

## Sermon Series: *The Ten Commandments*

### The Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath To Keep It Holy

#### Exodus 20:8-11

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

#### MEMORIZATION

The First Commandment: You shall have no other gods before Me.

The Second Commandment: You shall not make a carved image.

The Third Commandment: You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

The Fourth Commandment: Remember the sabbath to keep it holy.

#### Introduction

Today we look come to the fourth commandment, “Remember the sabbath to keep it holy.” You will recall that these words are the very words of God that He personally spoke out of the fire to the entire nation of Israel. These old commandments are not irrelevant. Jesus said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, because Moses wrote about me” (John 5:46). Jesus is the Word of God. Understanding these commands which were spoken by God and written down by Moses will help us understand Jesus and all that He accomplished for us! These commands are not irrelevant.

#### Remember the Sabbath

We first observe that God wants His people to “remember” the Sabbath. What does He mean by telling them to remember the Sabbath? Was He commanding them not to forget something they already knew? Or was He commanding them never to forget what He was presently saying? To answer this we have to ask was there anything in their past that they might call to mind regarding the Sabbath? Had they ever heard the word Sabbath before? The answer is yes. They had heard it before and we have to go back to Exodus 16 to find it.

#### The Meaning of the Word

The word Sabbath means “to rest or cease from work.”<sup>1</sup> The first time the word appears in the Bible is in **Exodus 16:23**. At that point in Israel’s journey, it had been a month and a half since Israel has departed from Egypt (Ex 16:1). The people began grumbling and complaining against Moses and Aaron. They were complaining because they didn’t have anything to eat.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, John H. Sailhamer, Walter C. Kaiser et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 2: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 423-24.

### **Exodus 16:3**

*and the people of Israel said to them, Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.*

God hears their complaint and He decides to answer by “raining down on them bread from heaven” (Ex 16:4). The LORD (Yahweh) tells Moses that He will give this “bread from heaven” every day for six days but that on the seventh day he will give them none. However, on the sixth day they would be able to gather twice as much as they gathered every other day so that they would have enough to last through the seventh day. The seventh day was to be a day of “solemn rest.”

### **Exodus 16:23-26**

23 [Moses] *said to them, This is what the LORD (Yahweh) has commanded: Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.*

24 *So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it.*

25 *Moses said, Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field.*

26 *Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.*

The Lord was providing them food enough for the needs of every day. He did this for six days. They could not keep any of it overnight for it would breed worms and stink. But the seventh day was to be a different day. God would allow them on the sixth day to gather two days worth of bread. The bread (i.e. manna) gathered on the sixth day would hold over night and it would not spoil. This was because God wanted them the rest on the seventh day. It was to be a day of solemn rest.

God also said this was to be a “test whether or not they would obey Him and walk in His law or not” (Ex 16:4). Remember this is a month and a half **before** God would give the 10 Commandments at Mount Sinai.<sup>2</sup> Did they obey? Did they rest on the seventh day? No.

### **Exodus 16:27-30**

27 *On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.*

28 *And the LORD said to Moses, How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?*

29 *See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.*

30 *So the people rested on the seventh day.*

Notice that the Lord had “given them a Sabbath,” yet they refused it. He was giving them a day of rest and yet they were quick to work for themselves. He was telling them to relax but they could not relax. They were quick to disobey rather than obey.

## **The Special Significance of the Seventh Day**

The Lord is attaching a special significance to the seventh day even **before** He gave the 10 Commandments. Why? Why does the Lord do this? What is special about the seventh day? Why does God want Israel to rest on that day? To answer that question we have to back to Genesis 2.

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<sup>2</sup> See Exodus 16:1 and 19:1.

### **Genesis 2:2-3**

2 *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.*

3 *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.*

The significance of the seventh day relates to the work that God had done on the previous six days combined with the fact that He ceased from His work on the seventh day. God did not work on the seventh day. Genesis 1:31 tell us that at the end of His work He stood back and looked at all He had done and He said "it is very good." And then He decided that was enough and He did no more work on the following day.

### **God Blessed the Seventh Day**

God also decided to bless the seventh day and make it a holy day (Gen 2:3). God placed a special blessing on the seventh day. What does it mean when God blesses something? He causes His goodness to surround it. He makes it productive. He makes it fruitful and useful. This is what God did to the seventh day. He pronounced a special blessing on a the seventh day.

### **God Sanctified the Seventh Day**

And He made it holy, or He sanctified it. This is the first time the word holy appears in Scripture. To make something holy, or to sanctify it, means to set it apart. The root word of sanctify means "to cut" or "to separate." When you sanctify something, you set it apart FROM one thing and you set it apart TO another. When we are sanctified we are cut off FROM sin and separated UNTO righteousness.

### **Keep the Sabbath Holy**

This is the second observation. *God wanted the Sabbath day to remain a holy day.* To make a day holy or to sanctify a day means that God separated that day from all other days. He separated it FROM the ordinary and set it apart UNTO the divine. *The reason God chose to do this was because He Himself had acted differently on the seventh day than He had on the other six days.* He worked the first six days but He did not work on the seventh.

### **How Should It Be Kept Holy?**

On the seventh day He rested. This is the way in which God wanted Israel to keep the Sabbath holy - by resting and not working just as He Himself had done. This is HOW they were to keep it holy - by remembering and by resting. This is exactly the reason that Moses gives in verse 11 of our text this morning.

### **God Created Then Rested**

#### **Exodus 20:11**

11 *For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."*

The work that God had been doing for the first six days was the work of creation. For six days God worked and on the seventh day He did not work. In six days He created everything that exists; everything in heaven, everything on earth, and everything that is in the sea. He did all of this in six days.

Remember this is not Moses' summary of what God did. This is Moses' writing down what God said. These are the very words of God speaking to Israel out of the fire. Refer back to Exodus 20:1, "And God spoke all these words, saying,... and the He spoke these 10 commandments.

God created all that exists in six days, then on the seventh day He stopped creating. He ceased from His work. He rested from His labors. Not because He was tired and shagged out, "for God never sleeps or slumbers" (Ps 121:4), but because He had created all He wanted to create and He was finished. Resting from His labors means He stopped working. He does not mean He was tired.

Now as God was giving this command to Israel, He wanted that same pattern to be demonstrated in the lives of the people with whom He was making a covenant. God wanted His people to remember that He was the Creator of this world and He wanted it so embedded into the fabric of their lives that they were to act it out, so to speak, on a weekly basis.

The God of Israel is unique. He alone is the Creator of all that is. The gods of all the other nations were simply the creations of their own hands. However, this God that was making a covenant with the nation of Israel is the one true God who had Himself created them as well as all that exists.

This is a fact that we are to believe by faith. **Hebrews 11:3** *By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

Just before Moses was about to go down from God to the people and just before God gave him the 10 words written on the two tablets of stone God said this,

#### **Exodus 31:12-13**

12 *And the LORD said to Moses, 13 "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.'*" (We will return to the "sign" portion of this verse).

#### **Work and Rest: A Divine Pattern To Be Followed**

God wanted the Sabbath command to be THE command that was cherished above all the other commands. God wanted His people to imitate Him. He wanted them to act like He had acted. He had worked for six days then rested for one day and this is exactly the pattern He wanted His people to follow. Look at verses 9-10.

#### **Exodus 20:9-10**

*Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work...*

#### **A Command to Work**

Notice that contained within this command is the command to work. There is a command to rest, but there is also a command to work. "Six days you shall labor and do all your work." Work is not ungodly. In fact, *working six days is just as much following the model of our Maker as is resting one.*

Work is not a curse from God, neither is it a result of the Fall. God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to work it **before** sin entered the world (Gen 2:15). Work is just as godly as is worship. In fact work is worship if we are doing it as unto the Lord. We are being just as obedient to the LORD when we go to work as we are when we go to church.

## A Day **TO** the LORD

So the Sabbath was to be kept holy by separating it From the regular work of the other six days and by separating it **TO** the LORD. It was a day to rest FROM all labour but it was also to be kept TO the LORD. It was not a day for complete inactivity. It was to be a day directed TO the LORD. It was a day to rejoice in the LORD. Just as God had stood back and looked all He created and said, “That is very good,” so His people were to look over the week and praise God all the goodness of His creation. It was a day to focus more intently on Him. It was to be a day TO Him, to praise Him and to worship Him.

## Who Was To Rest?

Lets keep reading verse 10 and find out whom God intended to obey this command.

### **Exodus 20:10**

*10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.*

## Everyone Was To Rest - Even Animals

You will notice that this command is very comprehensive. It applies to everyone, from sons and daughters to male servants and female servants, to the animals and even the strangers who lived within the city limits. **Everyone** was to have one day in seven as a day of rest to the Lord. Parents could not sit back in the recliner while the kids worked. Neither could families rest while the servants were busy at work, and they were not even to fudge on animals. Even the animals were to have a day of rest!

## Everyone Was To Rest - Even Foreigners

And this was not limited to the people of Israel. Even the foreigners who lived within the gates were to obey this command. You might think, now how is that supposed to work? You can't make foreigners rest. They'll do what that want. That is true, but there won't be much to do if all the residents keep their shops closed on that day and everyone stays at home.

This happened in Nehemiah's day.

### **Nehemiah 13:15-22**

*15 In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food.*

*16 Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself!*

*17 Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day?*

*18 Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.*

*19 As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day.*

*20 Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.*

*21 But I warned them and said to them, Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath.*

22 *Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.*

Nehemiah notes that people were working and so were the donkeys. Foreigners, “who lived in the city,” were selling food on the Sabbath. He also specifically ties the breaking of the Sabbath with the judgment that had come upon the land. He confronted the leaders. When the people of God began obeying His commands, along with some pretty zealous leadership by Nehemiah, the foreigners among them got the picture and closed the bizarre.

### **Keeping the Sabbath - Serious In The Sight of God**

The keeping of the Sabbath was very serious in God’s eyes. In fact, breaking the Sabbath was a capitol offense.

#### **Exodus 31:14-15**

14 *You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.* 15 *Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.*

### **The Execution of A Sabbath-breaker**

This happened a while later (Numbers 15:32-36). A man was found gathering sticks<sup>3</sup> on the Sabbath. Those who found him brought him to Moses & Aaron. Moses went to the Lord and asked what should be done with the man. And the LORD said,

#### **Numbers 15:35-36**

35 *And the LORD said to Moses, The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.*

36 *And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, as the LORD commanded Moses.*

### **What Does This Mean For Us?**

What does this mean for us? Are we to put Sabbath-breakers to death? No. We are not. We are not because the right to execute God’s law was given to the nation of Israel. We are not the nation of Israel. We are Gentiles and not ethnic Israelites. The first church council (Acts 15) agreed that keeping the Mosaic law was not required for Gentiles who believe in Jesus. However, we are the children of Abraham if we have the faith of Abraham.

God has written His law upon the hearts of all of His children (Jeremiah 31:33) by giving us His own Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Acts 2:1-4; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14). God’s law is spiritual (Romans 7:14). So if we have God’s Spirit within us, there will be an inner testimony that draws us to obey the spirit of His commands and laws though we are not obligated to the Law in the same way that the Jews were.

We know that no one is justified by God by keeping the law (Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16), because no one can complete obey the whole law. But God justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Gal 2:16). So when we as Gentile believers desire to obey God’s law it is not so that we can earn justification, for that is something that we could never do. We desire to obey God’s laws because we have already

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<sup>3</sup> Kindling a fire was forbidden on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:3).

been justified. We want to obey God not to earn salvation, but simply because obedience pleases Him and it is our heart's desire to please Him. We want to obey His commands simply because we love Him, not because we are legally obligated to do so.

Let me suggest to you three principles which I believe express the spirit of this Sabbath command. Please consider these as you prayerfully discern how you might apply them to your life.

### **Application**

1. One day out of seven should be set apart unto the LORD.
2. We are to live our lives by faith in God's steadfast love rather than in our own strenuous labor.
3. The patterns in our physical lives should be pointers to spiritual rest in Jesus.

### **1) One Day Out of Seven Should Be Set Apart Unto the Lord**

When we surrender our lives to Christ, we surrender every day not just one. He deserves our full devotion every single day of our lives. Indeed, He purchased our lives and they are no longer our own (1 Cor 6:19-20). Nevertheless, is it not right that we should set aside one day in seven in which to honor God and devote our attention to Him?

### **Which Day? Saturday or Sunday?**

God says that His children were to work six days and rest on the seventh. Does it matter which day? For the Jews the seventh day was Saturday. For them Saturday was and still is the Sabbath. However, the day we set aside for the Lord is Sunday and not Saturday. We worship God on Sunday. Today is Sunday. Why the change?

The early Christians, who were all Jews by the way, began to gravitate toward Sunday as the day of their gathering for worship. Why? There are several reasons. The first is that Jesus was raised from the dead on Sunday.

### **Jesus' Resurrection Took Place on Sunday**

The first reason was because Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday.

#### **Matthew 28:1**

*Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.*

*2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.*

*3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.*

*4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.*

*5 But the angel said to the women, Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.*

*6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.*

The first day of the week was Sunday, which was the first day after the Sabbath. Sunday is the day that Jesus rose from the dead. This is the deepest reason that Christians gather on Sunday to worship Jesus. This is true all over the globe. Christians around the world gather on Sunday to worship Jesus.

### **Pentecost Took Place on Sunday**

The second reason was the Pentecost took place on Sunday.

*Acts 2:1 When the day of pentecost arrived, they were all gathered together in one place.*

Here are all the believers in Jesus gathered together. Pentecost took place 50 days after the celebration of the feast of first fruits. After that celebration, which took place on the Sabbath, they were to count seven Sabbaths and then celebrate the feast of Pentecost on **the day after** the seventh Sabbath which would be Sunday and also the fiftieth day (Lev 23:15). The Holy Spirit was poured out on all the believers gathered together on that Sunday and thus the birth of church! This happened on a Sunday.

After this we see that it became customary for believers in Jesus to gather on Sundays.

#### **Acts 20:7**

*On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.*

#### **1 Corinthians 16:1-2**

*1 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.  
2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.*

And by the time we get to the book of Revelation, Sunday had begun to be called by its own name.

#### **Revelation 1:10**

*I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.*

It is for this reason that Sunday has been called among Christians, “the Lord’s day.” This is why Christians have set aside Sunday as the one day dedicated to the Lord. It was been a day of resting **FROM** the work of the other six days and a day dedicated **TO** the worship of Jesus by gathering together with God’s people to sing His praises and to hear the reading and expounding of His word.

#### **But What If You Must Work On Sundays?**

But what if you simply must work on Sundays? I work on Sundays. Sundays are not a day of rest for me. The Old Testament priests had the same problem.

#### **Matthew 12:5**

*Have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?*

The priests had to work on the Sabbath. They stood all day doing the work of temple service. They worked on the Sabbath and yet were held guiltless. I work on Sunday’s. I am still able to fellowship with God’s people and worship on Sundays, however, this is also part of my work. Sundays are not a complete day of rest for me. So for me my Sabbath rest is on Monday. I work Tuesday through Sunday and then take off on Monday’s.

Paul tells us that each of needs to work this out in our own hearts before the Lord.

#### **Romans 14:5-6**

*5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.*

*6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord.*



### **Colossians 2:16-17**

16 *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

Whether it's Sunday or Monday, is there one day each week that you set aside to honor the Lord, to remember all that He has done for you, to praise Him, to be strengthened by focusing on His word, and to be encouraged by being with His people?

The Jews emphasized the day itself rather than the attitude of the day. God is sovereign over the time that He gives us. He deserves every hour of every day, yet is it really such a horrible thing to honor Him with one day out seven?

### **2) Live By Faith In God's Steadfast Love Rather Than In Man's Strenuous Labor**

The second principle is that we live by faith in God's steadfast love rather than in our own strenuous labor. This command reminds us that we are to put faith in God's provision rather than in our own productivity.

Just as the children of Israel were to live every day by faith that God would provide enough bread for each day, the Sabbath demonstrates a constant reminder that God wants faith to be a natural part of the lives of His children.

The Sabbath was to be observed every seventh day even during times of plowing and even in the time of the harvest (Ex 34:21). If the crop lays too long on the ground it will rot or be eaten by insects or animals. Yet God wanted His people to learn to put their *faith in His ability to provide for them and not in their own ability to produce.*

When you're in the middle of a project it is hard to lay it aside and remember the Lord. We want to do things for ourselves and make things happen. Yet this principle reminds us that God would have us live a life of faith that when we honor Him, He will provide us with all that we need.

Isn't it amazing that we have a God who tells us "Stop working! Rest for a little while." And we find incredible verses in the Bible like these:

#### **Isaiah 26:12**

*O LORD, you will ordain peace for us; you have done for us all our works.*

#### **Isaiah 64:4**

*From of old no one has heard  
or perceived by the ear,  
no eye has seen a God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him. (ASV)*

Let the foundation of your faith rest confidently in His love and not in your labor.

### 3) The Physical Patterns Of Life Should Be Pointers to Spiritual Rest In Jesus

The physical plan of our daily lives is to be a constant testimony (i.e. sign, pointer) to the spiritual rest we enjoy in Jesus. Including a pattern of physical rest in our lives, is simply a sign pointing to true spiritual rest (Ex 31:13).

#### **Exodus 31:13**

*You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.*

The Sabbath rest was a sign that pointed to the fact that it is God who sanctifies us and not we ourselves. In other words, it is a testimony to the fact that we cannot make ourselves holy. Only God can do that. The Sabbath rest was a reminder of our own inability to sanctify ourselves and also a pointer to the fact that God is the one who will give us the holiness we need in order to enjoy a relationship with Him.

In the words of Abraham to Isaac, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”

Jesus is that sacrifice. This is why Jesus could say,

#### **Matt 10:28**

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

Paul said that the Sabbath was merely a shadow of the things to come, but Christ is the substance of it. The Old Testament Sabbath was simply a shadowy sign pointing to the Jesus who is true spiritual rest.

Heb 4:3 *For we who have believed enter that rest.*

We can only fully enter into all that the Sabbath signifies when we put our faith in Jesus. Only Jesus can give us rest for our souls and only in Him is Sabbath rest completely fulfilled. If you don't know that rest, ask Jesus right now to give it to you.