

# OpenTheo

## Sunday (with Jack Franicevich)

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### Alastair Roberts

Jack Franicevich, a deacon and curate at Cornerstone Valparaiso and adjunct professor of writing at Valparaiso University, joins me to discuss his new book, 'Sunday' (<https://athanasiuspress.org/products/sunday-keeping-christian-time>). We talk about the scriptural teaching concerning the Sabbath, and how it relates to and can inform Christian understandings of Sunday, and of time more generally.

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## Transcript

Hello and welcome. I'm joined today by a friend who has written a book called Sunday. Jack Franicevich is a deacon and curate at Cornerstone Valparaiso, and adjunct professor of writing at the university there.

Thank you so much for joining me. Thanks for having me, Alastair. First of all, why did you choose to write on the subject of Sunday? Well, the short answer is I'm training to become a priest in the Anglican Church, and one of the main things you do there is call people to worship on Sundays.

So I wanted to figure out what Sunday meant, how it relates to the Bible, and what more besides the last chapter of each gospel and some scattered references to the Lord's Day in the New Testament we could draw from to imaginatively and appreciatively

understand what Sunday means in Scripture. So it seems that in considering Sunday, we're almost automatically drawn into an investigation of time more generally. What can you say about the way that the consideration of Sunday relates to a broader consideration of what time is for Christians? Yeah.

Time gets a lot more attention in the Old Testament. I was drawn originally to a study of the Sabbath a number of years ago, and then of Israel's festival calendar, Leviticus 23 and 25, sometime after that. And Alastair, you know that I wrote a paper actually under your supervision with the Theopolis Institute.

We love their Fellows Program. I was a happy fellow there. But there's a sad moment looking at the Old Testament's beautiful and complex and theologically rich configuration of time and realize that Israel's calendar is not the church's calendar.

And although there are relationships between them, they aren't quite the same thing. Some overly simple responses to this discrepancy are to say that time was sacred for Israel and for the church. You know, every moment is holy.

But as the prophet's syndrome from the Incredibles says, if every moment is holy, then no moment is holy. So I felt, as an heir of the shorter Testament, the New Testament, what can we get from the Old Testament that endures? Is there a kind of a theology of time, a sanctity of time that remains relevant for Christians? I think the first departure point that maybe should steer me again after this, the Leviticus gives Israel a brand new social imagination after they've just been released from slavery in Egypt. And I come to appreciate Israel as a recently traumatized, but a long traumatized nation has been persisting and enduring in an oppressive, enslaved state and now comes out and has to order a new social life from scratch.

How do you have property? How do you have neighbors? What does it mean to love your neighbor? How do you manage people well and justly steward positions of authority? And issues like the sanctity of time, the sacredness of time, are related to justice concerns and economics concerns and rehabilitation concerns. And it seems important that as the Church, as those who are freed from the power of death, we ought to be rehabilitated in some other kind of way to see the rhythms of time as working toward our redemption and not just there. So when we're thinking about Sabbath or Sunday, part of what we're reflecting upon is the relationship between the six days and the one day.

When we talk about the weekend, for instance, we often think about it merely in terms of time to recharge, where the time of the weekend or the time of Sunday is considered under the principle of work. It's there to enable us to get back to work again, rejuvenated in our energies. And yet Sabbath seems to suggest something more than that.

It's not just rebooting for the sake of work. It's something that stands over against work in various ways. Can you speak a bit to the way that Sabbath and the days of work, how

they relate to each other? Yeah, much of what there is to say about this is fairly evident and has already been said by people before me and better than me.

But one of the insights that sparked this book was the way in which the Sabbath command addresses those who are in charge of work. Peter Lighthouse had pointed out that the Sabbath command is given in the masculine singular, addressed to one particular person rather than to a collective. And that person who's told, you shall do no work, is then told you or your children or your servants or your animals, the foreigner in your midst.

And it becomes clear by the end of the commandment that this address not just to a human being, but addressed to the head of a household, the one who can tell himself and also those under his care when it's time for work or not. And so the Sabbath command in Exodus has two immediate meanings. The first is you do no work and you also give rest to those who you cause to have to work.

And so it is addressed to heads of household, to middle managers, to teachers, to deans, to those who set work schedules and beyond that. So I think that if you start looking at the Sabbath from Exodus rather than say from Genesis, the vision for the Sabbath becomes a way of participating in the Lord's household that is in contrast to Pharaoh's household. The Lord treats us in ways that Pharaoh doesn't.

And Pharaoh had treated us in ways that the Lord never would or never will. So one, I suppose, newer contribution I'm trying to make is to say that it judges both the work that we do and the work that others make us do, or on the converse, the work that we make others do. When it's given to us in the context of the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath commandment is related to the original creation week, the context of Genesis 1 to 2, where it's the Lord's pattern of labor, as it were, that sets the pattern for human labor.

What do we learn about the Sabbath from its first occurrence within Scripture in the context of creation? In Genesis 1 and 2, we get a picture of a world in which God is the primary authority and he fills all and is in all things. When he's in charge of all of the acts of world building, all of the acts of creating a space and causing flourishing to happen, this is the way that he behaves. God himself rests, he identifies his work is finished, and he blesses the time itself.

It's a very uncomplex world and it's one that we look back to nostalgically. We look at the garden and long for what that life was that we've never experienced personally. It also projects forward to a world in which the heavens descend to the earth and God is effectively all in all.

He rules us again according to the same kind of pattern. One thing it does is it connects, well, it focuses the concept of work on world building, which I really think is there in both Genesis and in Exodus. Genesis 1 describes God not simply doing work or going to his

job, but building a world according to his vision.

In Exodus, there's the same kind of thing with Pharaoh. It opens with Pharaoh building a world, according to his vision, although with less materials and less divinity than God. It describes the kind of rest that we receive and the kind of work from which we rest as the work of world building, either building Pharaoh's world or building God's in some way.

I think it helps us understand or more deeply appreciate descriptions of work and rest given by, for example, Jesus in the New Testament or Saint Paul in the New Testament, who described similar kinds of labor and fruitfulness in doing the work of God. They are also world building, not building the city into which they were born, but building the kingdom of God, building the kingdom of heaven as it's given them to do. So as we look through Genesis 1 to 2, there seems to be implicit within the text a sort of vision of time.

You start off with the rhythm of evening and morning, the day and the night, the condition of the light and the condition of the darkness. Then on day four, the central day, you have the establishment of the lights and the heavens to elaborate that principle of light and darkness, ruling over the day and the night. Then you have furthermore on the final day, book-ending the whole creation week with the first, this day of rest.

So even there we have something of a structure for time going forward, not just that week, but that week provides an archetype for all later weeks and also a structure that will be the basic setting up of a beat and the setting up of a sort of phrase that will continually repeat. It seems to me that that is a very important part of the burden of the text as we go through the book of Exodus. I think that's elaborated in various ways, but it does seem to me that when we're dealing with the creation pattern, the importance of the week, it really stands out.

One of the things that is interesting to me is the question of, is there any natural grounding for this principle of the week? Why is it that the pattern of seven days, the pattern of the week, the pattern of the Sabbath is so foundational for our social life still? That's a question that I found pretty much zero scholars very helpful on as I read through in my research. The week really does stand out as a non-discernable unit of time. The way that a day is discerned and a month is discerned and a year is discerned based on solar and lunar cycles, those are so immediately given.

The week is not. The week is given by revelation in some ways. One thread I've tugged on a little bit that's interesting is that even Israel, when they would reckon a week in their calendars, their week could fluctuate between seven and eight days in the ancient world because their decision was to split one month, which as we know isn't exactly 30 days, but depending on the time of year is roughly 29 point something days.

They would divide their month into four weeks because it was useful for them to have a quartered up concept of the month, which shows the tension between what could you

call the theological or religious ideal of imitating God's seven day week and also the asymmetrical reality of having a not quite 28 day, more than that month. You can maybe even see it as an extra sabbatical principle. There is something of the leftover character of the seventh day.

You have the complete structure of the six days of labor that are very symmetrical, the three and three, and then you have this remainder, the remainder that is the day of rest. So that there might be other remainder periods, might be a continuation of that principle or expansion of it into other units of time. It seems like there's something there.

I can't put my finger on it. Do you have any hypotheses or theories, Alistair? I'm not sure. It's an interesting question.

Of course, there have been various ways of relating it to the seven celestial bodies and other theories that have been put forth. I know other people who are working on this question. It's a very interesting one.

If anyone has good answers to it, I'd love to hear them. In the context of the Exodus, we have the gift of the Sabbath as a covenant sign. The way it's described at the end of chapter 31 is very similar to the covenant sign of circumcision, as we see it in Genesis 17.

Could you maybe speak a bit about the way that the Sabbath functions within the covenant of Sinai? What is it about the Sabbath that sums up the events of the Exodus such that it could be seen as a fitting sign of the whole covenant? Yeah, I know you've written some of this yourself, Alistair, and maybe a little bit more than I have. But from my angle, focusing on the book of Exodus, as I have, the Sabbath is a distinct social principle from the social principle of Egypt. If you go behind the text or if you're engaged in other Near Eastern studies, data has surfaced saying that the Akkadians, possibly, and the Ugaritts also had some kind of seven-day rest cycle.

There's speculation about where that came from, whether they copy Israel, whether they came to it themselves, dividing up the month into four periods also. But by my read, the heart of the Sabbath in Exodus is that you no longer work for Pharaoh building his world, but now you work for the Lord building his. And the Lord, unlike Pharaoh, is one who's sufficient unto himself to finish his work and to bless it and sanctify it and, in effect, rest for all of his agents, those who work underneath them, everything he calls to fruitfulness, whether it be the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the grass that grasses out, or the humans themselves.

God does the work of making fruitfulness happen, and they need not override that time or anxiously put work where rest belongs. Do what Paul calls submitting, once again, to a yoke of slavery, which he does in a, what we'd call it, a metaphorical way or a spiritual way, when we have the concrete story of human-on-human slavery in Exodus, to break

the Sabbath, either by doing work on your own or breaking the Sabbath by causing others in your power to do more work, is to, what's that word, bottleneck the work of the Lord or circumvent his timeline. I do find it fascinating looking through the books of the Pentateuch and even into Joshua to see the many ways the principle of Sabbath plays out.

And one of the areas where you do discuss the principle of the Sabbath is within the festal calendar of Leviticus 23. Could you speak a bit about the importance of the festal calendar, the relationship of the festal calendar to the underlying principle of Sabbath, and the ways in which that principle is refracted in these various feasts? What is it about the Sabbath that we can see from the manifold forms that these feasts take? Yeah, the Pentateuch is not strictly Sabbatarian in the way that some Christian traditions prioritize the Lord's Day over and against what we could call annual holidays. It begins with the Sabbath as the seventh day, and that's the sign, but the sign itself is embedded into a whole calendar that reckons the year and the seven-year cycle and the 49 and 50-year cycles as theologically and socially significant units of time.

And it seems that in Leviticus, the Lord is starting a new nation from scratch, and to start a new nation from scratch requires giving them reckoning units of space and time. My mind's going lots of different directions here, but for them to mark their their seeding and harvest times as not just times where certain work is required, but certain kinds of commemorations of the Lord's done for them to bring them out of the place that they came from, I think there's some things that are fairly clear about it. In the calendar given in Leviticus 23, every seventh day is a Sabbath.

The calendar goes on to describe seven particular holidays or units of festal time. It gives a seventh year as a Sabbath year for rest. Every seven-sevenths of year, the Jubilee comes.

The feasts that are longer than one day are seven days long, plus one. Maybe that leftover or remainder element comes into play there. There is a way of conceiving of unleavened bread and the Feast of Tabernacles as seven-day feasts, but also as eight-day feasts that have two Sabbaths.

In addition to having a holiday that takes 49 years to count up to, they have a holiday that takes 49 days to count up to, the Feast of Firstfruits. Yes, the Feast of Firstfruits begins a 49-day count, the 50th day, which is Pentecost. Israel's seventh month itself contains the majority of their feasts.

And so whether it's the use of the number seven, the reckoning of holy time, or the command to rest and to recall what the Lord has done, all of those themes or aspects are present in the other holidays too. The Sabbath also plays out in various other parts of the material of the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua in relationship to Israel's worship, the space that it occupies, and into social practices such as slavery. Can you speak a bit

about some of the other places beyond the calendar that we see the principle of Sabbath applied? The act of the command is given to keep the Sabbath holy in Exodus 20, Exodus 21, towards the beginning of the Book of the Covenant, an extra special subset of laws within the Pentateuch.

The first law that's given is a manumission law where slaves are manumitted in the seventh year. And the way in which their manumission is described, both in Exodus 21, and when the law is repeated again in the middle of Deuteronomy, I guess either 12 or 15, I believe it's 15, where the manumission law comes back up. The language used to describe the manumission of the slave mirrors, or I mean, I'm talking with Alistair Roberts, so I have to use the word echoes, echoes the theme in Exodus where Pharaoh involuntarily coughs up bread and wine and livestock, the kinds of things that Israel would need both to live on and to offer up sacrifices of their own.

So the manumission of a slave, in the way that it echoes Israel's national manumission from Egypt, becomes a kind of reenactment of the Exodus. A man and his family are sent out from a house of slavery to have a certain kind of liberty, and they're given things to make offerings to God in their new place of residence. And beyond that, in Deuteronomy 15, we have the poor laws and other principles that elaborate Sabbath in the way that you treat those who are in need within the land.

Also in places like Leviticus 23, laws of gleaning would be another way in which you're applying the concern for the poor that the Sabbath really holds forth. Just briefly there, I think the laws of gleaning, I've not thought enough about, but it's that principle of leftover again. And I wonder whether the Sabbath that lasts more than one day as the month goes too long, the idea that after the 49th day, there's the 50th day, after the 49th year, there's a 50th year of extra rest.

Gleaning, leaving over things that could be further divided among those who have, but being instead left for those who have less. There's something there, I'm sure. Maybe one of us will write something about it.

But you were saying? And as we go further into the story, we see various ways in which the Sabbath is an element or the principle of seven. So think of the story of the manor or in the book of Joshua, the way in which the city of Jericho is brought down on the seventh day with seven trumpets blown. And there seems to be something of a principle of Sabbath that's implicit even in those sorts of stories.

And then also I think of the way that the construction of the tabernacle has a Sabbath principle at its heart, where you go through the pattern of the seven days of creation, mapping the aspects of the tabernacle onto the elements of the creation. And you go through that pattern twice over. Can you maybe put together some of the different elements of Sabbath practice that are brought out by these various refracted forms? Or maybe put that differently as we see all these different ways in which the principle of

Sabbath is mentioned in slavery, in the practices of annual feasts and celebrations of the Lord's great work for his people, in the deliverance of the land to the people, in the ways in which they care for the poor in their land, in the way in which they receive daily provision, in the ways in which the Lord establishes a place where he dwells in the midst of them.

Can you maybe putting those things together and give a sense of what is the Sabbath containing as a reality at the heart of Israel's Exodus life? Yeah, I love your read of Joshua, by the way. I hadn't reflected enough on that as I put together my argument in my book. But one way in which it maps on to what I've been thinking about is that the Sabbath in Exodus, the Sabbath law in Exodus 20 explicitly commemorates the Lord who created the world.

And in Deuteronomy, it explicitly commemorates the Lord who redeemed his people, Israel, out of slavery. And papers have been written about whether the Sabbath is more about commemorating creation or commemorating salvation, two things for which the Church thinks. Thanks, God.

One thing that the biblical narrative does is, I think, flesh out all that creation means and all that redemption means. And the way in which the Lord created us is not exhaustively described by Genesis chapters 1 and 2. But his creation of Israel, his creation of the holy people for himself, his creation of the Church is configured by Genesis, and also many mission narratives. And also, in addition to the construction of a garden sanctuary, the construction of a tabernacle, the construction of a temple, even the clearing out of land upon which that temple could be built.

I think we know that where we see the number seven, either as a deep structure in a text or an explicit reference in a text, and especially when it has to do with time. I mean, seven speeches about the tabernacle and different parts of it, seven days to knock down Jericho's fortresses, that links back to answering the question, how does God create that which God creates? And how does God redeem that which he redeems? And so when we commemorate God's work on our celebration of the Sabbath, our celebration is inclusive of all of those things he's done in history, and perhaps all of the things that are analogous to that, that are described in the biblical text, but we can also name as things which God has done. So the biblical narrative gives us a deeply fleshed out picture of how God creates, how God redeems, and the Sabbath is meant to commemorate all of that.

The Sabbath often is mentioned in later parts of the Old Testament, in certain parts of the history, we think about the end of Nehemiah, for instance, or in various parts of the prophets, where neglect of the Sabbath or distortions of practice on the Sabbath, or promises of some sabbatical principle in the future, whether Jubilee or some greater Sabbath, occur in places like the Temple of Ezekiel or elsewhere. Can you maybe discuss



some of the continuing principle in Israel's life, and some of the ways in which the corrections and challenges of Israel for its practice and distortion of Sabbath, clarified the way that the Sabbath principle should be understood? I think I would begin by saying that it's important to keep in mind, and I say it's important to keep in mind because the prophets seem to think it's important to keep in mind, there's a difference between the Sabbath on the ground and the Sabbath as idealized and given, independent to it. In Genesis, it's just God by himself in the garden, and his choice to finish his work and rest seems fairly uncomplicated, there's no adversarial element.

In the command given fairly triumphantly in Exodus, is to say, as God has freed you and given you rest, you also ought to walk in that rest and give that rest to other people. But as civic life, social life becomes complicated, there's all sorts of temptations to exceed God's time, or to overuse the laborers God has given you to steward. And so the prophets, and who I have focused on, to say things like, I hate your Sabbaths.

The first response is, well, yeah, well, because your Sabbaths are Sabbaths in which you rest at the expense of other labor. And those who have are only experiencing the kind of thing that looks like what God gets in the garden, by neglecting the poor among them or using them in some way. Are there any certain prophets you want to talk about? Or are you saying things besides that, that you'd like to highlight? Yeah, I see, for instance, in the prophecy of Ezekiel, there are several references or allusions to the principle of Jubilee.

And you see that even in the design of the temple, the significance of multiples of 50 and various multiples of 50 or 25, half a Jubilee, or seven, even the gates, where you have three chambers on either side, and then one great chamber at the end, it's the principle of Sabbath, where you have the three and the three, and then the crowning seven. And so it seems that even in its presentation of holy space, that holy space is sabbatical. And that promise of this temple is at the same time a promise of God, sabbatically dwelling with his people.

And so I think there are instances like that, that are significant. And also the way that the Sabbath is constantly drawing Israel back to its generative route, the events of the Exodus and the way in which constantly grounding themselves in that will enable them to continue the pattern of life that is essential to their existence as a nation. And so neglect of that is also a national threat, because it puts them at risk of being removed from the land and being cut out from the sabbatical life into which the Lord has brought them.

I would love to hear your thoughts on the way that the Sabbath principle is seen in the Gospels, because the Sabbath is perhaps in the Gospels, more often than not, a cause of controversy. And Jesus is challenged a few points in the Gospel of John, for instance, in Matthew as his disciples go through the grain field and rub the grain to eat it. It seems

that Sabbath is a disputed principle.

And Jesus often seems to, certainly the average reader, to be breaking the Sabbath or somehow to be at odds with the Sabbath. Can you maybe speak a bit to the way that you understand Jesus' Sabbath practice and the disputes concerning Sabbath in the Gospels? Oh yeah. And I'm more excited to talk about it now after hearing your insights on Ezekiel and your mention of Joshua.

I could talk about those first for just a moment before getting to Jesus, because this is really new and really fun. There's a way in which you can't separate sacred time from sacred space. Israel, when they're freed, are supposed to be a generative nation, a wise nation on a mountain that the rest of the nations of the earth would flock to to learn from and to copy.

And that even though the Sabbath is a sign of Israel's covenant with the Lord, it would become a similarly generative principle around the world, as ideally it is done on earth as it is in heaven. And so the hope of Joshua is that as Israel is given their own space, to put it one way, given land in which to en flesh their ideals, or the Lord's ideals rather, that they live up to the moment and their land is full of justice. I think that that's why the ethical commitment to the Sabbath continues.

There really is no other way to describe and to prescribe good negotiation of labor and rest than that. And God doesn't let it go. And the temple has to signify God's righteous reign through his righteous rulers on the earth.

And it's going to take some kind of power from heaven to actually upturn those who are keeping people from rest, whether it's the spiritual forces, unclean spirits, demons, or simply wicked or unjust rulers who act the same way that the unclean spirits and demons do. I notice in the intertestamental literature that the Sabbath is eschatologized. I can't say the word.

Eschatologized. Eschatologized. There it is.

The same way it is in Ezekiel. And Melchizedek emerges as a figure who's going to declare the ultimate Sabbath year, the ultimate jubilee, the ultimate cancellation of all debts, because it's not going to work from the ground up. So it looks.

It's going to have to be from the top down. So the Messiah becomes a big proclaimer of the Sabbath. And all of that, of course, is in the background when Jesus in Luke, for example, proclaims the year of the Lord's favor and appears like that Melchizedekian figure or like the new temple in Ezekiel.

He says, I'm here. This is the time. There will be real manumission, real release of those who are bound, real forgiveness.

It's happening now. And the Gospels do portray Jesus as what looks like a breaker of the Sabbath. So what's really going on? Some people, when they look at Jesus in the Gospels, will point to places where they see him resting by himself on a mountain or going by himself to pray and call that his form of rest.

And there's something there. But all of those stories that describe Jesus doing something on the Sabbath don't show him resting on the Sabbath. That's not what he does.

And that's where the controversy comes from. And I have two thoughts here. One is, I've been reading the books of Maccabees lately, and one of the significant controversies in the Maccabean period is that Israel is being attacked on their holy days, including on the Sabbath, and being caught off guard.

And so Mattathias, who's a fairly conservative keeper of the law, decides that what's more important on the Sabbath is that life is preserved and life is endangered. And so he permits Israel to defend themselves and to take up arms on the Sabbath. That appears to be an innovation.

Israel hasn't been attacked on the Sabbath before, at least not in sacred history. And so it takes a courageous innovation to say, the spirit of the law, if the Sabbath really is made for man, then we have to defend ourselves. And Jesus, in one of his controversies, gives that line.

He asks the question, is it better to save life or to destroy it? And when he gives that line, he's not making it up. He's drawing from the Mattathian tradition. So I think that one answer to those who would say that it appears that Jesus is a breaker or disregarder of the Sabbath, would say he's really just participating in a different tradition of it.

But also some Pharisees contemporary to him also participated in. He just happened to be arguing with ones who were on the other side, who were perhaps more scrupulous and had lost the spirit of the law in that way. And the second thing to say is that Jesus, in his words, describes himself as granting rest on the Sabbath.

As he's healing a woman and he's told not to, or asked if he's aware of the commandment, he says, yes, I'm aware of the commandment, but which of you, if you had a donkey in a ditch, would do something to help them out? And on the face of it, it seems disrespectful that Jesus would compare a woman to a donkey and put them in the same category. Until you remember that the original command in the book of Exodus says, you do no work, you and your daughter and your female servant and your livestock. And so I think that in the Gospels, Jesus sees himself as a head of household.

He's not so over-focused on his own practice of rest, that he's not also concerned with granting rest and proclaiming release to people who are unable to do the rest themselves. One insight I have from Luke, Luke tells seven stories of Jesus doing things

on the Sabbath. And in each of the first three stories, the action verb that's ascribed to Jesus is the verb rebuke.

Jesus rebukes an unclean spirit, he rebukes a demon, and he rebukes an illness. And the consequence of him doing that on the Sabbath is that the people under those powers, who have those powers rebuked, are then released into their own kind of rest. The practice of Sabbath that we talk about in the Old Testament is, and also within the Gospels, is different from Christian practice.

We tend to meet on the first day of the week, on Sunday, your book is called Sunday, we've been talking about Sabbath. And it seems that there's some sort of missing piece. How does all this stuff about Sabbath translate into something that's fruitful for us when we're thinking about Sunday? Yeah, the simple historical fact is that the Edict of Milan includes a rule that the day of worship, the sake of unity, should be on the first day of the week rather than the seventh.

But the historical answer is not very satisfying, or very imaginative, or very deeply connected to Scripture. So much so that there's real movements within the Christian world that would say, we really ought to keep worshipping on the seventh day rather than the first. The real creative proposal of the book, Alice, there is that when Luke describes the first day of the week, as he does it, he's drawing not only on the Sabbath, but also on the Passover, and on the Feast of Firstfruits.

And yeah, I think there's something there. But to talk for a moment about... No, I should backtrack just a second. The day that Jesus rises from the dead, which all the evangelists call the first day of the week, isn't just the first day of the week, but it's the first day of the first week after the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

And in the Levitical calendar, the first day of the first week after the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the Feast of Firstfruits. And so putting it all together, Jesus is raised from the dead on a day that's already considered a holiday, the Feast of Firstfruits. So I think that to understand the significance of us worshipping on that day, it's worth going back and doing a whole other investigation on firstfruits in addition.

I think the first thing to say about the Feast of Firstfruits is the way in which the scriptures describe it as connected with the Feast of Passover. Passover celebrates Israel being freed out of Egypt, and firstfruits celebrates them now having a new land from which to offer the first of its fruits. I think that the clearest place that the scripture does this is in Joshua chapter 5, where Joshua gathers the people, they celebrate a Passover, and the very next day they enjoy the fruits of the land for the first time.

And those two holidays together work as an abridgment of their sense of history. They're able to celebrate what they can celebrate on firstfruits because they remember right before they do everything that they've been freed from. One of my professors in

seminary called it both exodus and the isodus, out of one place and into another.

Passover itself isn't ever meant to stand on its own apart from where Israel is freed into. I think that in Christian parlance we say the same thing. We're set free from something and we're set free for or into something else.

Firstfruits always captured the back end. Would it be the back end? I guess just the second half of the completion of Passover, the real fruitful long-term settled life in a new place. So Sunday, you know, if you have to pick between two halves of a day, we commemorate Jesus' death.

We also commemorate his resurrection. There's a way in which we could make Friday our special day, we could make Saturday our special day, but we mostly emphasize the Sunday part of the story. We commemorate God's act of raising Jesus from the dead.

I think that's the theological significance of shifting the days. Jesus' resurrection is at firstfruits of a new creation the eighth day has been identified as the day of new creation. Yeah, that's where I'd start.

I think that's very naturally related to the rationale given for the Sabbath in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, the first being the creation and the second being the great act of redemption. And so we're defined by a new creation and a new act of redemption, which are both associated with the eighth day or the first day of the week. One book I've found very thought-provoking on some of these questions of time is Patrick Stefan.

He wrote *The Power of Resurrection, Foucault Discipline and Early Christian Resistance*. And one of the things that he's exploring within it is the way in which time and other aspects of spatial distribution, our practices, these sorts of things are means by which power can be exercised upon us and we can be formed as a particular sort of people under certain authorities. And he observes just how important it was for the early church to have a calendar and a practice of time.

And that unified practice of time was one of the means by which the church was formed as distinct people, distinct from the ways of practicing time current among their neighbours and formed into a sort of people that relate to the past, the future and the present time in distinct and distinct ways that are formed by the fact of Christ's resurrection primarily. And so it seems that that disciplining of time continues in the life of the church, whether that's in our weekly celebration as we gather together on a Sunday morning and as we maintain something of a day of rest or in the broader pattern of the church calendar, as we have a sense of a commemoration of acts of God's deliverance and redemption, events associated with Christ's birth, death, resurrection and his ascension and Pentecost. And so I'd be curious to hear some of your thoughts on the way in which that discipline of time can be enriched in the life of the church.

What are some of the ways that we can lean into that disciplining of our time in fuller ways? Yeah, I think we all get this at a gut level as individuals. We want to discipline ourselves according to time. I'll speak for myself.

I am lazier and more procrastinating than I wish that I was. Because I'm not the only personal creative agent in the universe, I can't divide my projects up into six or seven distinct parts and do one per day the way that I see it done in Genesis 1. So there's a way in which I read Genesis 1 and feel frustrated, but only as a way of reminding myself that I'm not the Lord God. I think that pious and devoted Christians have some impulse to do things like set aside a personal quiet time, to set aside a day or a weekend every month or a quarter or so for a personal spiritual retreat.

And this individual impulse, I do think, is harnessed by the church to say, yeah, you know, that's fine for an individual to do, but we also have on offer ways of structuring your experience of the year, your memory, your identity around this one generative moment where God redeems us and newly creates us in the resurrection of Jesus. So speaking now as a I'm a deacon at a small church. And what we try to do is to celebrate more meaningful days.

We make a big deal out of Holy Weekend and Easter. We make a big deal out of Lent and Advent, Christmas, and all 12 days of Christmas. We try to give that holiday all the room that it deserves.

The prophets in Scripture are a clear and realistic witness that it's not all about setting up holidays, but if you don't use them the right way, you don't keep them the right way, they'll become just as sour as everybody else. And you won't be a force of redemption in the world, but a force of oppression. But just the concept that we could either create or receive a sacred calendar invites us to communally disciple ourselves according to the same kind of time.

The last thing this is making me think of right now is, you know, I went to an Anglican seminary. I was a Theopolis fellow. And so as a result, I have a whole handful of friends who are priests and deacons or pastors who are all living by the same church calendar.

And so I see them on Instagram, posting the goose that they're cooking for Michaelmas. And when I see four of my friends cooking a goose for Michaelmas, I get jealous again. What was I doing on Friday, September 29th, that was so important that I couldn't think to drive to Chicago and buy a goose and do the same kind of thing.

But keeping the holidays in a robust and happy way that can celebrate God's work, not just in raising Jesus, but in saving Israel from Egypt, putting them in a new land, doing all the things he's done for us also. I just like the idea of gathering together and forging the counter society of the church that really tries to focus its memory on the fact that God is creating, God is newly creating. And if we don't remember that, we're in danger of

slipping into the same kind of stuck space that everybody else is in.

And I think that sort of practice has the effect of maybe focusing us more upon the great acts of God in history, not just doctrinal ideas. Because every year as we're going through the pattern of the church calendar, our minds are being drawn back to foundational events, not so much just foundational ideas. And that I think gives a more participatory understanding of what it is to be a Christian, that we are participating in the reality brought about in history by our Lord's coming, his death, resurrection, ascension, and the gift of the spirit at Pentecost.

This isn't just a set of doctrinal or moral ideas. It's a life that has been established that we're invited to become participants within. I do wonder also whether there is something very distinct about the Christian practice of leisure, as Sabbath as a sort of leisure.

I was reflecting upon this a week or so ago at a conference in which we were discussing the decline of the liberal arts. And it occurred to me that very few people have leisure as a fixed, leisure in the thicker sense, as a fixed part of their week or their calendar. And yet every single Sunday or Sabbath, there is a principle of leisure that the church upholds, a time that is set apart from practical, narrow practical ends that is designed for meditation, reflection, for celebration, for thanksgiving, for communion with others.

And it seems that in the absence of that, many of the ways in which we are drawn to reflect upon something greater than the immediacy of our circumstances and labour would be cut off to us. It's precisely the gift of the Sabbath that opens our horizon to something beyond the immediacy of our daily labour. Yeah, I'm feeling that in a more acute way this year than before as a writing instructor at a school.

Most of my particular students are commuters, athletes, and or nursing, pre-medical, or engineering students, who are also paying their own way through school. And they all describe the anxiety and the stress and the overwork to get all the work done. And then here I am, two or three hours a week in the classroom with them, trying to invite them to discuss a short story with me.

And discussing a short story is on one level really easy, because you just hear the story and pay attention to it, call out what you notice and wonder about what's going on in the character's lives. And it's so enriching. But it's also so difficult if you can't turn off all of your other responsibilities, real or imagined.

And so I find myself fighting the first few minutes of every class to try to proclaim some kind of edict of rest among the students and say, hey, we have one hour during which you owe nobody anything. You may not use a cell phone, you may not use a laptop, you must bring your physical copy of the text. And I'm just trying to intellectually shake them by the shoulders and will them into enjoying what I get to enjoy as a person who's paid to read stories and discuss them with students.

And it's absolutely true that those who are the least encumbered by outside stressors and are the most able to lean back in their chair and hear a story by Wendell Berry or Flannery O'Connor or whoever it is that day, and just get to enjoy a character, explore their motives and wonder through their motives that what the human heart is and what humanity is and how we are distinct. And so, yeah, it isn't the Sabbath as the legislated one day a week during which reflection happens, but there is this struggle to siphon off certain spaces. And I think that's the wrong word, but to put boundaries around certain times and make them times for reflection and leisure upon things that are of transcendent interest.

And in the classroom, it's not the acts of God, except insofar as thinking about humanity, who's thinking about the creative act of God. In conclusion, I'd love to hear any thoughts that you might have, maybe two or three suggestions on how people listening to this might improve their practice of Sunday. What are some of the things that maybe they could learn from reflecting upon the Old Testament teaching concerning the Sabbath or reflecting upon what Sunday means in the light of Christ's work or reflecting upon a biblical theology of time more generally? How might this cash out in practice? That's a great question to end with.

Let me try two things. I think that most of the teaching that I've received about the Sabbath and most of the popular literature about the Sabbath simply recommends rest or tells people to do it. And in the Gospels, frankly, my favorite thing about Jesus on the Sabbath is that nowhere does he tell people to rest.

What he does is he rebukes the powers that keep them from rest, and he releases them from the bonds that bind them. And it's fleshed out in his teaching as well. I think that I get at this in the book, the language he uses to describe forgiveness ties back to the Sabbath.

The language he uses to describe love of enemies ties back to the Sabbath, especially in the Pentateuch. And so I think that when it comes to improving or honing your own practice of rest on Sunday, the first thing to do is not to look at yourself, but to know that Jesus is one who actively rebukes the powers that oppress us. Once for all, when we dethrone sin and death in a particular way, that the first act of rest is to cry out to Jesus, who in fresh ways leads us into rest.

And it's not simply a practice and imitation of God, but a mercy continually given and on offer by Jesus. And I think that what that turns us into is people also who don't nitpick one another's Sabbath practices, but also learn how to proclaim, release, and to rebuke the untrue thoughts. And Paul says this, and I can never remember his words exactly, but taking thoughts captive and asking Jesus for help and to captivate our thoughts as well.

I think that one element is thinking of Jesus, not first as an example of how to rest, but as



one who makes rest happen. I think the second is too big to make a personal practice in the way that very few of us will ever have the opportunity that Joshua did in the book of Joshua, to really lead a whole nation of people into a new space and to see the denunciation and the crumbling of an old order and to spur people on to settle there. There's lots of ways in which on way smaller scales, we are in that position.

When you move to a new home or when as a teacher, you take on a new classroom, or you're given some new responsibility, that is a participation in the kind of conquest we see in Scripture. In Scripture, what conquest is for is for setting up sacred space that embodies sacred time so that rest can be proclaimed in a particular land. I think that's the vision for the Sabbath.

What I'd love to see among Christians is a deep and appreciative sense of how God prioritizes sacred space and sacred time in the formation of the people in history and creative, just any kind of creative implementation of encoding sacred space, or sorry, encoding sacred time in whatever space we have any authority over. That's how I think we get to live lives that resonate with major themes in Joshua and Ezekiel and the other prophets that we mentioned. Jack Benitovich's work is Sunday by Theopolis Books.

I will leave the link for that in the show notes and I highly recommend that you read it. Thank you so much for joining me. Yeah, thank you, Alistair.

It's been a pleasure.