's not a triumph. That's a tragedy of monumental proportions.

When I was in seminary, I played on a co-ed intramural league flag football team. Just to let you know how good we were, I was our quarterback. I'll let you draw your own conclusions there. Now I am a little competitive—more than just a little. We were in a very tight game, a game we had to win. We were driving the ball down the field, going in for a touchdown. We had all the momentum on our side, their defense was reeling when one of our players called a time out. "Are you injured?" I asked. "No," she said. "I called a timeout so we could pray. I thought we were losing our focus upon God." I remember at the time rolling my eyes and in my intense will to win saying something like "There's no praying in football!" Not one of my better moments as a disciple of Jesus Christ. But right there, at about the 30 yard line, we all joined hands and prayed resting in God's strength rather than ours. And, in case you are curious, I threw an interception two plays later. Now I would rather honor God and fail rather than fail to honor God.

There is of course nothing wrong with working hard and having success. God wants us to work hard for His glory. But the real danger is that we may work so hard that we forget that the LORD is our partner and that He is the author of our success.

Rather than taking the time to seek success, we should leave the time for the LORD to give us glory. I know some of you who are taking the Crown Classes actually memorized this verse this week. *1 Chronicles 29:11-12* "*Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens*

and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all." Success, power, might, strength, greatness, glory, victory, majesty—all those things which our human heart craves—they all belong to the LORD. They are all His to distribute at His good pleasure. Scripture tells us, time and time again, that God loves to give gifts to His children. *Luke 12:32, "Fear not little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* How much more likely are we to receive if we leave time for the LORD to give us the glory rather than taking the time to seek success?

Another way we take the time is we saturate every second with something. There is a commercial I've seen a few times in the last week which has caught my attention. In it an older man sits on the couch trying to talk a younger man. This younger man has a laptop computer on his lap, a phone clenched between his ear and shoulder talking to someone, and he is watching TV. The older man tries several times to get his attention but succeeds only in becoming angrier and more frustrated. Finally a woman enters the room and says "You can't reach him, he's "televisaphonnetting." The older man tries a couple more times to penetrate the "televisaphonnetting" barriers, even knocking on his head with his fist, but with no success. What a metaphor for our life today—except the one Who desperately desires to get through to us is God. We won't get very far in our partnership with God if every second is so saturated with something that we can't hear what He has to say.

Most of us have to actually work hard if we want to unplug from the world. We have to actually go somewhere if we want to be in a place where we can't be reached on a cell phone or can't watch TV, listen to the radio, surf the internet or check our e-mail. A lot of us have become addicted to that kind of stimulation. Every year Webster's Dictionary names a new word of the year. Their new word of 2006 was "Crackberry." Some of you will start immediately laughing. "Crackberry" is the slang for a "Blackberry" or any other personal data assistant or handheld device that lets you check e-mail, internet,

schedule meetings, and make phone calls. The joke is it is as addictive as "Crack." I have just had one of these for eight months and I find myself reaching for it instinctively whenever it goes off. Why is it so addictive? Every time it rings, dings or buzzes, someone somewhere needs you for something right now—validating and enforcing that greatest of human needs, to be indispensable to someone.

And for this we pay a price. When we saturate every second with something, we don't leave time for the Lord to speak to our spirit. *Psalm 46:10* tells us, "*Be still and know that I am God.*" St. Augustine said, "*The true Sabbath consists in tranquility of heart.*"⁵ Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God and we can only find our rest in God by leaving the time to be still and know Him.

God made time. He made time to be the fabric of our life and the marker of our priorities and our heart. It is the great leveler. Unlike money or opportunity or intelligence or talent and ability we are each given the same amount of time each day to choose how to spend. God's intent is for us to spend that time resting in His strength. When we saturate every second with something, when we live a "televisaphonasurfing" lifestyle, when we never get still and get quiet for Him to speak to our spirit, we can never know God in the way He so desperately wants us to know Him.

A lot of us think that getting the most out of our time is a little like getting the last bit of toothpaste out of the tube. If we want to get to that very last drop of paste, we have to wring it out, we have to start at the bottom and roll it up nice and tight. We do this with our time by scheduling every moment, planning as many activities as we possibly can, being as productive as we can be, multi-tasking every moment so that when we do get to a moment of rest we simply collapse into it. But it just doesn't work that way. We don't wring out our time doing that—instead we wring out ourselves, becoming empty and spent. And it is often too late when we find out our strategy has failed.

An old man who lived alone was cleaning out his attic in preparation for a move. Rifling through the old boxes he spent more time recalling faded memories than thinning out his bunches and bunches

of stuff. The yellowed photos, dusty toys, old clothes, and even ancient smells brought back the years gone by with startling efficiency. After a time he came across a warped and dusty diary which his now distant son had kept when he was eight years old. The man had worked hard in his life to provide a good living and a good future for his family. The flipside was, however, that his life was filled to the brim with things to do. He had made harvesting his field right up to the edge a matter of personal pride. He was always busy and rarely had the time for little things, like rest and enjoying time with his wife and children. He told himself it was his first job to provide for his family, and he did. His children had all gone to good colleges and made successes of themselves. That success had taken them far away from home and the phone calls and visits had grown quite infrequent over the years. The old man took his son's diary and began leafing through the pages. And once again he heard the voice—not of his son the polished corporate attorney, but of a nine-year-old boy full of innocence and wonder. He came across an entry dated, Monday August 18. The boy described a fishing trip to a nearby lake the day before. The old man paused. He remembered it vividly. That trip had been a disaster, he thought. The lake was crowded that day and they couldn't find a place to put their lines in. They had gotten a flat tire on an old lake road and had to walk for six miles to a gas station. They hadn't caught a thing and arrived back at home so late that it caused him to oversleep the next morning and be late for work, nearly costing him an important client. That was the last time he could ever remember going fishing with his son. But as he read his son's diary, he read about the blue water, the big trees, and the worms in bucket, what they did and what they talked about. He read nothing of the struggles of that trip. Even the flat tire had been an adventure. The entry concluded with the words, "Spending the whole day with my Dad was the best day in my life."

Jesus Christ said, "*Man is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man.*" *Mark 2:27* The Sabbath is God's gift to his children. Too many of us are just leaving that gift on the shelf. And one day we may be sorry to discover just how much of God's good plan for our life we have missed by depending on our own strength rather than resting in His.

Do you have the time? Try leaving some for the Lord.

Amen.

¹ This dialogue is from *The Matrix: Reloaded*. It is from a conversation between Neo, Trinity, Morpheus and the Merovingian.

² The facts in this paragraph were gathered from familiesandwork.org

³ This is my own count made utilizing the Bibleworks computer program search function.

⁴ "Bloomberg to Grads: Never Leave the Office," Sara Schaefer Munoz, Wall Street Journal Online, June 21, 2007.

⁵ This commentary is taken from one of Augustine's sermons on *Leviticus 23:3*, source unknown.