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Scripture

Jeremiah 17:19–27

¹⁹Thus said the LORD to me: Go and stand in the People's Gate, by which the kings of Judah enter and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, ²⁰and say to them: Hear the word of the LORD, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. ²¹Thus says the LORD: For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. ²²And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the sabbath or do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your ancestors. ²³Yet they did not listen or incline their ear; they stiffened their necks and would not hear or receive instruction. ²⁴But if you listen to me, says the LORD, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but keep the sabbath day holy and do no work on it, ²⁵then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall be inhabited forever. ²⁶And people shall come from the towns of Judah and the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the LORD. ²⁷But if you do not listen to me, to keep the sabbath day holy, and to carry in no burden through the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates; it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.

Devotional

Sabbath keeping is a tricky topic. For some, it conjures up images of, dare we say, puritanical types fixated on the “don'ts.” For others, sabbath equals self-care, “me time” for whatever is most gratifying. For many more, sabbath keeping never crosses their minds—it's an ancient ceremony irrelevant for Christians today, especially the really busy ones. This is too bad.

In Jeremiah's day God was serious about sabbath. Even Jesus' corrective regarding keeping the Sabbath did not retract a gift he linked to his reign (Mark 2). Indeed, the gift *is* his reign: God is God, so we don't need to be. That is the real burden Judah needed to leave at the gates. It is why God invites us to reorder our time—that our worship, rest, and compassion might point beyond “me” to the one upon whom everything depends. Our exertions are not that important. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Lord of the Sabbath, in our ever-busy lives show us the limits of our constant striving to remake, redeem, and renew ourselves. Teach us during this Lenten season to repent even of our self-denial if this ever becomes a substitute for trusting you with our past, present, and future. Amen.