

Honor The Sabbath – Exodus 20:8-11

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Eric Liddell*

1. It was 1924 and the Olympics were being held in Paris.
2. Eric Liddell was there to run track's premier event for Scotland - the 100 meters and he was expected to take the gold.
3. But he arrived in Paris only to discover that the qualifying heats for the hundred fell on Sunday – Liddell couldn't run!
4. He'd made a commitment many years before to honor the Lord's Day by devoting it to worship.
5. Liddell was the son of missionary parents.
 - a. in fact, he'd been born in China in 1902.
 - b. now, in his last year of college at Edinburgh University he was preparing to return to China as a missionary himself.
 - c. but his skill as a runner had brought him to the Olympics where everyone knew he was a shoe in to take the hundred.
6. Everyone was stunned when he *matter of factly* told them he had to drop out because his qualifying heat was on Sunday.
 - a. they didn't understand: This was a once in a lifetime opportunity.
 - 1) more than that, few people ever had such a chance.
 - 2) how could he so casually toss it aside?
 - b. Liddell's decision wasn't easy; it was a tough choice, but one he was never really in any doubt about.
 - c. you see, running for Liddell was no longer the fun recreation it had been when he and his elder brother had chased each other around the yard as children.
 - d. running was now a discipline, a task; one he was extremely good at, even gifted for.
 - e. in fact, Liddell said that when he ran, He felt God's pleasure, as though God had made him to run!
 - f. but *competing* in the Olympics demanded that running be turned into a kind of *work*, a *labor*.
 - g. and many years before, Liddell had made a commitment to honor the Lord's day by refraining from work and devoting it to worship.
 - h. his *conscience* would not let him run on Sunday.
7. The Scottish Olympic team administrators and his teammates tried to reason with him, but Liddell was determined and cheerfully told them he would not be dissuaded.
8. Finally, someone hit on the idea of seeing if Liddell would run in the 400 meters instead, a race he had not trained for.
9. Liddell agreed and ended up taking the gold medal.

B. *Honoring The Sabbath*

1. The story of Eric Liddell became the basis for the movie *Chariots of Fire*.
2. What the movie doesn't tell is that Liddell also took a bronze medal in the 200 meter race and after graduating from Edinburgh University, he returned to China, where he was instrumental in leading thousands to Christ, was imprisoned by the Japanese, and ended up dying in an internment camp in 1945.
3. Liddell died as he had lived, a man whose one aim was to honor the Lord in all he did.
4. What history remembers him most for – was the honor he showed to the Lord's Day.
5. We're looking at the Fourth Commandment this morning.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 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* 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. ¹¹ For *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.

B. The Controversy

1. There’s huge debate among Christians over how to understand the Fourth Commandment.
 - a. the debate stems from the fact that this command seems so **unlike** the others.
 - b. all of the **rest** of the commandments have obvious spiritual and moral principles that undergird them –
 - c. while **this** commandment seems to be far more **ritualistic**.
2. It’s obvious **why** we’re to have no other gods, and not make an image of Him or take His name in vain.
3. It’s obvious why were’ not to commit murder or adultery or lie or steal.
4. But how does keeping the Sabbath become a part of the life of faith and mark our covenant with God?
5. And here’s another question that comes up – when did the Sabbath get changed from its original day on Saturday, to Sunday?
6. Well, let’s begin by just taking a closer look at the actual commandment.

C. The Sabbath Instituted

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* 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.

1. As always, we need to understand these words as they would have been received by those who originally heard them.
2. Who were they? Recently liberated slaves
 - a. for nearly 300 years they had labored under the cruel lash of harsh taskmasters.
 - b. for generations they’d bent their backs to the burdens of stone and brick as they built the monuments of ancient Egypt.
 - c. and all throughout those years, they’d never had a day off!
3. In fact, to the world of that time, these words were revolutionary.
 - a. no nation, no culture enjoyed a weekly day off.
 - b. they might take an **occasional** day off to celebrate one of their pagan festivals, but these were few and far between.
 - c. the idea of a **weekly** day off, was simply unheard of.
4. In fact, the Jews ended up incurring the scorn of the rest of the world for their observance of the weekly Sabbath!
 - a. the Greeks considered it a sign of laziness.
 - b. the Romans derided the Jews because in their driving quest for domination they knew no culture that took one day a week off would take over the world!
5. Set against this historical context, what God said to them in the Fourth Commandment would create an immediate question in their minds.
 - a. we might think they would hear it and say, “Alright! A day off! EVERY WEEK TOO – AWESOME!!!”
 - b. but that would not have been their reaction.
 - c. they’d say, “How can we take a day off?”

- 1) remember, they lived, literally, hand to mouth.
 - 2) they were in the wilderness -- they did not have crops to harvest.
 - 3) the bread they ate each day, which was the center and staple of their diet, they collected every morning from the ground.
 - 4) their daily labor provided their daily bread – how could they take a day off? What would they eat?
 - 5) well, you'll remember in Exodus 16, which had occurred just a week before what we're reading here in ch. 20, when the Lord first sent the manna, he told them to gather twice as much on the 6th day, because the 7th, the Sabbath, there would be none.
 - 6) in other words, they were to prepare for the 7th day by collecting twice as much on the 6th – all so that they would not have to work on the Sabbath, but could enjoy it's rest.
6. It's crucial we get this because it becomes the heart and principle behind the Fourth Commandment.
 7. God told them to rest on the Sabbath day because it was a way for them, as a people who depended for their survival on their daily work, to realize that really, their survival was dependent, not on *their* work, but on *their God!*
 8. Look at what the Lord says here –
 - 8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.**
 - a. the word “remember” literally means *to make a memorial*.
 - b. God is calling them to establish the Sabbath as a marker, a memorial.
 - c. to what? To the fact that they are His covenant people!
 - d. the Sabbath day was a weekly reminder they had entered into a unique relationship and covenant with God.
 9. I wear a ring on my finger. It's a symbol, a reminder of May 17th, 1980 when my lovely bride and I stood before Pastor Romaine, our family & friends and entered into a solemn, yet joyous covenant between one another and God.
 10. Whenever I see that ring on my finger, I flash back to that day and the promises made.
 11. When I see a wedding ring on someone else's finger, I know they're married.
 12. When someone sees my ring – they know I'm taken! I'm in covenant with the wife of my youth! She is mine and I am hers.
 13. The Sabbath was Israel's wedding ring!
 14. It was a way for God and His people to show they belonged to one another.
 15. And it was observed once every 7 days because Israel lived in a world filled with distractions and competitors who would try to get her to forsake her heavenly husband.
 16. She needed the reminder of who and what she was, *that* often.
 17. So God says – “Remember the Sabbath day, make a memorial out of, setting it aside as holy, as special.”
 18. And here's how you are to make it special –
 - 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but 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.**
 - a. every week is divided into 7 days.
 - b. on 6 of those days they were to do their work – and note carefully what it says in v. 9 *about* their work –
 - c. they were to do ALL their work on those 6 days.
 - d. they were to determine what work needed to be done in a week, and then *schedule their times* so that they got done what needed to be done, in 6 days.
 - e. and the work they were to do on those 6 days, was – THEIR work.
 19. God is speaking here of *that* work which is *our* work – our *career*, our *vocation*, our *calling* by Him.
 - a. you see, every one of us was a unique calling from the Lord.

- b. we are not all called to be cross-cultural missionaries or pastors or worship leaders.
 - c. in fact, for the vast majority, the call of God isn't into full-time church service at all.
 - d. that call is for a tiny percentage.
 - e. no, most people's call is into what we tend to call the *secular* world.
 - 1) teachers, carpenters, masons, sheetrock hangers and tapers.
 - 2) painters, IT administrators, stock-brokers, repair-persons
 - 3) graphic artists, editors, salespeople, researchers, customer service,
 - 4) reservoir engineers, domestic engineers, technical drafters, CAD/CAM operators
 - f. we call this the *secular* world, but if this is where the *Lord* has called you, then *is it* secular? No – it's *sacred* because it's the field and occupation He's called you to know and serve Him in.
 - g. and may I say, the Christian graphic artist, or salesperson, or IT administrator can have a far greater impact for the Kingdom of God in their sphere of influence than the pastor could have in that same sphere.
20. When William Wilberforce became a Christian, he went to Pastor John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*, and asked if he should quit his career in the English Parliament, and instead enroll in seminary so he could become a minister.
- a. Newton wisely said, "Maybe God has you there for a purpose."
 - b. Wilberforce stayed at his post, and ended up becoming one of the strongest forces for Christianity in the entire modern era.
 - c. it was his commitment to Christ, lived out in the political arena that saw an end of slavery in the British Empire.
 - d. and while that is what he's best known for, Wilberforce was also effective in a far more important way.
 - e. you see, the general civility of Western Europe was rapidly declining because of the pagan influences of the Enlightenment.
 - f. those influences would later result in the horrifying atrocities that ripped Europe apart during the 1st & 2nd World Wars.
 - g. but Wilberforce almost single-handedly delayed them by decades because of his resolute commitment to resist the removal of God from the political sphere & public square.
21. God has called each and every one of us in this room today to some unique task.
- a. this is our vocation, our calling – and because it's from the Lord, it's *sacred*, not secular.
 - b. God wants His people sprinkled throughout this world like salt, preserving it against evil.
 - c. He wants us scattered here and there like beacons of light in the darkness.
 - d. truly, where would the world be now without the redeeming influence of the faithful people of God, living *out* their faith in the marketplace, the capital, and the office?
22. But we are to do that work, *our* work -- in fact, *all* of it, on 6 days of each week.
23. Just as we're called by God to that work, we are called to execute it in 6 days.
24. The 7th. He has other plans for. And His plan is *rest*.
- a. the word Sabbath means, to cease, desist, to make an end of; to rest.
 - b. we are to cease from our work, the one He's called us to, and on that 7th day we are to take a break.
 - c. not only are we to take a break, but so is everyone and everything connected to and associated with our work.
25. Look at what God says here -
- ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but 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.**
26. V. 10 is aimed directly at those who would fall into the trap of thinking that they can "get around" the commandment by not working themselves but by making *others* work for them.
- a. these the those who make a good show of being religious by they have no heart to really

- obey God.
- b. so they would not work themselves, but they'd employ their family, or servants, or even a stranger, a day-laborer, to work for them.
 27. But in what God says here we realize that the Sabbath was meant to be a blessing, not a burden.
 28. God wanted them to rest, and to enjoy it, not fret about the fact that potential profit was being lost.
 29. The Sabbath was to be a time for refreshment and renewal, when all work stopped and the people could kick back and enjoy one another!
 30. How can we enjoy one another when some are resting and others are working?
 31. God says, "Look, this idea of rest on the Sabbath is so crucial, I don't even want your cattle working!"
 32. The order of the day – is REST!
 33. The WHY of the Sabbath is given in v. 11 . . .

D. The Reason For The Sabbath

¹¹ For 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.

1. The bottom line for *why* God commanded the Sabbath for Israel is because **He** kept the Sabbath, and God's people are to be like Him!
2. God created the universe in 6 days, and rested on the 7th.
 - a. He didn't rest because he was *tired*.
 - b. He *ceased* because He was *finished*!
 - c. He had created it all for a reason, there was a purpose to the creation,
 - d. and the 7th day was the day He *enjoyed* that purpose.
 - e. the creation found it's reason realized on that 7th day!
3. Tell me, what was the height, the epitome of God's 6 days of creation – what is the last thing God made? Man.
 - a. and then in a kind of *postscript to creation*, He created woman and united man and woman in the intimacy of marriage.
 - b. this is all a hint of what God purposed in the creation.
 - c. first He creates space to hang the universe in.
 - d. then He makes one particular planet, and decorates it as a home perfectly suited for man.
 - e. then he makes man *and* woman.
 - f. and the very next thing we see Him do, is establishing the Sabbath, a day of rest, so that He could *enjoy* what He had just created. It's all about relationship – fellowship – covenant!
 - g. it wasn't 6 days of creation, and then start all over again with another week, another cycle of 6 days.
 - h. the *7th day* finished the cycle, and that 7th day was *the goal*, the end to which the previous 6 had been moving. That goal was fellowship between God and Man.
4. God bases Israel's observance of the Sabbath on the fact of His own observance of it.
5. He set the Sabbath day apart as special and blessed it.
6. Since He calls His people to be holy and wants them to be blessed, He graciously invites them *INTO* the Sabbath. They become the ones the Sabbath was intended *for*.
7. You see, the whole point of the Sabbath was to provide the opportunity for people to know the purpose and reason of their existence – to enjoy fellowship with God.
8. God didn't stick us here to work our lives away.
 - a. He didn't put us on Earth to work hard, amass a fortune and die with the most toys.
 - b. He didn't create us to find our identity in our career, as some kind of successful entrepreneur – or even in the noble and honorable vocation of being a wife & mother.
 - c. as important as that is, a woman is not to draw her primary sense of identity from her roles.
 - d. above and beyond all of that, she is a daughter of the King, a precious member of the eternal

- Bride of Christ.
- e. and while mother and wife may occupy her attention and field of activity 6 days of the week, the 7th is to be spent relaxing in the privileges of being God's child.
9. And unless she does – her effectiveness in all her other roles and duties will suffer.
 10. Look here, God bases His command to rest on the 7th day on **His** resting from creation.
 - a. there is a rhythm to creation that runs on a cycle of 7 days.
 - b. there is something built into the very fabric of the universe that revolves around this cycle.
 - c. all kinds of studies have been done that have discovered when people and equipment are placed on a 7 day cycle, to work 6 days and rest the 7th, productivity reaches it's maximum.
 - 1) in the short term, if they are put on a continuous work schedule, at first - productivity goes up.
 - 2) but within a short time, productivity begins to decline and if that schedule is kept, it eventually leads to failure.
 - d. during the French Revolution when they tried to enforce the ideas of the Enlightenment and eradicate all vestiges of Christianity, they tried abolishing the Sabbath.
 - 1) the result was disastrous.
 - 2) physical health deteriorated so badly they had to reverse direction.
 - e. the Communists, in their attempt to perfect man and create the perfect laborer, went to a 10 day work week.
 - 1) that experiment also failed.
 - 2) it was found that both people and equipment simply could not endure such stresses.

E. For Christians

1. So, how does all of this relate to us?
2. Should we, as Christian observe the Sabbath?
3. And the answer is – Yes, Absolutely!
4. But as with each of the Commandments, we are more interested in the principle **behind it** than in the crass observance of a wooden and literalistic interpretation of it.
5. There is probably no law that received more attention from the rabbis than the Fourth Commandment.
 - a. several volumes of their commentaries are devoted to Sabbath regulations.
 - b. God said don't work – so the rabbis, in their zealous pursuit of obedience asked, "Well, what constitutes work? Let's define it so that we don't have to worry about breaking it."
 - c. they developed 39 categories of what work is.
 - d. for instance, one category dealt with carrying burdens
 - 1) the rabbis said anything heavier than a dried fig was considered a burden, and could not be carried because that would be work.
 - 2) so, you could carry half a dried fig, unless you put it down!
 - 3) you could not pick it up again because that would be in effect *doubling* the weight, and so that would now be a whole fig, which was a burden.
 - 4) if you were putting fruit away when the Sabbath began, you had to drop the fruit because taking from one place to another was carrying a burden.
 - 5) you could pick up a child, but only after inspecting his/her hands to make sure they had nothing in them.
 - 6) if the Sabbath began and you were wearing your false teeth, that was okay, because they were considered a part of you, but you could not put your false teeth *in* on the Sabbath because that would be lifting a tool, and that was a no-no.
 - e. another category governed travel.
 - 1) you could only go 2000 cubits, or about 1000 yards. No farther!
 - 2) the people often needed to travel much farther in order to be able to make it to synagogue or some other place on the Sabbath, so the rabbis came up with a neat device to get around the travel restrictions.

- 3) movement inside your home didn't count as travel, only outside your door.
 - 4) and a home was technically any part of your house.
 - 5) so the Jews began putting a rope at the end of their streets, effectively *attaching* the two sides of it and making every house on the street technically the same "home."
 - 6) so your journey didn't begin till you passed the rope, and ended when you got to the next such street.
 - 7) this practice continues to this day in such cities as LA and Miami.
 - g. you could dip a radish in salt, but not leave it there – because that would be pickling.
 - h. you could spit, but only into a handkerchief or on solid rock, never into the dirt, because that would be making mud.
6. Imagine that, righteousness defined by where you spit!!!
 7. This was the context into which Jesus came. And as He did with all the laws, so He did with the Sabbath; He showed how in their re-interpretations of the Sabbath law, they'd missed the point.
 8. With all their additions and refinements, what the rabbis had done was take what God meant to be a measure of His grace and a thing of blessing and turned it into one more burden.
 9. While the Sabbath *prohibited work*, the rabbis had turned *keeping* the Sabbath *into* a work.
 10. In Mark 2:27 Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."
 11. Then he said this, and here is where we get the real basis for our understanding of how to observe the Fourth Commandment – Mark 2:28

"Therefore the Son of Man [meaning Himself] is also Lord of the Sabbath."

12. When God originally gave the Sabbath Commandment, He said it was the Sabbath *of the Lord*.
 - a. Jesus is claiming *He* is that Lord, and the Sabbath is *HIS* day!
 - b. He fulfills it and claims it as His own.
13. This means that for Christians, the Sabbath is no longer a legalistic and slavish observance of one day a week.
14. We don't enter the Sabbath once every 7 days; rather because we are *in Christ* we've entered the heart of the Sabbath, the rest of God.
15. Hebrews 4 makes this crystal clear - Vs. 9-11

⁹There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. ¹⁰For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His. ¹¹Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest . . .

16. The *works* the writer of Hebrews is speaking about here are not our vocation, but our attempts at *working* our way to heaven through our own merit and righteousness rather than trusting in Christ alone.
 - a. he says that faith in Christ has *liberated* us from such a works-righteousness
 - b. and brought us into a place of perpetual rest because we no longer have to earn salvation.
17. I hope you're making the connection here.
 - a. I know we've covered a lot so let me summarize.
 - b. God gave the Fourth Commandment as a *memorial* to the people of their covenant with Him: He would be their God and they would be His people.
 - c. this memorial, celebrated every week as the Sabbath, gave the people a break from their normal work, *reminded* them of their dependence on God and provided time for them to *enjoy Him* by resting and refreshing themselves in Him.
18. The blessings of the *New Covenant* we have in Christ is that the Sabbath isn't something we observe just one day a week – it's *every* day!
19. No matter where we are or what we're doing, it's for Him.
20. Under the Law of Moses, the best they could hope for was *one day a week* to be intimate with God.
21. In Christ, every moment is worship; every second is fellowship with Him.

III. CONCLUSION

A. No Day Then?

1. Does this then mean we don't need to heed the Fourth Commandment in terms of it's call to refrain from work one day a week?
2. Well, that depends.
3. Let me ask you – can you work an endless number of days without taking a break?
4. You know you can't! So how often ought you take a day off and rest?
5. Every 7 – it's part of the cycle and fabric of creation, and you can't violate it without repercussions. You can't!
6. What about church? How does all of this relate to going to church on Sundays or Saturdays?
7. Notice that no where in all of this did the Lord say anything about going to church or synagogue on the Sabbath; it was to be a day of rest, and that for the purpose of enjoying and fellowshiping with Him.
8. So now, let me ask you, how well do you maintain your sense of intimacy and fellowship with the Lord when you neglect gathering with your spiritual family to worship and partake of the ministry of the Word?
9. Rare in the extreme is the man or woman who can go for long without the ministry of the church and stay strong.
10. On the other hand, it's the testimony of many dozens I have known over the years who had said that it wasn't until they made a final and firm commitment to be in church at *least* weekly that they felt like they really got their spiritual feet under them and began to mature in the things of God.
11. Are we bound by the Fourth Commandment?
 - a. well, are we bound by the other 9?
 - b. sure!
12. The difference between us and the ancient Jews is that while they obeyed these commands in an *external* way, we aim at the spirit and principle behind them.
 - a. so if *they* set one day a week apart as special,
 - b. should we do *less*?

B. Our Day

1. I want to suggest that rather than falling into the casual and rather sloppy mind-set that marks many of God's people when it comes to attendance at church, we come to this time with a sense of *holy joy*.
2. **PREPARE** for the service.
 - a. set out your clothes
 - b. plan what you're going to have for breakfast, get it ready to go.
 - c. pray over your family and circumstances for peace and protection
3. **PARTICIPATE** in the service.
 - a. leave home in plenty time to get to church *early*
 - b. fellowship with others,
 - c. avoid feeling rushed
4. **PRESERVE** the service.
 - a. talk about it on the way home.
 - b. let each family member say what they learned.
 - c. how can you as an individual and your family install something the Lord was speaking to you.