

**Meeting Jesus In The Fourth Commandment**  
**Exodus 20:8-11 Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

**October 14, 2018**

**SI:** We're studying the Ten Commandments this fall.

The theme verse guiding our of our study is Romans 10:4,

Christ is the end of the law.

Doesn't mean Christ gets rid of the law or abolishes the law so don't have to keep.

End is the Greek word telos—goal, aim, fulfillment—that kind of end.

When we study each Commandment we should end up at Jesus.

His perfection, his substitution, his deliverance—and ultimately we should see how the Commandments are ways for us to respond to Jesus in faith.

So let's look this morning at the Fourth Commandment.

I'm going to read this commandment twice, first from Ex 20, then from Deut 5.

You'll notice the command is the same, but the rationale for the command is different in each of these two passages.

<sup>8</sup> "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> 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 or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

**INTRO:** The Fourth Commandment has caused lots of debate among Christians. Here are some of the issues:

Is the Sabbath something that was only for the nation of Israel, or is it also for believers today? Is it morally binding for the church?

Another question:

The Sabbath was Saturday, the seventh day of the week.

We worship on Sunday, the first day of the week.

Is the switch from Saturday to Sunday valid?

Is Sunday the Christian Sabbath, or is our Sunday worship disconnected from the Fourth Commandment and something we do for entirely different reasons?

Another issue:

If Sunday is the Christian Sabbath, then what activity is permitted on that day and what is not permitted? The commandment says you shall not do any work.

What exactly does that mean?

One more thing: What should we emphasize? Resting or worshipping?

The commandment itself focuses on rest but other passages focus on worship.

The challenge of preaching a sermon on the Fourth Commandment is that all those questions demand to be answered.

But I would murder this sermon if I tried to do that.

So let me tell you where I'm coming from.

I believe the Fourth Commandment has not been abolished. It is still for us.

It is still part of God's moral law that we are to follow as individuals and a body.

I believe the switch from Saturday to Sunday is valid and biblical.

The first day of week, day Christ rose, the Lord's day is the Christian Sabbath.

I believe there are activities that are required on the Sabbath, there are activities that are permitted and there are activities not permitted on the Sabbath.

It's not a day for you to do whatever you want.

God wants you to do some things and cease from doing other things.

But I'm not going to give you a specific list. Because when the church makes

Fourth Commandment lists, they have a way of causing us to miss Jesus himself in the commandment. Just like we saw in the Matthew 12 reading!

One more thing, I think rest and worship are both commanded, both important.

But I'm going to focus on the command to rest.

I'm going to paint this in broad strokes and challenge you with something things, and urge you to work this out before the Lord.

Two headings: 1. Resting from your work 2. Resting in your Savior

**MP#1 Resting from your work**

When Columbus discovered the New World and landed on the island of Hispaniola, the Spaniards enslaved the native islanders, called the Arawaks. They forced them to mine for gold.

There was a priest, Bartolome de las Casas, he was an eyewitness of the slavery of the Arawak people. He wrote this:

“ . . . mountains are stripped from top to bottom and bottom to top a thousand times; they dig, split rocks, move stones, and carry dirt on their backs to wash it in the rivers, while those who wash gold stay in the water all the time with their backs bent so constantly it breaks them . . . ”

He describes how the women were enslaved for farm labor and also worked without rest. Husbands and wives were so exhausted they ceased to procreate and on the rare occasions when children were born, the mothers were so overworked they had no milk to nurse and the children died.

Eventually slave labor destroyed the Arawaks and the Spanish had to import African slaves to work their Caribbean plantations.

Fast forward to the 1930s and 40s.

The Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn describes life in the slave labor camps of the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin.

Prisoners would work in rock quarries or cutting timber in the Siberian forests or digging canals or building dams with shovels and buckets.

They worked 12 hours on and had 12 hours off.

But walking to and from the worksite was part of their time off, and sometimes they had to walk two hours each way.

Also, during the 12 hours off they had two full roll calls where all the prisoners had to stand outside at attention and give name, serial number,

Soviet Union penal code violation, and their sentence—10 years, 25 years.

Also, during the 12 hours off their only two meals of the day were served.

This also required prisoners being called one by one so that officials could check who had met the work quota and earned their bread and who hadn't.

Solzhenitsyn says:

“out of twelve leisure hours . . . barely four remained for undisturbed sleep”

What's the common experience of these enslaved people? Work without rest.

When we read the Ten Commandments, we should try to imagine the Israelites hearing them for the first time. The voice of the Lord spoke from Mt. Sinai.

At the base of the mountain was a vast congregation, hundreds of thousands.

Who were these people? They were former slaves.

The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years.

Exodus says they made mud bricks for the vast Egyptian building projects.

Archaeologists have found these bricks. They are the size of concrete blocks.

Day in and day out, year after year, decade after decade, for generations,  
under the blazing Egyptian sun, with quotas enforced by whips.

You don't work, you don't eat. You get a beating. So every day you work.  
They lived an exhausting existence.

Years later they called their Egyptian slavery the iron furnace.

So how do you imagine they felt when they stood before that mountain  
and they heard the voice of the Lord speak this command?

On the Sabbath Day you shall not do any work. One whole day every week,  
no work. It sounded great to them. They had lived exhausted lives.

But the Lord says, I want you to rest like I rested after six creation days.

Few chapters later God repeats the Sabbath command

and says that on the seventh creation day he rested and was refreshed.

A fascinating detail, that God could be refreshed. God doesn't have a body.

That shows us that rest is more than physical. It touches the whole person.

Back in Egypt, Pharaoh could relax whenever he wanted. Slaves toiled every day.

But God says: You're not slaves any more. You're my free people.

And so this rest is not just for the people in charge, it's for everybody.

You, your children, your servants, alien laborers, even your animals.

Which is another fascinating detail, God wants working animals to rest too.

In Exodus 20 God says rest because I rested on the seventh day of creation.

In Deuteronomy 5 God says rest because I brought you out of slavery.

So when the Israelites put aside their work for a day and rested,

it was not just a refreshing gift for their bodies and spirits—

it was a testimony. It was a witness.

It was a visible demonstration that they were no longer slaves to a demanding  
taskmaster. Yahweh had set them free.

They didn't have to work every day of the week in fear they wouldn't meet quota.

By putting aside their work for a whole day they were testifying

that they believed God would provide for them through labor other six days.

Can you see how this commandment would have radically changed the Israelites?

It gave their lives a rhythm of work and rest they had never known.

In doing that it recalibrated their thinking about who they were and who

God was and what was important in life.

So let's talk about resting from your work on the Sabbath.

There's a Lutheran theologian Marva Dawn who wrote a book on the Sabbath.

She asks, what does the Lord want us to cease from on the Sabbath?

She comes up with a long list, I just want to read the first three.  
I know I said I wouldn't be giving any lists, but this is different. See where going.

**Cease your work.** Of course that doesn't mean all work.

Jesus himself in Matt 12 says works of necessity and works of mercy must be done.

Disciples getting food for themselves, Jesus healing the man..

But God wants you to cease work one day a week because, Marva Dawn says, this becomes a holy rhythm that keeps work from becoming an idol.

I like that. She's going for the heart.

I've sometimes heard Christians say that they do this or that thing on Sunday because that's how they relax. It's a day of rest. I know what feels restful to me.

Doing this or that work or project or activity is restful, so that's what I do.

But maybe you're deceiving yourself, and you're doing those things because idols.

You can't not do them. You can't keep from doing them. Have a grip on you.

Let's go deeper. The next thing on her list.

**Cease your productivity and accomplishment.**

Nothing wrong with producing and achieving, but they can become taskmasters that enslave us. I have so much to get done if I don't I'm a failure, if do feel good.

“trying to accomplish a lot is one of the ways we seek to satisfy the deep longings of our existence, but inevitably when we reach our goals we will not be satisfied.”

On the Sabbath, put away your to do list. That might mean you don't accomplish as much as you hoped in the coming week, but God's at work in your heart.

**Cease your worry and anxiety and tension.**

As part of your Sabbath Day habits, concentrate on ceasing to worry.

How do you do that? Well, it's connected to ceasing these other things.

Deliberately put away anxiety and worry causing projects that can be dealt with in the coming work week. She actually puts paperwork, bills, etc in a box.

You might think this is just living in denial, putting these worries off, they'll just be worse on Monday for not having dealt with them.

But she says it doesn't work that way at all. As this becomes a habitual practice, as it becomes a holy rhythm, you gain new priorities, new perspectives, and a new sense of God's presence.

That's the ultimate purpose of the Fourth Commandment—to connect us to Lord.  
So let's focus on . . .

**MP#2 Resting in your Savior, resting in Christ.**

The Fourth Commandment calls us to rest on two levels.

First, it is a call to take physical and mental time off from work.

God says: I made you. I know what you need.  
It's not good for every day to be dominated work.  
But that that physical and mental rest points to a deeper command.  
A command to rest from the underlying drives of our hearts that enslave us.  
Drives to produce, accomplish and react to our worries and anxieties and tensions.

God rested from his work on the seventh day.  
But he didn't rest because he was tired. God doesn't get tired.  
He looked at all he had made and said it was very good.  
That was the essence of God rest. He was satisfied with his work.  
He was able to put it down and leave it alone.

That's the rest that God wants you to experience.  
Rest that is so deep that you can look at your life and say—I'm satisfied.  
How is that possible? We aren't God.  
It can only happen through faith in Jesus Christ.  
Remember what Jesus called himself in Matthew 12.  
The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.  
Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. He's the Lord of the Day of Rest.  
If you are connected to him, then you can be satisfied with your life and work  
in a way that sets you free.

I'm sure you've all seen the famous movie *Chariots of Fire*.  
It's the true story about Eric Liddell, a British athlete in 1924 Paris Olympics.  
Liddell was a Christian with strong convictions about resting on the Lord's Day.  
His race was the 100 meter and the schedule published months before had the heats  
and the race on weekdays, but when he got to Paris, the heat changed to Sunday.  
So he didn't run. He spent the day in rest and worship as he always had and  
as a result he forfeited participating in the Olympics.  
But he was given a chance to run the 400 meter, which was not his strong suit.  
He won gold and set a world record that lasted 12 years.

So that's the main story of the movie, but there's another story—  
another runner on the British team named Harold Abrahams.

For Harold Abrahams running and winning was everything.  
He was driven to accomplish and produce, he was filled with tension.  
Abrahams has a line in the movie:  
“When the gun goes off I have 10 seconds to justify my existence.”  
He felt he had to prove himself so he could never rest.

Contrast Harold Abrams' statement and view of his work with Eric Liddell's most famous line in the movie.

He's talking to his sister and he says:

"God made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

Eric Liddle didn't run to justify his existence or to prove himself.

He ran simply to please the God who he knew had already accepted him.

So he wasn't enslaved to his work and was able to lay it down and rest.

I love the way Tim Keller put it in a sermon on Matthew 12.

"There is a work underneath our work that we really need rest from. For almost all of us, unless God comes into our lives, we're working and we're doing things to prove ourselves—to convince God, others, and ourselves that we are good people. And that work is never over, unless we rest in the Gospel."

There is a work underneath our work that we really need rest from.

That's profound. That's our essential problem. That's works righteousness.

That's what drove Harold Abrams to run not for pleasure—

but to justify his existence.

That's what drove the Pharisees in all of their religious exercises,

not for the joy of fellowship with God, but to prove they were good people, and therefore accepted by God.

Let's be honest, that's what drives us—work beneath our work.

We want to prove to ourselves, others, and to God that we are ok.

We all chose different areas in which to prove it—

success in parenting, school, business, athletics, wealth, romance, religion whatever—but the end result is not deep satisfaction.

We cannot look at our work and say: It is finished.

We cannot rest because there is always incompleteness and anxiety and tension.

Even on the Sabbath Day when God had told us not to work because not slaves.

Even on that day we can't put everything down like he had told us.

But what did Jesus come to do?

He came to finish the work underneath your work so that you can rest.

Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience. Kept God's law perfectly. He rejoiced in it.

He heard from heaven those words of commendation:

This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

And then, the Bible says, he was obedient unto death, even death on the cross.

In that great final act of obedience, paid the penalty for our sins.

And what were his final words as he hung there on the cross?

It is finished. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

It is finished.

What was finished? The work beneath your work.

You no longer have to strive to prove you are ok to your friends or your parents or your children or God or yourself.

You have God's approval completely in Christ.

And God's going to take care of you and supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

So what does resting on Sunday and putting down our ordinary work and activities really have to do with this. This seems like an internal, spiritual activity.

Learning to trust Christ's finished work. Knowing and believing I'm set free and I'm an accepted and loved child of God. That's all in here.

What difference does it make what I actually do or don't do on Sunday?

I think this is the answer.

We're physical-spiritual beings. We're not angels. We have bodies.

God has made us so that the movements of our spirits are expressed in bodies, and the movements of our bodies can have an impact on our spirits.

So ceasing your work and resting from your work, if it is done in faith, and with a desire to know Christ better, will actually have that effect.

Like taking Communion. This physical eating and drinking done in faith, brings about a spiritual communion.

John Piper was asked, What's the Sabbath for?

It's a day for worshipping Jesus. It's a day for saying by what we do and don't do that Jesus, not our work and not the money we get from our work, is our treasure and our meaning.