

Exod. 20:8-11 The Fourth Commandment (part 1 - God is Sovereign Lord of All.)

Today's topic, the Sabbath, is very important for us. And, there are many differences in opinion on how New Covenant Christians should view the Sabbath. We have Seventh Day Adventists. We have Christian Sabbatarians who believe we must observe the Sabbath, but as Christians, the day has changed to the first day of the week (Sunday). There is also a group of non-Sabbatarians who believe we aren't necessarily bound to the Sabbath. And within these groups, there are differing degrees of application. Many questions arise like, "What is work?" "What if I find mowing my big yard with my new tractor as I also spend solitude time thinking, praying, worshiping, as the opposite of work?" "Must I attend church on Sunday? Or, am I free to go on Saturday night?" The questions abound! And, I hope to answer some of these next week.

Today, please bear with me as I do my best to lay a foundation for a proper understanding of the Sabbath. So you will know, I have done more reading and more studying on this topic (by far) than any topic I have preached in the 4 years we have been at Grace. I don't want to simply take a position on this issue because someone else says so. Praise the Lord for the time of the last 4 weeks. It couldn't have come at a better time in preparation for the next three sermons. Here is what I would like to do. Today's sermon is foundational. I have two points, going back to God's Sabbath rest in Genesis and then briefly looking at the Sabbath in the life of Israel. Next week, we will turn to Jesus and his understanding of the Sabbath. The following week, we will look at the New Covenant as we consider the meaning of Jesus' words: "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood" as we observe the Lord's Supper together. So let's begin.

1. The Sabbath shows that God is Lord of Creation. The Meaning of the Sabbath has its roots in the fact that God is the Sovereign Lord over all his creation. Look at Gen. 2:1-3: "**Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 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.**" One thing we should notice about these verses is that they don't command anyone to rest. They simply state some facts about God. This "Sabbath" refers to God, not man. Given, the Sabbath command in the 10 commandments is certainly patterned after God's "rest" on the 7th day as we will see. But, in Genesis we do not see the command to rest. So, what is the basic meaning? After God finished creating in six days (which I take to be literal), He ceased from his work of creation, which is what the word "rested" in v. 2 means. And, it doesn't mean that God took a nap on a Sunday afternoon, or kicked his feet up on his earthly footstool. For the Psalmist says, "**Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep**" (Ps. 121:4).

So, God did not stop working in some aspects because the Bible says in many places that creation is sustained and held together by his power. And, obviously this was the case on that 7th day. So, what does it mean? I believe generally speaking it means that God created in 6 days and on the 7th day He ceased from his work of creation and He stood back and said, "*This is good!*" *What I see declares my glory! The work of creation is finished!*" There was perfect peace. And, we could easily say, the 7th day was picture of ultimate rest. On that 7th day and for a following time there was perfect rest in the universe. Creation rested in God. Adam and Eve rested in

harmony with all of God's creation. And, the goal of creation is perfect rest, which is pictured in the 7th day.

This is so important for us as believers for many reasons because we must understand this in order to truly comprehend what Jesus meant when he said, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”** (Matt. 11:28). You see after the fall of man, this “creation” rest was disrupted (to put it mildly). This is why Paul can say in Rom. 8:19-22: **“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”** Today, there is no hope for rest in this life or the life to come outside the eternal Son of God. The man, the woman, the child who truly rests says, **“My sins are forgiven! My soul is at rest!”** This is the Gospel: **“that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them”** (2 Cor. 5:19). We cannot preach the “Sabbath” unless we preach Christ.

But for our purposes this morning, let's move back to my point. The Sabbath pictures that God is Lord over every place in the universe. This also means that He is Lord over all time, which He also created. There is no life outside of Him. There is no hope outside of Him. Any attempts to belittle God as creator and sustainer over all his creation are futile and useless. There is no place we can go or hide from his presence. He is Lord over all! And, as we will see, this is the basic meaning of the 4th commandment to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. He is Lord! David understands this principle well when he says, **“O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. ¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well”** (Psa 139:1-14). Now, let's move to our second point.

2. The Sabbath shows that God is Lord over His people. I am being specific here in reference to the “*people of God*,” those on whom He has put his special love; those whom He has chosen as his own; those to whom He reveals himself in a particular way. In Deut. 7:6 we read: **“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”** In the NT John tells us: **“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”** (John 1:12). Yes, God is Lord over all his creation, but He has a special relationship with his people. Concerning the 10 commandments we have under

the Mosaic Covenant, these 10 words were given on Mt. Sinai to Israel. And, I am willing to argue that we see the moral principles behind these commands as generally understood by the peoples of the earth before Sinai. After all, doesn't Paul say in Rom. 2:15, "**They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.**" I think this is true of God's moral law in general.

But, what about the Sabbath in the Mosaic Law? God clearly says to Israel: "**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.**" As we have seen, it is rooted in creation and pictures ultimate rest for the people of God. For we read in v. 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.**" But, what is it about the Sabbath commandment that says, "*God is Lord over his people?*" Here are some reasons.

i. The Sabbath is a command to rest. Look at v. 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.**" We really don't know whether this Sabbath Law was known in some form by God's people before Sinai. And, as we saw in point number one, I believe the reference to the Sabbath in Genesis was a reference to God and his rest, not man and his rest. And, whatever Sabbath-rest principle they may have had from their understanding of creation, it seems unlikely that the Egyptian taskmasters would have respected it. Nevertheless, we see the command to rest very clearly. And, this rest must come on the 7th day, which is the Sabbath for the Jews as well as some groups like the Seventh Day Adventists and even some Seventh Day Baptists. After Sinai, the Sabbath became a part of OT calendar. It is still a part today. And, this Sabbath command is the reason we have a 6 day work week. Many today rest one in seven.

This command to physical rest reflects the fact that God knows what is best for mankind. God gives provision to our bodies. We need rest. The people of Israel were not to work "24/7," a principle workaholics finally realize after their first heart attack. What a relief the hard-driven Israelite slaves must have felt when their God was not like their tyrannical task masters! He cared about their physical well-being and even doubled the amount of manna given on the 6th day. Under this command, ALL work was forbidden. You couldn't even get carry out. So God was saying to Israel, "*You must rest. This is good for you.*"

ii. The Sabbath is a sign of redemption. In Deut. 5:15 we read, "**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.**" This verse puts Sabbath keeping in the context of God bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. In other words, when the people obeyed the Sabbath command, they were to remember that God redeemed them from Egypt. They were slaves in arguably the most powerful kingdom on earth and God sent 10 plagues and through these mighty acts, He saved Israel. So, when they obeyed this command, not only did they rest from their work, not only did they praise God in his creation, they also remembered the mighty acts of God in redeeming them out of Egypt.

iii. The Sabbath is a sign that God sanctifies (sets apart) his people. If you remember, my second point was that the Sabbath shows us that God is Lord over his people. In the context of Israel and the Mosaic Law, I would like to read Exod. 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.’”** Out of all the 10 commandments, this one stood out the most in separating Israel from the rest of the nations. (We do see circumcision, but not as visible to the nations as Sabbath.) They were to be a Sabbath-keeping nation. Not only did they have a Sabbath day (7th day), they even had larger Sabbaths like the year of Jubilee. In Lev. 25:8-10 we read, **“You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years.”**⁹ **Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land.**¹⁰ **And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan.”** It was also commanded that Israel keep every seventh year as a Sabbath, in which they were not to plant or harvest during that year, but give the land rest. There were also various Sabbaths during the year which served as times when Israel celebrated the God who saved them.

So, obedience to this command marked them out from the other nations and was a sign that they were set apart by the God of Creation. They belonged to God. So when they kept the Sabbath, they remembered their God. And along with all the other commands in the Law of Moses (not just the 10), on the Sabbath day, and during the Sabbath feasts, they also remembered that they were sinners who had been chosen by God and forgiven their sins.

Let me try and summarize and bring this point to a close this morning. The Sabbath was a time for physical rest. It was good for Israel. And during that time, they were to worship as they reflected on the Lordship of their creator, Yahweh, as they remembered that He brought them out of slavery in Egypt, as they remembered that He chose them as a special people and saved them from their sins. It was a day of repentance. Now, I have a few applications.

1. God will give rest to his creation. Rom. 8:21-22 says, that **“Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.**²² **For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”** This is still future. There will be a day when the Lion will lay with the lamb. There will be a day when we will not see the dead carcass on the road. There will be a day when no more tornadoes rage through a city. There will be a day when earthquakes cease from destruction. God will give physical rest to his creation and restore the original rest of the 7th day. Oh what a glorious day that will be! And, there is nothing that can stop this plan. All of creation is heading there.

2. God will give rest to his people. Right now, there is an already and a not yet to this fulfillment of Sabbath rest. Already, you have rest if your sins are forgiven. If your sins are forgiven, the God of all creation is not angry with you anymore. He punished his Son in your place. Jesus said, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid”** (John 14:27). In another place he also

said, **“Come unto me all of you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”**

There is no rest in this world (right now) unless your sins are forgiven. As the Sabbath pictures God’s ceasing from his work of creation, it pictures our ceasing from our own good works, which are filthy rags in the sight of God. Christ worked so that you can rest.

And not only is rest found now in Christ, there will come an ultimate rest for the people of God. Rev. 21:1-4 says, **“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”**

3. **Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.** This means also that He is the fulfillment of the Sabbath. This means that He is the very presence of God. In the OT we see that God met with his people in a place; in the garden; on special mountains; at particular altars; at the tabernacle; in the temple place in the holy city Jerusalem. He also gave them special times where they were to remember his Lordship. With Jesus, He is the place. And, when he came two thousand years ago and died on the cross and rose again, we read that in the fullness of time Jesus came. And, *“Today is the day of salvation.”* The Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ. He is the place. The time of his coming is the time. He is the Lord of creation, **“the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together”** (Col 1:15-17). God is in the process of reconciling all things to himself because of the work of Christ. And, one day, He will usher in the new heavens and the new earth with Christ as Lord. Oh, what a beautiful picture of God’s plan for all of creation including his people: The Sabbath Command.