

Exod. 20:8-11 The Fourth Commandment (part 2) Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

The most difficult part about these sermons on the Sabbath and particularly today's sermon (for me) is how to narrow what I give you. There is so much! You will only get a fraction of all the theological, historical, and hermeneutical issues that helped me to get to our truths today. And, there are many more we will NOT cover. I welcome further discussion. And, as always, test what I say with the Scriptures. I expect some good conversations on this topic in the coming days. And, if you want to read more, let me know. I have lots of sources.

Also, let me say that Sabbath understanding and application (for me) is not an issue for salvation or fellowship in the Christian Church. There are more views (especially in application) on this subject than most others in the NT Church. In the context of keeping certain rules and regulations, Paul writes in Rom. 14:5 **“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.”** With both the context and the spirit of this principle in mind, I am trying to be convinced in my own mind, and at the same time not judge others according to principles of freedom in Christ. Let me say clearly from the beginning, I believe Christ fulfilled the Sabbath and that we are not “bound” to keep it as Israel did under the Mosaic Law. Today, I have two parts to the sermon. The first is really a summary and application of last week, focusing on Christ as the one who has fulfilled the Sabbath. In the second part, I am going to ask some questions regarding the Sabbath and then try and answer them. So let's go.

1. As Lord of the Sabbath Jesus fulfills the Sabbath. This point is really a recap of last week's message. In relation to the Sabbath we see 3 BIG truths from the Sabbath that finds their fulfillment in Christ.

i. The first is in sanctification. In other words, the Sabbath was given in the Mosaic Covenant (also called the Law at Sinai) in order to separate, or “sanctify” Israel as the special people of God. We see this clearly in Exod. 31:13 which says, **“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.”** When they obeyed the Sabbath command, they were different. They knew it. And, the surrounding nations also knew it. This was a sign that God sanctifies his people. But, here I must ask, “Did obedience to this law actually sanctify them in such a way that we are sanctified today?” We must say, “No!” This was a sign pointing to what is real.

Today, Christ is the one who sanctifies. In Rom. 6 & 7, Pauls speaks at length about the Law and how it points to what is real in Christ. In respect to sanctification, listen to 6:22-23: **“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** Then again in 1 Cor. 1:30 he says, **““And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”**

ii. The second is in redemption. Sabbath law was given to Israel as a picture of their redemption from Egypt. 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.” In these verses we see that God gave the Sabbath to Israel that when they observed this day (as well as all the other Sabbaths), they remembered that God saved them from slavery. Now, I must also ask, *“Did obedience to this law or any other laws actually save Israel?”* Again, we must say no! Why? We must say no because the Sabbath was incomplete in that it could not provide ultimate redemption. Salvation did not come through obedience to the Sabbath command. This command pointed to the TRUE deliverer. Lord Sabbath is his name.

iii. The third is in rest. We see this point in Exod. 20:11, **“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.”** When Israel obeyed God’s command to rest they ultimately pictured God’s rest at the end of creation. Everything was peaceful. Everything was right. There was perfect rest. Again, I must ask, *“Did their obedience on that day give them rest for their souls?”* We must say no! Ultimate rest still came through the peace that only God could give through the forgiveness of sins. This Sabbath command was a picture of true rest in Christ as the one who fulfills this command.

Jesus is the true “rest” of God. The true rest we find in Christ is the deepest meaning because this one finds its roots in creation. In Acts 7 Stephen explains this idea of rest in his sermon. He preaches a great sermon on the history of Israel. But, at the end, he speaks about the “*dwelling place*” of God in reference to the temple. David asks, *“God let me build a temple for you dwelling place.”* God says, *“No. Wait. Solomon your son will build it.”* Later Solomon builds the temple. Then, after this point, Stephen says in v. 48: **“Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands.”** Then he quotes Psalm 11:4 saying, **“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?”** In saying this he was saying, the only place of rest is in God Himself. For only in the eternal God will rest be found. So when Christ comes and says in Matt. 12:6, **“Someone greater than the temple is here,”** He was saying, I am the place of God’s rest. I remember the day I understood this. Truly if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

Now, at this point, you may say, *“Jon I see all this. You are repeating yourself and preaching to the choir.”* ALL the modern Christian views that I read concerning the Sabbath believe that Christ fulfilled the Sabbath rest from creation that was lost in the fall. All of them believe that Christ fulfilled Mosaic Law as well. All of them believe that Christ has the authority to interpret the Sabbath. The difficulties come when we ask, *“Do we obey the Sabbath command from the Decalogue as Israel did? If so how? Do we keep the day on 7th day as the Seventh Day Adventists? Do we move it to the first day of the week and obey it by keeping a “Christian” Sabbath?”* So instead of applications, I have questions and answers.

Question 1 – Are we bound to keep the Sabbath as Israel kept it under the Mosaic Law? Because Christ is the fulfillment of Sabbath Law, I do not believe we are obligated by law to keep what Christ fulfilled in the same way as Israel did under the Mosaic Covenant. Just a quick note: Did you know that the penalty for Sabbath breaking under the Mosaic Law was death? Exod. 31:14 says, **“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.” I have never met anyone who has kept this Sabbath Law perfectly. If we are to keep Mosaic Sabbath Law perfectly even as NT Christians, then we must put people to death when they break it. And, I believe in order to be perfectly consistent in keeping this law, as Israel did, we must stick to the 7th day, not Sunday. (In this regard, at least the 7th Day Adventists are consistent.)

Question 2 – Are we bound to keep the Sabbath based on a creation ordinance found in Gen. 2:2-4? I could say a lot here. But, as we pointed out last week, these verses are not about man’s rest. They are about God and his rest from creation work. Do I believe that every man created by God should rest one in seven? Yes I do. It is wise and prudent and rooted in God’s creation rest. It is good for man to rest. We need it. And we must rest. But, do I think that the Sabbath command is a creation ordinance in such a way that we MUST obey it as seen in the 10 commandments? No. What about marriage? Many would say this is a creation ordinance. But, are we bound to marry? Is marriage the best? Yes! Is it normal? Yes! But, even the Apostle Paul said it is better not to marry. And I must admit this is a huge issue in considering the Sabbath command in the 10 Commandments. But, let me finish this point by saying that ultimate rest is found in Christ, not in physical rest in this world.

Question 3 – Is the Sabbath command in the Decalogue a moral command? This is a difficult question. Think about it. It sits right in the middle of the 10 Commandments. And, obviously the other nine are moral. And if it is moral, are we not obligated to obey this command? I must admit that this is probably the most difficult issue for me. Let me try and explain myself better. Under Mosaic Law, every command of God is moral, whether it is to keep the Sabbath or not to covet, or to steal, or to follow certain dietary laws, or treat lepers or menstruating women in certain ways, or purification rites. If God commands it, it is moral! What theologians have done, especially the Puritans, is to separate Mosaic Law into 3 distinct categories: ceremonial, civil, and moral. (How many of you have heard this?) And with the coming of Christ and his death and resurrection, they say that the ceremonial and civil laws have been nullified or done away with, leaving only the moral laws to be obeyed. And since the 10 commandments are the center of moral law, therefore the Sabbath Law must be obeyed in the NT.

But, I am not convinced we can separate out all the ceremonial and civil laws from the moral ones we find in the 10 commandments into some neat 3 part structure as many have tried to do. I have lots of questions here. If we are “bound” to keep the Sabbath “day” as NT Christians, why are we not also “bound” to keep the other Sabbaths as well; like the yearly Sabbaths, the one in seven Sabbath, or the year of Jubilee? Really, the main reason is that what the Sabbath pointed to found its fulfillment in Christ. I have lots of questions here and see some inconsistencies. It is important for us as NT Christians to understand what Paul meant when he said in Rom. 10:4: **“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”**

And, in the NT we see nine of the commandments of the Decalogue clearly repeated in moral aspects. But, we do not see the Sabbath in the same way. Listen to the words of Paul in Col. 2:16-17. After reminding the Christians in Colossae about Christ and what He accomplished on the cross, he says, **“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.” I believe the clearest meaning from this passage has to consider this as an application of Sabbath Law given by Moses. Also, in Rom. 14:1-5 he also says, **“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 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.”**

Here is something else to consider. What about the Jerusalem council? Do you remember after Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem after planting churches all over the Gentile world? They had a discussion over circumcision. In the end, they did not command the Gentiles to be circumcised, which was also part of God’s Law. Along with Sabbath keeping, this was the biggest sign that Israel belonged to God. Here is their conclusion. Acts 15:28-29 says, **“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”** What an opportunity to tell them to keep the Sabbath. There is much more here but we don’t have time. I will come back to this idea of morality at the end.

Question 4 – As NT Christians, why do we meet on Sunday (also called the Lord’s Day)? There are various reasons. I believe the primary reason is related to the day of the week that Jesus rose from the dead. Without going into much detail, all of Jesus’ recorded appearances to the Apostles, to the women, and the two men on the road to Emmaus happened on the first day of the week. I do not believe that these recordings in the Gospels are by accident or coincidence.

Another reason we meet on Sunday is because we see at least some example of this in the NT. Acts 20:7 says, **“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.”** In Acts 16:2 there may be an implication that they were meeting on this day. Paul writes: **“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.”** By the way, this is the verse many use to show that giving tithes and offerings is a part of our weekly gathering. In all fairness, historically, I don’t think we see Sunday as the absolute norm for worship in the Christian church until Constantine made it law in the 4th century, and even then, some met on Saturday. There are still examples of Christians meeting on the 7th day as well as the 1st day, especially in the 1st three centuries.

Another reason we meet on Sundays is because this is the day that Christ rose from the dead. And, the theological implications from this truth are huge. Think about this. In the OT, the Sabbath acted as a memorial of God’s redemption of his people from slavery. In the same way, the Lord’s Day, considering the resurrection of Christ, celebrates the climax of God’s redemption of his people from the bondage of sin. Also, the OT Sabbath remembered creation. In

the same way the Lord's Day remembers the new creation as Christ is the firstborn of creation, the Lord of creation. In 1 Cor. 15 Paul clearly considers Christ's resurrection to be both the inauguration and the first fruits of the new creation.

Another theological reason we meet on Sunday is because the resurrection of Christ begins the "rest" of God from creation in the lives of sinners. Our rest is based upon the person and work of Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath. If your sins are forgiven today it is only because of Christ's death and resurrection.

Another reason we meet on Sunday is because in the NT, it is also called "The Lord's Day." In Rev. 1:10 we read these words from the Apostle John: "**I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.**" This truth is huge for us. If you remember from last week, my first point was that God is Lord of Creation. And when Israel kept the Sabbath, they remembered God's Lordship. It was a day "to the Lord." We might even call it the OT Lord's Day. In the NT the title "day of the Lord" distinguished the first day of the week as the NEW Lord's Day, the day on which by their worship, the new people of God demonstrated their allegiance to Christ's lordship established by the Resurrection. Both days point to God's lordship over time and history. With the OT Sabbath, lordship was acknowledged by ceasing from work for the whole day. With the NT Lord's Day we proclaim the Lordship of God through the resurrection of Christ as we worship Him as the one who fulfills the Sabbath.

So, how do we obey the Sabbath in the NT?

Final Application - As Lord of the Sabbath Jesus demands ultimate obedience. As the 10 commandments sit at the center of Mosaic Law and the Sabbath commands sits in the middle of the 10 commandments, Christ is the center of all of it. He is Lord of the Sabbath. Therefore, He demands ultimate obedience. And, in his death and resurrection we cease from our works and rest in him.

Is it the best day for us to meet as Christians? Yes. And, the Bible says, "**Do not forsake the gathering together of God's people**" (Heb. 10:25). But, when we see that the Sabbath was fulfilled in Christ, we see that this command is applicable for every day of the week. As OT Sabbath focused on physical rest, so now the Sabbath is focused on worship of the risen Lord 24/7.