

Part 8: Holidays & Retirements

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[0 : 00] Well, please turn with me to Genesis chapter 2, and I'm going to read verses 1 to 3. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Today we are coming to the end of a series that we've been working through over the past couple of months called Good Dreams, Better Certainties. And in this series we've been thinking about two crucial truths.

One is the fact that everybody has dreams. And these are the things that you aim for in life, whether it's the job that you long for, the place you want to live, the holiday that you'd love to have, and we all have things that we dream of.

And these dreams are good. It is good to have dreams that give us joy and purpose and direction. Everyone has dreams, and those dreams are good.

[1 : 05] So that's one big truth we've been emphasizing. But the second big truth is the even more important one, the fact that the gospel gives you certainties. And those certainties are better.

Dreams are maybes, they're hopefuls, they're possibilities. Sometimes they come through, sometimes they don't. But the gospel gives us promises that are guaranteed, they are certain, and they are unlosable.

And the content of those promises is better, even better, than everything that we have dreamt of. So everybody has dreams, those dreams are good.

The gospel gives you certainties, and those certainties are even better. And every week we've been starting from Genesis chapter 1 or chapter 2 in the creation narrative that we have in the opening pages of the Bible.

And the reason we're doing that is because we want to highlight that the dreams that we all have and that the people around us have, even people who don't believe in God and don't read the Bible or think about it at all, the dreams that we all have find their origin in the Bible, and in particular in the biblical doctrine of creation.

[2 : 15] The dreams that we long for are all things that we have been made to pursue. And we've actually been saying throughout the whole series that it's actually only with a biblical worldview that your dreams make sense.

Way back at the start of the series, we said that nobody dreams of finding a reproductive mate. We dream of falling in love. No one dreams of building a den or a nest that preserves you from predators.

We dream of a house that we can call home. And no one dreams of just surviving. We dream of thriving.

We dream of a well-earned rest. We dream of a wonderful holiday. We dream of a secure retirement. Our dreams tell us that as humans we're different. And it's the Bible that explains this magnificently.

We've looked together. We've been looking together at eight dreams. We've done seven of them. We've looked at the dream of a home, a career, a relationship, a family, the dreams of sport, the dreams of wealth, the dreams of health.

[3 : 24] And today we come to our final part, the dream of holidays and retirement. And for all these dreams, our headings have been the same.

We're saying that these dreams are good dreams. They're broken dreams. And the gospel replaces these dreams with better certainties. So in terms of holidays and retirement, first of all, we want to

say that this is a good dream.

We're at the start of the summer holidays. At the moment, schools are closed. Many of you are going away on holidays. Some of you are here on holiday. And I think all of us will agree that holidays are good.

I can still remember so vividly the feeling on the last day of term in June. School's over, six or seven weeks off. No more work, no more classes.

Fantastic. And I'm sure all the children here have dreamed of the summer holidays several times over the past year. For those of you who work, I'm sure many of you have booked a holiday earlier in the year.

[4 : 30] And now you're finally going to enjoy it. Maybe you're already enjoying it. And I'm sure there was moments where you're in the midst of a busy week, dreaming of being on holiday this summer. And alongside the blessings of summer holidays, many of you are enjoying the blessing of retirement.

And for you, you can have six weeks summer holiday and then at the end of it, you don't need to go back to work, which is wonderful. So holidays and retirement are a dream. Everybody agrees.

So you look at the society around us, all around us, people are working incredibly hard to make this dream come true. And so people work each week longing for their next holiday.

And people press on year after year after year in order to clear the mortgage, build up the pension, and one day retire comfortable, secure, and happy.

This is a dream that everybody has. And all of it's a good dream. And all of it finds its origin right at the start of the Bible.

[5 : 36] And that's because both holidays and retirement are part of the bigger dream of rest. And that dream is established in Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis chapter 1, God creates the heavens and the earth.

When that work is complete, as we read in Genesis 2, 1 to 3, God rested. He blessed the Sabbath day, the seventh day, as a day of rest for humanity to enjoy as well.

And so from the very beginning, God has established this pattern of work to be followed by rest.

And our dreams of holiday and of retirement echo that pattern. So when we're in the midst of hard, busy work, we long for the rest and refreshment that comes from holidays and from retirement.

And it's a good dream in lots and lots of ways. I'm just going to very quickly highlight five things.

There's many more things I could highlight, but I just want to pick them out quickly. What do holidays and retirement give us?

Well, one, they give us time. Holidays are a chance to slow down. Retirement, the pace of life eases, and we can step aside from the pressures and busyness of day-to-day life.

[6 : 50] Retirement is the same. Well, at least in theory, retirement should give you more time. I think there's probably many people here who are like, I'm just as busy now that I'm retired. But for some, and certainly there are times when retirement does give us just more time, the pace of life slows down.

Secondly, there's opportunity. And again, this echoes what we see in Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 2, 9, we looked at this before, that the Garden of Eden was a place full of trees that were pleasant to the sight and good for food.

And there's echoes of those two things in the creation all around us. Things that are pleasant to look at, amazing to look at, and things that are wonderful to eat and enjoy.

And holidays are a chance to experience all these things. We can go to different parts of the world. We can see beautiful things and take in just that splendor of creation. Holidays are also a feasting time.

And I mean that in a good way. We can go and we can enjoy foods and meals in a way that we maybe aren't able to in day-to-day life. It's a time to celebrate.

[8 : 00] It's a time of great joy. And in both of these, we can share these blessings with others. And that's one of the beautiful things about a holiday. There's great opportunities. There's also delight.

The time and opportunities that we're given in holidays and in retirement, they all bring moments of great delight. But so holidays are a happy time. And many of our best memories come from being on holiday.

And that can be things that you associate with tastes or experiences or games or even smells. So this is maybe going to sound funny. But you know sometimes farmers spread muck on fields.

So they get all the muck, all the poop from the cows and everything over the winter. They gather it all together. They put it in a tank and they drive through the fields. They spray it everywhere. It stinks.

I love that smell. And do you know why I love that smell? Because it reminds me of being on holiday. Because when we were young, we'd go on holiday to my aunt's house near Aberdeen.

[9 : 04] And that was the smell. You could smell everywhere. And it meant that we were on holiday. I love that smell because it's a holiday smell. And retirement's the same. It's an opportunity to do wonderful things, to enjoy precious, delightful time with the people that you love.

So there's time. There's opportunity. There's delight. There's also protection. And that's a very important principle to recognize. That part of the Sabbath principle established by God in Genesis and applied throughout the Old Testament was in order to protect people and to protect the resources that God had provided.

So people are commanded to rest from their labors. In fact, that's included in the Ten Commandments as highlighted here in Exodus. Twenty, six days shall you labor and do all your work.

The seventh day you shall not do any work. You shall rest. And that didn't just apply to people. It also applied to livestock. You can see it right there. And people who are visiting with you.

It's an opportunity to rest. And then we also see later in the Old Testament that it was that whole principle of protecting yourself through rest was even applied to land.

[10 : 12] So you can see that in Leviticus 25, they're saying for six years you can plant in your fields and gather the fruit from your vineyard. But every seventh year you should let your land rest in order for it to recover, in order to protect it and preserve it.

And it's all reminding us that work can be hard. It can be draining. It can be oppressive. And when we dream of our holidays and of retirement, we're dreaming of being freed from that pressure and we're able to rest safe and secure.

So there's time, there's opportunity, there's delight, there's protection. There's also, fifthly, there's reward. There's a sense in which the rest of a holiday or of retirement is a reward that we aim for at the end of a season that's maybe hard or busy.

And it's a wonderful reward. And again, that's the pattern that you see in the Old Testament. As the people came out of Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

Eventually, they were going to enter into the promised land. And that was a reward, that they would be provided with a place of rest, like at the end of something hard, something better is coming.

[11 : 26] The same language is to use to describe the end of conflict. Entering into the promised land meant that there would be conflict, but eventually there would be rest from all your enemies around you.

So you see in the Old Testament this pattern that there's a hard season followed by rest. Now, our circumstances are different. Mercifully, we are not fighting and we are not wandering like the Israelites were back in the days of the Exodus.

But the same principle applies. That rest, the rest that comes in holidays or in retirement is a beautiful reward that comes at the end of a hard season.

Now, there's loads more that we could say about this. The big point is that holidays are brilliant. Retirement is a great blessing. And everything that we dream of in these things, everything that we dream of in terms of holidays and retirement, finds its origin in the beautiful principle of Sabbath rest that God established right at the very beginning.

The dream of holiday and retirement is a good dream. Now, as we recognize that biblical truth, how do we apply it? Well, the answer, I think, is summed up in one word.

[12 : 40] Enjoy. So enjoy your holidays. So many of you have worked hard at school for weeks and weeks and weeks.

And many of you are working, working, working hard day by day. And for many of you, the summer will give just an opportunity for a holiday. Enjoy it.

And remember that God delights for you to enjoy the wonderful gifts that he's given us in the world around us. Holidays are something to enjoy. And likewise, retirement.

Many of you have worked and worked and worked for decades. And now you're retired. Enjoy every day. Wake up every day thankful that you have this space and time in your life.

Enjoy it. These are good dreams. This is a wonderful gift from the Lord. But like all the other dreams, the dream of holiday and retirement is also a broken dream.

[13 : 41] And again, there's lots that we could say here. I just want to highlight two things. I want to say that the dreams of holiday and retirement are very often not as good as we hoped they would be.

And they are always not as long as we wished. So often they're not as good as we hoped. So holidays and retirement can actually be disappointing.

So sometimes you're waiting and waiting and looking forward to this holiday. And then it doesn't go very well. And the pictures in the brochure and the reality don't line up.

And for people who come on holiday to Lewis, you look at holiday brochures. Nobody prints a holiday brochure with rain in it. And yet there's a pretty high chance that's what you're going to get when you come here. And I mean, often people are brilliant because they make the best of that. But often things don't align. And other times, you know, any of you who have gone on a long flight with toddlers, not a holiday. And sometimes it can be hard work.

[14 : 43] And likewise, retirement can sometimes actually leave you feeling a bit empty. And so, you know, all of a sudden you kind of lose your sense of purpose.

And your motivation kind of diminishes. And your energy evaporates. And you go from being a really important part of your team at work to being retired.

And the kind of irony of it is that having spent a lifetime working, you can actually be left feeling a bit useless. And that's not as good as you thought it would be.

Holidays and retirement can also be a bit boring. And boredom is a massive problem in our society today. And holidays and retirement can exacerbate this problem.

And so, although God establishes work, establishes rest, that's always alongside the creation ordinance of work. So that work and rest go hand in hand, side by side.

[15 : 45] And holidays can be a very welcome break. But sometimes they can quickly become boring. That can be true for children. That can be true for grown-ups. I remember, you know, first week of the summer holidays when you finish school, amazing.

You're not going to school. But very often the last week was just a bit boring. You can't have done everything that you'd wanted to do. And you're just like, well, I've got to go back to school. And it was never quite as good.

The last week was never as good as the first week. And that can be true for children. It can be true for grown-ups. And retirement can be even worse.

And it can be extremely confusing. Because the thing that you spent your whole life working for actually ends up being a bit dull. And you're like, I don't quite know what to do with myself. And so holidays and retirement can be disappointing.

They can be boring. Most seriously of all, holidays and retirement are a broken dream. Because they can be avenues through which sin creeps into our lives.

[16 : 42] So holidays can be the time when our self-control slips. And that's something you see very often with people. Whether that's to do with drinking, to do with sex, to do with gambling. Or even with our temper, we fall out with our family or with our friends.

And so the holiday that was meant to be a dream come true actually becomes a time of deep regret. Retirement also can be dangerous. So sometimes it can make us, it maybe has the danger of making us a bit lazy.

That we, you know, we retire from work, we retire from everything. And we just become very, very passive. But on the other hand, retirement can also devalue the older generation. Because instead of the older generation being respected and valued as they have generally been throughout the whole of history, we can tend to think, oh, well, they're retired.

They're past it. They're out of touch. They're irrelevant. And so sin is creeping into our lives. And the principle of honoring our father and mother, of honoring the generation before us, is actually being ignored and sometimes being rebelled against.

And most dangerous of all, we have to recognize that in both holidays and in retirement, there's the danger of idolatry. And so in our dreams of holiday and in our dreams of retirement, what are we often doing?

[18 : 03] We're trying to make our own heaven on earth. We're trying to make everything that we just dreamed for them to be. And when that happens, then our holidays or our retirement becomes

our idol.

It becomes the thing that we live for. It becomes the thing that we are convinced will make us happy. And it becomes the thing that we will sacrifice our lives in order to have. And when that starts happening, then it's become our idol.

And every idol will ultimately disappoint us. It's a broken dream because very often it's not as good as we hoped. But it's also a broken dream because it's not as long as we wished.

And in a way, that's obvious. Holidays are over all too quickly. You spend weeks waiting to go away on holiday and you're away for a week and it's gone. Back to work. And retirement, obviously, is longer, but it's still just the tail end of our lives.

And for some people, that turns out to be very short. And some people never reach it at all. And the shortness of holidays and retirement is just another example of how all of the dreams we're highlighting in this series are temporary.

[19:14] They're always temporary. Even if we get them, we soon lose them. But there's another very important aspect of the shortness of holidays and retirement that we need to recognize and think about.

If we are dreaming of holidays and retirement, and if that's the thing that we are really focusing on living for, then there's a massive danger that we are wishing away the majority of our lives.

And so if the weekend is all you really enjoy in a week, and if annual leave is all you really look forward to in a year, and if retirement is all you're really aiming for in a lifetime, then that means that the majority of your life is being wished away and squandered.

You're wishing away one of your greatest and most precious assets. And there are many, many people who are doing this. And all of it's highlighting how easy it is to have a distorted perspective on our life and on our dreams.

We can see holidays and retirement as the key to happiness. And yet all too often, it's not as good as we hoped. And our longing for this short season in life actually means that the bulk of our life becomes a burden that we wish would go away.

[20:42] And one of the great messages of the gospel is that it doesn't have to be like that. And that's because the gospel replaces these themes with better certainties.

And that's very true when it comes to holidays and retirement. The gospel offers us a much, much better certainty. And this is brought before us in a remarkable way in Hebrews chapter 4, verses 1 to 5.

This is a fascinating chapter that we read because it's a New Testament chapter that is unpacking an Old Testament psalm that is referring to the exodus that came long before the psalm that's echoing the Garden of Eden at the very beginning.

And all the way through, it's pointing us to Jesus. And it all focuses us on the theme of rest. So at the start of Psalm 95, which is the psalm that gets referred to in this passage, there's a beautiful call to come and worship God.

We sang that at the start of our service. We often sing that at the start of our service. It's God calling us to come and worship Him. But then the second half of the psalm, the bit that we sang in our third praise item, is issuing a warning to the Israelites not to make the same mistake as those who came out of Egypt.

[22:09] So if we remind ourselves what happened, Israel came out of Egypt. And not long after they came out, there was a couple of occasions, one in Exodus 17, where they had no water and they were grumbling at the Lord.

They were saying, why did you take us out of Egypt? We would be better to go back. And there's this rebellion against the God who's just delivered them.

And this took place at the places that came to be known as Massa and Meribah that get referred to in the psalm as well. There was a shortage of water. The people grumbled at Moses.

They doubted God and they resented the fact that they'd been taken out of Egypt. And the outcome of it was that that generation didn't enter the Promised Land. They wandered for 40 years. And it was the generation after them that came to enter the land.

Hebrews 3 and 4 is picking up all of this. And it's using it as an example to warn the readers of Hebrews not to turn back from following Jesus just because things are getting difficult.

[23:21] And there's lots and lots of things to think about in this passage. I just want to highlight one of the big points that's being made. And the big point that's being made is that the Israelites are

struggling in the Exodus.

There's no water. There's no water. The Hebrews, the readers of this letter to the Hebrews, they're struggling because they've been persecuted for their faith. And so instead of them all finding rest and comfort in Jesus, they're actually finding that it's hard going.

But the great message that's been said here is that the ultimate resting place is not the Promised Land. And it's not the moment right now experienced by the New Testament church when the letter to the Hebrews was being read.

The ultimate resting place lies in the future, in the new creation that God has promised. So the Promised Land was not the ultimate resting place. And Psalm 95 expresses that very, very clearly because David, who wrote the Psalm, was in the Promised Land.

And he'd got it, and yet he knew this is not the ultimate promise. This is not the ultimate resting place. And so it's constantly pointing them forward to keep pressing on, to keep trusting the Lord, because the great promised rest of God still lies in the future.

[24 : 47] So for the Israelites leaving Egypt, for David writing the Psalm, for the readers of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, for us today, the ultimate promise of rest lies in the future.

And that's what verse 9 highlights so powerfully. There is a Sabbath rest for the people of God that strive to enter that rest. It's all pointing to the ultimate resting place that lies ahead of us in the new creation.

All of this is pointing us to the fact that in the Gospel, God is wanting to give every single one of us a resting place from all the burden and struggle and sorrow and pain of sin.

The great promise that the Gospel contains is that ultimately, that in the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, we will have a permanent, beautiful resting place.

And one of the images that Scripture uses to capture that is the phrase, lie down. You see this two or three times in Scripture. It's related to the image of a shepherd and a flock, and there's this language of lying down that speaks very powerfully of this.

[26 : 11] So Ezekiel 34, 14 to 15, this is God's promise that He's going to come and shepherd His people. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land.

They shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord.

And then Psalm 23 captures it very powerfully. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me by still waters. Now I want you to think about that image of lying down, because it's a beautiful image of rest, and security, and peace.

And it's an image that we must never forget. And it's pointing us to two things that really are sitting side by side in Scripture in terms of our journey of faith for all of us.

At the one level, Scripture speaks a lot of journey language. So when it talks about following Jesus, you'll often hear the language of walking. So here's lots of examples. Galatians, Colossians, 1 John.

[27 : 18] Walking by faith, walking in the light, walking by the Spirit, walking in Jesus. There's that journey language we're heading towards that destination. And that's incredibly important for us to remember.

But alongside that, there's the imagery of lying down. And we see that in Ezekiel. We see that in Psalm 23. And I think there's two really instructive aspects to this.

At one level, this imagery of lying down is teaching us about where we're going. that in the promised new creation, we will lie down and rest.

And everything that pressures us and exhausts us and burdens us and beats us down will be gone. And so at the destination, we lie down.

But the other thing that's incredibly important to remember is that actually lying down doesn't just apply to the destination. It also applies to the starting point.

[28 : 19] Because yes, we go on a journey as we follow Jesus. But we start that journey how? We start it by lying down in His arms and resting in Him.

And so lying down is incredibly important because it's pointing to us about where we're going but it's also teaching us about how we get there. We get there by lying in Jesus, by receiving and resting on Him in faith.

In other words, by putting our trust in Him. In other words, what I mean is this. To start following Jesus, you don't work hard enough to be good enough for Him. To start following Jesus, you just lie down in His arms and you rest in everything that He has done. Maybe we can say it like this, that in a Christian life, there's both pilgrimage and pasture. There's pilgrimage and that we're on a journey. Jesus is leading us. We follow Him. But there's also pasture. As we lean on Him from day one, we're nourished by Him week by week as we follow Him and we look forward to the pastures of paradise in the new creation.

[29 : 31] And it's all reminding us that Jesus has come. He has come to conquer everything that robs us of rest.

And He's come to provide everything that makes rest beautiful. And all of this, all of this is pointing us to everything that the gospel is promising us. And so, think about your holidays and think about your retirement. I don't know what your dream holiday is. My dream holiday is skiing. I love skiing. And so, you go to the Alps and you're standing there and it's just utterly spectacular. like you see this glistening white snow, blue sky, incredible scenery and it's also great fun because you go to the top of the hill and you fly down and it's awesome. It is just great fun. So, that dream holiday, it's like picturesque beauty that I cannot describe and loads of just great, amazing fun, laughter, joy, excitement.

[30 : 38] Do you know what that's a glimpse of? It's a glimpse of heaven. where the glory of what you see will be breathtaking and the joy and excitement and fun that you have will be unforgettable. Now, your dream holiday might be different from mine but whatever your dream holiday is, it's going to be a glimpse of that. Maybe your dream holiday is warmth. You think of the warmth of the sun shining on you. Well, in heaven, we will enjoy just the radiant beauty of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ that the sun, the warmth of the sun is just a glimpse of. Maybe you love to feast and to enjoy food and being around the table and laughing together. Heaven is the great heavenly banquet, the marriage supper of the Lamb. All of these things are just a glimpse. They're just a beautiful, amazing glimpse. And when you dream of retirement, maybe you dream of just no more pressure, no more hassle, no more grief, no more people hounding you for stuff, no more feeling drained, no more feeling undervalued, no more feeling confrontational with people who are difficult. Maybe you just long for a break for all of that. There's none of that in heaven. None of it in heaven. Instead, there's just the warmth and joy and beauty of a sinless family together.

[32 : 04] Not because we're not sinners but because our sins have been washed away by Jesus and we can cherish the amazing moments that we can share.

In other words, what am I saying? That if you follow Jesus, he's promising you everything that you dream of in your holidays and in your retirement except there's two massive differences. It's better and it's forever. It's better and it's forever. God. And that is how good the gospel is. That's how amazingly generous Jesus is. And that's what you're turning down if you say it's not for me.

As always, I've run out of time. There's a few other things I was going to say but I want to just get on to my last point which really is a conclusion for the whole series.

[33 : 08] Have you been thinking about your dreams? And maybe if you haven't, I want you, if you've only been here for the series today, that's totally fine. I just want you to think about your dreams. Think about the things you dream of in your life.

And I want you to see that it is the gospel that makes sense of these dreams. We have dreams like this because of the way that God has made us. An atheistic, naturalistic worldview does not explain the dreams of home, career, relationship, family, sport, wealth, health, holidays and retirement. It does not explain these things. The gospel does. And so if you want to know whether the Bible has any relevance in your life, if you want to know if the gospel can do anything for you, if you want to know if any of this really matters, you do not need to think about your philosophical principles or your religious convictions. You need to think about your dreams. All of them are pointing you to Jesus. and with Jesus all of them will be even better.

[34 : 23] So please go and pursue your dreams. They're good dreams. But never forget, never forget that the gospel replaces these dreams with far, far better dreams.