

4th Commandment: You shall keep the Sabbath Day holy Exodus 20:8-11

A very warm welcome to our morning service on the fifth of July 2020 I invite you to take your Bible, and to open it to the book of Exodus chapter 20 and we're going to read from verse eight to eleven.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

I'm looking forward to looking at this fourth commandment today with some trepidation also because there's a certain amount of controversy over the fourth commandment. Why? Well, it's different to our Lord's Day. Firstly we note that the Jews were commanded to keep the seventh day, the Saturday whereas we keep the first day of the week. Seventh Day Adventists disagree strongly with us as they insist on the Saturday. But also because increasingly in our day, people from our own doctrinal constituency, like many others in Christendom, are saying that the fourth commandment, no longer applies to today. They say it was abrogated by the death of Christ. They say it is part of the ceremonial law and so we no longer need to keep one day in seven. They would urge and say that every day is the day of the Lord for "this is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." But my immediate reply is this: As we have 10 commandments it would seem strange to me if just one of these commandments did not apply today. The 10 commandments are the moral law of God and they have moral implications. Why would God set these commandments in tablets of stone, writing with them with his own finger....10 laws, of which one no longer applies?... So we're going to look at this. And the key for me is this is that we consider the spirit of the law. You see in the New Testament, we're reminded that it's the spirit of the law and not the letter that is all important. You see I believe that the spirit of the law, the spirit of the Sabbath continues in the Lord's day. Yes, there is vast differences between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday. For example, in the Old Testament, you could not pick up sticks on the Sabbath day. If you did there would be penalty of death. Clearly that does not apply today. So, it's the spirit of the law that we must consider as Spurgeon very helpfully reminds us:

"I am no preacher of the old legal Sabbath. Those who were teachers of the law insist upon that quite enough. As for me, I'm a preacher of the gospel and rejoice that believers are not under law, but under grace. A worldling is under the law and it is his duty to remember the seventh day to keep it holy, for so runs the law which is his taskmaster. But I'm not under the law, and therefore I keep this day, not as the seventh, but as the first day of the week, on which my Saviour rose again from the dead. I do not keep it by law, but by grace. I do not keep it as a slavish bondage, not as a day on which I'm chained and hampered with restraints against my will. But I keep it as a day in which I may take holy pleasure in serving God, and in adoring before his throne. The Sabbath of the Jew is to him a task. The Lord's Day of the Christian, the first day of the week, is to him a joy, a day of rest of peace, & of thanksgiving."

So my brothers and sisters I ask you the question, and I ask myself the question, how do you see the Lord's Day? Is it a day of delight? Is it the queen of days? Is it the day that you look forward to when you may hear God's word and when you may worship Him? The day where you may rest from all of your labours? Is it the day where you sanctify him in your heart, or is it just 'the day of duty'? So we're going to consider three things this morning

- 1) The Jewish Sabbath
- 2) The Lord's day
- 3) The spirit of the law

1) The Jewish Sabbath

Now whilst the 10 commandments are particularly to the Jewish people the New Testament points out that not one jot or tittle has been abrogated from the law of God. As the New Testament reminds us in Romans 4: Grace has not done away with the 10 commandments rather it has established them. Though we're not under the rigour of the law the law still applies. So let us look at verses eight to 11 of Exodus 20: "*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*" they were told to "remember" it because they had been keeping it already. Exodus chapter 16 reminds us that God gave the Sabbath to his people as they were travelling through the wilderness. There was a time where they were hungry and God provided bread from heaven for them each day. It was coriander seed called "manna" and was sweet to their taste. Each day they were to gather enough quota for their family, but on the sixth day they were permitted to gather a double quota so that on the seventh day, the Sabbath, they would not work. If they gathered on the Sabbath day the bread would go mouldy and the Lord would be displeased with them. So they're told: "Remember the Sabbath day." Don't forget it. It's something you've been instructed in.

But what about us? Do we see that God has given a day of rest? We are called to separate it from all other days... to sanctify it for the specific purpose of worshipping God. "You have six days" he said, "on which to work." (v.9) I believe that's a very important part of the command. You see we're reminded that God has given us six days in which to fulfil our God given task of work. Work is where we find satisfaction and worth, as human beings made in God's image. In a partial sense this is something that you were made for. That may mean five days of paid work, and maybe another day doing all sorts of jobs and tasks in the house but on the seventh day we must forget those jobs. We must forget the things that we would normally do, So don't let the seventh day be a catch up day. Put everything to one side. This is the day of worship "Hallow Me on it."

And the Lord says, if you're a father and if you're a mother make sure that your children don't work on that day either. If you have a business or have servants within your home, make sure that they don't work. (The commandment even covered donkeys not working.) And if you have someone who's come to stay or a foreigner in your community, they too must not to work (v.10), And the reason? verse 11, "Because the Lord made the world in six days and on the seventh day He himself rested and blessed that day and hallowed it." What does that mean? Well however you understand the six days of Genesis it means that after God made this world, and looked upon it taking great pleasure in it He rested. There were no more creative acts. The Father continued to take pleasure in the Son, the Son took pleasure in the Father, the Holy Spirit in the Son, but there were no more creative acts. The seventh day was a day of rejoicing. Now, the Lord is saying to us that we have a pattern to follow. We have six days for creative works but on the seventh day we are called to rest and rejoice. Notice that God blessed that day. You see the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath. It was a day where we could be refreshed physically and rejuvenated spiritually. It was day to be lifted up and to spend time with God hearing His Word and worshipping Him. For that reason God gave the Sabbath. The day is essentially positive and we aren't thinking of it in terms of restrictions or in terms of being hemmed in or in terms of what we can or can't do.

But having said that, as you go through the Old Testament you discover that in order for God's people to keep that day holy, the Lord had to remind them of the things that they shouldn't do. The promise of grace should have been enough for them to keep it, but because of their sinful natures they could not keep the law by themselves. So the Lord had to say to them, things like this Exodus 35. "You shall not kindle fire on the Sabbath day." In Nehemiah 13 God reminded them that they could not buy and sell goods on the Sabbath day. In Jeremiah 17 they are told not to carry burdens on the Sabbath day. Yes military campaigns could be continued (Joshua 6). And of course the priests, they needed to work on the Sabbath day in the temple making sacrifices. Works of necessity and works of mercy were not prohibited. But things that were unnecessary could not be done on the Sabbath day. Now, I believe that to disregard this command was to disregard the whole of the law of God. You

see to ignore this commandment was to say that God was not worthy and God should not be honoured on his day. To put, for example, material things before Him was to break the command "You shall not covet", for to buy and sell on his holy day was a sign of covetousness. It was also a sign that they had broken the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me." by putting other things before him. It was also a sign that they had broken the third commandment. They were taking his name in vain for they felt that they could still worship him and break His day. They were also committing spiritual adultery and breaking the command: "You shall not steal" by robbing God of his day. You see by breaking the Sabbath command they were breaking the whole law. For if we break the law in one part we break it all.

Ezekiel said in chapter 20 verse 20 that the Sabbath was a sign between God and His people. It was something very special. *"Hallow my Sabbaths and they will be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God."* The day was a sign, a distinguishing mark that they were God's people. So to break it was very serious. Now in Deuteronomy five verse 15 we're told that on this day they should remember that the Lord brought them out of Egypt with his hand and with an outstretched arm. They were to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt but that God had brought them into a place of freedom. They were on their way to the promised land, to the place of rest, and they're to remember what God has done for them. The Sabbath was a sign to them of God's favour. Now Jesus himself, being a Jew, kept the Sabbath day. He was always in the synagogue on the Sabbath and say he often healed on the Sabbath. The day was honoured by Him. It was a Sabbath to the Lord

So, as we begin to think of the Lord's day, we need to consider how does these words that we read in Exodus chapter 20 verses eight to 11, apply to the Lord's day. What are the transferable principles of no working but resting, of how to honour God and know his blessing on the Lord's Day. Well let me take you to Isaiah chapter 58 verses 13 and 14. You see in these words we have the evangelical gospel spirit of the law:

*"If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,
And call the Sabbath a delight,
The holy day of the LORD honourable,
And shall honour Him, not doing your own ways,
Nor finding your own pleasure,
Nor speaking your own words,
¹⁴ Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD;
And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,
And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.
The mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

What Isaiah is saying is that for one day in seven put everything aside that hinders the true worship of God. Put aside all the mundane things that you would normally talk about such as football. Forget the business of the week. Don't think about going down to the beach and your usual pleasures. DELIGHT yourself in the Lord. Honour him. Surely, that's the spirit of the law that was transferred over to the Lord's day. So let's consider the Lord's Day.

2) The Lord's Day

In Acts chapter 20 verse seven we have a reference to the early church meeting on a Sunday. It is at Troas in an upper room. Paul preaches till midnight. It's a long sermon. *"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."* Well, in all probability the first day of the week was a working day. It wasn't until 321 AD that Constantine made Sunday, a non-work day and christianized it. Before then it was a normal working day. Jewish Christians, often still kept the Sabbath as a day of rest, but all Christians met on the first day of the week whether early in the morning or whether in the evening to remember the resurrection of Christ. Now in 1 Corinthians chapter 16:1-2 we read the

following: *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: ²On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."* In other words meetings on the first day of the week had become a regular feature of the church. Now after Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week he himself appeared to His disciples also on the first day of the week. John chapter 20 verses 19 and 26 record two appearances on two consecutive Lord's days. Clearly a pattern was being established. And then in Revelation chapter one, verse 10 we read that the apostle John is in the Spirit on the Lord's Day which is the first day of the week. Why was it called "the Lord's Day?" Because the day belongs to the Lord. Just like we were told in Exodus about the Sabbath. It is the day "of the Lord your God." So although the Sabbath is made for man, it is still the Lord's Day and we must not rob him of this day. But what about the teaching in Colossians chapter two verse 16? It says this. *"So let no one judge you in food or drink or regarding a festival, or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow the things that come, but the substances of Christ."* This verse has been cited over and over by those Christians who today believe that the Sabbath of the Old Testament is gone and so there's no need to follow that one day in seven principle. Well, I would say, "Yes, I agree with you. The old Jewish Sabbath on a Saturday, has passed away." And "I agree with the Bible that it was a shadow and the substance is Christ." The Sabbath day is about rest. But it's only a shadow. Real true rest is found in Jesus Christ alone. But I will also say this, "Because the New Testament clearly establishes another day of rest the principle which is from creation, of "one day and seven rest" remains. It is for our physical and spiritual good. All that is good about the Jewish Sabbath has transferred over to the Lord's Day. So now let's get back to the spirit of the law. We've considered that there is a Jewish Sabbath and we've considered that there's clearly a difference between that and the Lord's Day. Under the old Sabbath you cannot cook over an oven, or gather using sticks, and there are civil penalties for doing so. The Lord's Day is not like that. But there are transferable principles. *"Rest"* *"Delighting ourselves in the Lord"* *"Putting aside all the mundane things of the week and gathering together with God's people to worship are all transferable principles"*.

3) The spirit of the law

The psalmist would say things like this. "I was glad when they said to me. 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'" This is the spirit of the law. Great gladness in God's presence. You see it's very possible to go to church with the wrong spirit. You may go twice on a Sunday, or three times, or even four times. You may even prepare your vegetables on a Saturday night, and just turn the oven on Sunday and follow all sorts of rules but still break the Lord's Day. How? By doing things purely out of duty and legalistic habit... You come to God's house, but there's no joy. There's no relish. You sing the hymns but your heart is not engaged. You do not worship God in spirit and in truth. And so, deposit all your attention to performing your duty you are in fact a Sabbath breaker. Why? Because you have not kept the spirit of the law which is love to the Lord your God. Loving Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. You see we ought to be able to say and mean "A day in your courts is better than a thousand" elsewhere. You see it's a question of desire. It's a question of the heart. Oh, yes there may be duty but is there joy? *"One thing I have desired and that will I seek that I may dwell in Your presence and behold the beauty of the Lord"*. Oh yes, we may not be like the world, which says that Sunday is just a catch up day, or a sports day, or a jobs day, or a TV day... but is Sunday different in this sense that you sanctify the Lord God in your heart?

Now let's consider some practical things to close. First of all, why do we keep Sunday morning and Sunday evening? That's something very practical. It's not laid down in the Bible that we must have two services. But it's helpful to enable us to keep the Lord's Day holy. You see in the Old Testament, on the Sabbath day the Jews gave a double offering morning and evening on the Sabbath day. Now surely there's something here that speaks to us. On God's Day, as we have opportunity, do we not want to give Him a double offering of praise? But what about the rest of the day? Well remember the Lord Jesus Christ. He went about doing good and healed, particularly on the Sabbath day. So you can do good! You can visit. Maybe a lonely person in your church? Or maybe there's somebody who needs a letter written to

them? Or maybe there's somebody you can phone up? Then there's good books that you could read to feed your soul. You're so busy all week that you haven't got much time for reading but on the Lord's Day it's different. Above all there's the Bible to read and time for extended prayer time. Then there's the opportunity to fellowship with God's people... Now we are not to be legalistic about the Sabbath. You see the Lord Jesus would go to a Pharisee's house on the Sabbath. In Simon's house it was feast time. I can't imagine that the conversation was godly. But the Lord went there to bless and to instruct. You may be invited to a birthday party of non-Christian family on a Sunday. Now you don't want to absent yourself from the house of God but you may say well go to the party for a couple of hours, be a blessing to them. You see, we have to be careful that we don't lay down legalistic rules. What is the soul; What is the heart of Christianity? Thomas Watson, the Puritan, says this that "Love is the very soul of religion. It is the purest affection." If you want to keep the Lord's day, the most practical way you can keep it is by loving God and loving your neighbour as yourself. Each person has to work out what that means for himself. And finally one more practical matter. Remember to prepare yourself for coming into the presence of God. It is no good going to bed two o'clock early Sunday morning and waking up shattered. How will you listen to God's Word and truly delight yourself in the Lord. You will be too tired. And it's no good spending time listening to quizzes and all sorts on a Saturday night and then Sunday morning watching any old thing on TV, and then dashing out to church. How can you expect to be blessed? We need to prepare ourselves for the worship of the living God.

And when you come to church give God your best. Malachi was grieved when God's people came to God with a divided heart and did not give Him their best. In Malachi chapter one verse eight we learn that they brought before him, a blind lamb or a lame goat. They did not give him the best but something which way they felt would do. And how can we expect to be blessed if our worship of God is shoddy? Consider Malachi 2:2. So don't allow a worldly spirit to invade the Lord's Day. Don't allow sin, the lust of the eyes or the lust of the flesh to invade the Lord's Day. Sanctify the Lord God in your heart. So may Sunday truly be the queen of days for you and for me. May it truly be a foretaste of heaven. You see one day is coming an eternal Sabbath, an eternal rest. Then we will rest from all of our labours and will drink of the water of life freely. Then we will serve God with unending joy. May your Sunday and my Sunday be a little taste of heaven. God is good. He understands our need for rest. No person can work seven days nonstop. God knows that at times you need a little more time in bed or a nap on Sunday afternoon. He understands it, but may it be that Sunday is truly rest, not only for your body but rest of your soul as you delight yourself in Him. May God bless this word to you. "Remember to keep the Sabbath Day holy"