



The Ten Commandments

Sermon Transcript
May 1, 2016

Jesus, Our Rest
Exodus 20:8-11

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on May 1, 2016 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
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 on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The Ten Commandments

You shall have no other gods before me.
You shall not make for yourself any idols.
You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Honor you father and your mother.
You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not steal.
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
You shall not covet.

Introduction

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” The word that is most associated with the idea of Sabbath is the word “rest.” The idea of “rest” sure seems to be the focal point of the instructions given with this commandment. *“Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.”* And so imbedded into this commandment is this cycle of work and rest. In fact this prescribed cycle of work and rest is patterned after the story of Creation. We read in verse 11, *“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.”*

It would be very easy to come to this commandment and embrace it simply for its practicality. It is good sound advice to set aside a day in the week for rest. I can’t tell you how many times when I greet someone and ask them how they are doing, the common refrain includes the confession that they are both busy and tired. This confession transcends every walk of life. I hear students talk about being busy and tired. It is the common refrain of professionals and parents and even people who are retired. How many times have you heard someone who is retired say, “I am more busy now than I was when I was working.” And so you come to this commandment and you may be tempted to say, “I am sure glad this commandment is here. I need to be reminded of the importance of taking a day of rest.” After all, it is healthy to do so.

And yet, if your understanding of this commandment does not go beyond how you schedule your week with the rhythm of work and rest, you are actually missing the central issue of this commandment. If this commandment is nothing more to you than establishing the regulation that you set aside a day for rest and worship, then you are missing the whole point of the commandment. Michael Horton says that when we reduce this commandment down to taking a day off in the course of the week, we are guilty of seeing this commandment from a “human-centered” view rather than a “God-centered and Christ-centered way of looking at it.”¹

The kind of “rest” that is ultimately at issue in this commandment is not the physical rest that comes from taking a day off from work. Rather, as you see the theme of Sabbath developed from the Old Testament to the New Testament, you discover that at the heart of this commandment is a “rest” that comes to the soul. It speaks to a resting and peace with God. I don’t think this world is just filled with people who are physically tired. I think this world is filled with people who are spiritually tired. In fact, some of our physical exhaustion is due to trying to fill a spiritual need with physical things. We think

that if we climb the company ladder, or achieve a certain level of income, or if our kids become successful, or if we get to go on more vacations, or if we find the right guy or the right girl . . . then we will find what we are looking for and our souls will be satisfied. But when we finally grab it and get it, whatever “it” is to us, we are left looking around and wondering to ourselves, “is this it? Is this all there is?” There is no rest for the soul until you find your rest in God.

And so we come to the gospels and we hear this familiar “Sabbath invitation” of Jesus that goes like this, “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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.*” It is no accident that in very next chapter, Matthew 12, that we find the religious leaders accusing Jesus and his disciples of breaking the Sabbath because they were walking through the grain fields picking heads of grain on the Sabbath. Jesus responded to these accusations by claiming to be “*lord of the Sabbath.*” Furthermore, in Hebrews 4, faith in Christ is likened to entering a “*Sabbath rest.*” It says in Hebrews 4:9-10, “*So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*”

Here is the hard question you have to wrestle with when it comes to the fourth commandment. If it is through Jesus we find our Sabbath rest in God, to what degree is the fourth commandment and its regulations binding on us? Just by gathering to worship on the first day of the week instead of the seventh day of the week tells us that some change has taken place. But is that the only change that comes with the observance of the Sabbath? Is the only difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament that we happen to observe this commandment on the first day of the week instead of the seventh day of the week because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. It is the Lord’s day! And yet, it is curious to note that this is the only one of the Ten Commandments that is not repeated in the New Testament. Nowhere in the New Testament do we see the commandment to “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*” Perhaps then, there is a bigger difference between what we observe this morning and what is commanded in the fourth commandment for the people of Israel.

There are differences of opinion among good Christians as to the place of the fourth commandment in the life of the church. I am going to argue this morning that we are not obligated to observe the Sabbath with all of its regulations. At the same time, there is something critical that this commandment points us to and it does give us principles for living out our faith. But most importantly, this commandment tells us where to worship. It leads us to where we find our rest. We find our rest in Jesus.

Creation Rest

Here is the critical question you need to wrestle with when you are trying to understand the place of this commandment in the life of the church. Was this commandment established in Genesis or was it established in Exodus? Was this commandment introduced in the story of Creation or was this commandment introduced at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments? If this commandment was established at the point of Creation, then the commandment to keep the Sabbath would be universal and timeless in its application. But if this commandment to *remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy* was first established at Mount Sinai, there may be something unique to this commandment in relationship to the people of Israel.

The story of creation tells us that there were six days in which God created the world and on the seventh day he rested. This is what it says in Genesis 2:1-2, “*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. 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.*”

What does it mean that God “*rested from all his work that he had done in creation?*” Well, first of all, I will tell you what it doesn’t mean. It doesn’t mean that God came to the end of a very busy and tiring week of creating things and needed to take a break. And furthermore, there is a sense in which God never ceases from activity. When Jesus was being accused of breaking Sabbath law in John 5 because he healed a man on the Sabbath, he said in John 5:17, “*My Father is working until now, and I am working.*” In other words, God is always active and he never ceases from doing his work in this world as he sustains all things and provides for all that this world needs.

Now you do get the sense from the story of creation that when it says that God rested on the seventh day that the work of creation had been completed. We know that God was pleased with all he made because we constantly hear the refrain “*And God saw that it was good.*” Furthermore, it is also helpful to know that the word for *rest* is closely associated with the word for *peace*. And you can see in the story that unfolds in the Garden of Eden that in this world God had made, there was a taste of heaven on earth as God and man walked together in perfect peace and “*rest.*” Truly, at the end of the story of Creation, everything was “good.”

When you look at Genesis 1-2 and walk through the seven days of creation, besides working on the first six and resting on the seventh, there is something else that

distinguishes the seventh day from the other six. The first six days all end with the formula, “*And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*” And so on it goes for the first six days. Each day, if you will, came to close. But for the seventh day there is no boundary tied to it, “*And there was evening and there was morning.*” In other words, the work is finished and the prospect of man living in peace with God and under the blessing of God was to be his ongoing delight and joy. And so the seventh day of being at rest and peace with God was never meant to end. Peace, joy, blessing and rest comes from continually living under God. And so if Adam had never rebelled against God, he would have experienced an eternal Sabbath rest and peace with God.

And finally, with the story of Creation, we simply read that God rested at the end of the week of creating. There is no commandment in the story of Creation to observe a Sabbath day. In the story of Creation, Sabbath rest with God was descriptive, not prescriptive. In fact, you see no such command to observe the Sabbath until you get to Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments. No doubt, when this commandment is given, God looks back to the pattern of the creation week as a basis for this commandment. But all the way through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the many years the descendants of Abraham were in Egypt, there is no hint of a commandment to observe a Sabbath day. I think the reason for this is that at the heart of the Sabbath, is the idea of being at *rest* with God and that was the reality in the Garden of Eden until Adam and Eve sinned.

Remember The Sabbath: A Sign of the Covenant

This brings us to Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments. And it is here, for the first time on the pages of Scripture, we read this commandment, “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work*”

We can not forget what is happening at Mt. Sinai. This is not just the story of how we got the Ten Commandments. Rather, this is a critical part of the story of how God is going to restore this broken world. Through the people of Israel, God is going to bring his “Sabbath rest” - his peace - back to this broken world. Before God gives the people of Israel the Ten Commandments, he says to them in Exodus 19:5-6, “*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.*” This whole world belongs to God because God created it. In his very next breath, God indicates the purpose for why he is entering into covenant with the people of Israel. If they keep this covenant, they will be to God “a

kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” A priest is one who brings the people to God. And that is what Israel was to be for this world. Through the covenant God was making with Israel, God was making promise to be their God and they were agreeing to be God’s people in this world. As was promised to Abraham, through his descendants, God would bring his blessing—his Sabbath rest—to this broken world.

Back when we were in the book of Jeremiah, I showed you a video that rehearsed the various covenants God made throughout the Bible. There was the covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses and the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai, King David and then we looked at “the new covenant.” Through these covenants, we learn about the promises God made that ultimately led to our salvation and deliverance. With these promises, God gave “signs” to help his people remember his promises. For example, the rainbow was the sign that came with the covenant God made with Noah. Every time we see the rainbow, we are reminded that God made promise not to destroy the world again with a flood. Circumcision was the sign of the promise to Abraham. What was the promise God made with Abraham? The promise was that Abraham would have many descendants and through his seed God would bless the world. And so we read in Matthew 1:1 that Jesus was the “son of Abraham.”

That begs the question, “What was the sign of the covenant that God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai” when he gave them the Ten Commandments? The promise was that if Israel lived under God’s rule, they would bring God’s blessing to this world. So what was the sign of this covenant? We are told in Exodus 31 that the Sabbath was the sign of God’s covenant he made with Israel. It says in Exodus 31:12, *“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.”* Then in verse 17 he says of the Sabbath, *“It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel.”* There was something unique about Israel’s role in bringing the blessing of God to this world and the keeping of the Sabbath.

Did you know that when it came to observing the Sabbath for the people of Israel it was more than just a weekly observance? When we think of a Sabbath we think of the weekly cycle of working six days and then ceasing from work on the seventh day. But there was also a Sabbath of years that Israel was to observe. It is one thing to cease from labor and commerce one day a week. But they were to give the land a “Sabbath rest” every seven years. That is entire year without farming. And then at the end of seven cycles of seven years, on the fiftieth year, they were to celebrate the Year of Jubilee and during this time they were to release anyone who was held in slavery and cancel all debts. Now, as you can imagine, it was hard enough to take a break from commerce one

day a week. In Amos 8:5 you can hear the people of Israel grumble about the challenge in keeping the weekly Sabbath. They are kind of mumbling under their breath, "*When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale?*" The reason the people of Judah spent seventy years in captivity in Babylon was because for seventy cycles of seven years they failed to give the land its "Sabbath rest." It says at the end of 2 Chronicles, that the land would lay desolate until it *enjoyed its Sabbaths*.

And so this gets to the heart of the "sign of the covenant" and the keeping of the Sabbath. By keeping the Sabbath, Israel would demonstrate what it means to trust God and live under the peace and blessing of God's good care. The spirit of keeping the Sabbath is found in Psalm 62:1, "*For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.*" Literally, that verse means, "*For in God alone my soul rests.*" By resting from their labor every seven days on the Sabbath, Israel was to demonstrate that true rest and peace in this world comes from knowing and serving God. True peace doesn't come from our labor and our work. True peace and rest comes to us from finding our rest and our trust in God. The Sabbath became that weekly reminder, that sign for Israel, that God has made promise to them and that God will provide for them and bring rest to their souls.

Jesus, Our Rest

By the time Jesus comes onto the scene in the New Testament, the religious leaders had turned the Sabbath into something it was never meant to be. It actually was supposed to be a delight, but they had turned it into a drudgery with all of their do's and don'ts attached to it. It is no accident that the Sabbath was a constant battlefield between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. When chided for picking heads of grain on the Sabbath, Jesus told them they got it all wrong. He said in Mark 2:27, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" It was supposed to represent the peace and rest that comes in knowing God. It was to serve man and not enslave man.

When they didn't like Jesus healing people on the Sabbath, you can see Jesus scratching his head in disbelief. How did the Sabbath become a day where it was unlawful to do good? In fact, rather incredulous, he asks them in Mark 3, "*Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?*" He became angry with the religious leaders. He wanted them to see how ridiculous their rules had become when he asked them in Luke 14, "*Which of you having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on the Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?*" They didn't even respond. You would think

that bringing healing and wholeness to someone on the Sabbath would be something completely in line with keeping the Sabbath because all the way back in the account of creation we saw that Sabbath rest was all about peace with God.

In the context of this battle between Jesus and the religious leaders, Jesus makes the claim to be “*Lord of the Sabbath*.” He makes this claim in Matthew 12, immediately after he extends the invitation for people to come to him and find their rest. In Hebrews 4, speaking of our faith in Jesus, it says, “*there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest had also rested from his works as God did from his.*” Michael Horton says, “This is the key . . . to the entire purpose behind the Sabbath institution.”² Quoting from Romans 4, he says, “*To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited to him as righteousness.*” Because of faith in Jesus, we are living in that seventh day, the eternal Sabbath. Jesus is the Sabbath for his people. There is no morning or evening for this day. Through Jesus, you are at peace with God forever. You can’t work your way to God. You can keep a list of do’s and don’ts to get to God. You must cease from your labor and repent of your sin and turn in faith to Jesus and he will give you rest for your soul.

Keeping the Fourth Commandment

So what about this commandment? Does it apply to us? Does Sunday just replace Saturday? It is not that easy of a question. Here are some thoughts:

The Old Testament Sabbath does not apply to us: This is the most simple thing to point out. If it did apply to us, we would be mandated to worship on Saturday. We already saw that it was a sign of the Mosaic covenant we are now under the new covenant in Christ. Furthermore, this was a point of contention in the early church because many of the early Jewish believers insisted on hanging on to some of their Jewish practices and making other do the same. That included the practice of Sabbath. Paul had this to say about this view in Colossians 2:16. Among other Jewish practices, “*Let no one pass judgment on you . . . with regard to . . . A sabbath.*” Why? “*These are a shadow of things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*” That is exactly what we have seen. Just like the Exodus out of Egypt points us to our deliverance from sin, the weekly Sabbath rest points us to the rest we have through faith in Jesus.

Does the Lord’s Day replace the Sabbath?: There are several verses in the New Testament where we see the early church gathering on the first day of the week and it was natural to do so because this was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. But it was not necessarily

seen as a replacement of the Sabbath. The early church father Ignatius, writing in 110 A. D., spoke of Jewish converts who no longer observed the Sabbath but rather they now observe the Lord's Day. They were seen by him as two separate observances. In fact, in the early church they would gather to worship and then go and work. It wasn't until after Constantine in the fourth century that some began to see the Lord's Day as a replacement of the Sabbath. Even Luther, 1500 years later, saw the necessity for rest but he didn't tie it to the Lord's Day. It was the Puritans who brought about a more strict view of tying the Sabbath to the Lord's Day.

Should we observe the Lord's Day?: Unlike the Old Testament, there is no commandment in the New Testament that tells us to observe one day over another. We do know that it became customary very early on for the church to gather for worship on the first day of the week. We also know that we are commanded to not forsake coming together for the purpose of public worship. Being connected to a local church and participating in public worship is essential to our faith. Quite naturally, the Lord's Day, the first day of the week is the most natural day to gather because it is the day that Jesus rose from the dead. At the same time, according to Romans 14:5, there seems to be some liberty in this matter because it says "*one person esteems one day as better than another while another esteems all days alike.*" So if your conscience requires you to observe the Lord's Day on Sunday, you should do that. Starting in September, we are looking to start a Saturday evening service and we don't feel that is violating the fourth commandment, because in reality, everyday is a "day of rest" because our rest is in Jesus.

What about six days of work and one day of rest?: No doubt, there is great wisdom in this and because of the support of our culture, Sunday is often a day many people can rest. In fact, I would encourage you to embrace some of the aspects of Sabbath rest that are articulated in the Old Testament. It was a day that included worship, rest and extending mercy to those in need. Of course, that would be a great way to spend your Sunday. Tom Shreiner puts it this way, "It is wise naturally for believers to rest, and hence one principle that could be derived from the Sabbath is that believers should regularly rest. But the New Testament does not specify when that rest should take place, nor does it set forth a period of time when that rest should occur."³

Conclusion

Are you observing the Sabbath? For us to observe the Sabbath, it means that we have ceased from our labor and we have put our trust in Jesus, our Sabbath rest. When God created us he created us to know God. Your soul will never find rest until you find your

rest in God through faith in Jesus. There is no rest in your good works because there is no assurance that you can be good enough. But Jesus was good enough. He kept the law of God and he died for our sins. So observe the Sabbath by turning in faith to Jesus. He said, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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.”*

The first four commandments are all about worship and they tell us how to love God; **You shall have not other God’s before me:** This tells us who to worship. We are to worship God alone.

You shall not make for yourself any idols: This tells us how to worship. We can’t worship God any way we want to. We must worship God through Jesus, in spirit and truth and with the corporate worship of the church.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain: This tells us when to worship. *Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy: This tells us where to worship. We find our rest in Jesus. He is our seventh day our Sabbath rest. Cease from your work and turn in faith to Jesus and he will forgive your sin and come in your life and give you lasting peace in this life and the life to come.

¹Michael Horton *The Law of Perfect Freedom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993)

²Ibid

³Tom Shreiner Quoted by Justin Taylor “Is the Sabbath Still Required for Christians?” www.thegospelcoalition.org October 14, 2010

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Share with the group what Sundays were like for you growing up. How was Sunday different from any other day of the week? How did it shape you and your faith?
2. Spend some time as a group reciting the Ten Commandments together and rehearsing the Q & A catechism for this week. Open with a time of prayer. Reflecting on the fourth commandment and the catechism for this week, what do you want to thank God for? What do you want to confess? What do you want to ask God to help you with in living out this commandment?
3. Share what you learned about the fourth commandment this week.

Diving Into The Word

4. Read Psalm 62. Look for words like “alone” and “only” and “rest.” What do you learn about finding your “rest” in God from this psalm? In vs 5, David counsels himself with the lesson of vs 1. Where are the areas in your life where you need to “counsel yourself” with the lesson of these two verses? In vs 8 David talks to others too. What from Psalm 62 could you use to help others with their fears?
5. Read Exodus 31:12-17. What does this passage say about the role of the Sabbath in the Mosaic Covenant? In what way was the weekly cycle of work and rest a “sign” of the covenant God made with Israel? (See Exodus 19:4-7)
6. Read Matthew 11:25-30 and 12:1-8. Discuss what Jesus has to say about his relationship to the Sabbath. What are the claims Jesus makes about himself in this passage and what do these claims tell us about the role Jesus plays in bringing God’s rest to our lives? What do you find encouraging about this passage in connection to the issue of the Sabbath?
7. Read Colossians 2:16-17; Romans 14:5-6 and Hebrews 10:24-25. What practical instruction do you receive in these passages when it comes to observing the Lord’s Day and your own rhythm of work and rest?

Taking It Home

8. How can you incorporate the principles of worship, rest and acts of mercy into your weekly practice?
9. If Jesus is our Sabbath rest, how can we live in his rest on a daily basis?