

**EXODUS 20:8-11**

*(Reading: Heb.4:1-16; WSC 57-62; Matt.11:25-12:14)*

**The Fourth Commandment**

Congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ...

The Law of God tells us about a special day.

A day worth remembering.

A day which, if we forgot, we would miss connecting with something very important about ourselves.

Actually, isn't any special day in our lives a remembering of something important in our lives?

That's what birthdays are - aren't they?

And you wouldn't want to forget your Wedding Anniversary!

Doesn't ANZAC Day and Australia Day do the same?

They're special days because they commemorate a particular event.

Now, those kind of days happen just once a year.

We have here in our text, however, a day which happens once a week.

So if our government believes an event so important that we have a certain national day once a year for it; and if as families we regard certain events in our lives worth remembering also once a year; what does it say about the importance of a particular event God tells us to remember every week?

The question answers itself.

This day is so **extremely** important it has to be remembered every week!

And so important is this day that it has to be totally and uniquely set apart from the other six.

This was something the Israelites under Moses were well aware of.

And not only because practically they could not gather any of that special bread, the manna, on the Sabbath.

The LORD gave them twice as much the day before.

The Israelites, however, already knew about the one day in seven from the story of creation.

While there's some suggestion that the Sabbath day became neglected under the patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - it's clear that here they're pointed to something they already knew.

"Remember," the text begins.

And who can be asked to remember something they don't know about?

But because they did know about it, they can be reminded about it.

In fact, since this one day in seven is a creation ordinance - so it's a principle from before the fall into sin - it reminds us of what things really ought to be like.

Mind you, it had not been that way for the Israelites.

They showed it with still trying to find manna on the Sabbath, when the LORD has told them to pick up twice the daily amount on the day before.

They might not have been used to it - but it didn't mean they didn't know it!

In the same way, just because so many Christians profane - they treat with disrespect - the Sabbath today, doesn't mean the fourth commandment is obsolete.

We are sinful; because when we sin we choose to forget what we ought to do.

So the Sabbath is, in the words of the first point...A DAY TO REMEMBER.

Mind you, remember what?

It's here that other passages written by Moses are helpful.

For instance, later in Exodus, chapter 31, he says, "The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for generations to come as a lasting covenant.

"It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested." (v16f)

And in Leviticus 23 he further added, "the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly."

Congregation, this one day in seven celebrates God's creation.

But even more than that, it also celebrates His **re-creation**.

You see, in-between when God created the world in six days and when He wrote these words in the fourth commandment, there had come that terrible divide of sin.

And let's not think that it's to everyone these words are written - they're written to God's own people, the nation He had brought out of Egypt to worship and serve Him alone!

They are His new creation by the water and the blood!

In fact, the word often used for leisure today - recreation - comes exactly from this re-creation.

A word used so commonly by the world has very heavenly origins.

Exactly because it was God Himself who rested after the six days of creation.

He made His own time for re-creation.

Genesis, in chapter 2 verses 2 and 3, says, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

"And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."

So, much as the special days of our society may remember the great deeds of this country - how much more doesn't the Sabbath recall the far greater deed of the world's creation itself!

The Church by its public worship on Sunday witnesses to the God who gave us not only that day but every day; the One who not only enables us to serve Him in this way, but makes us able to work in any way at all!

When verse 8 of Exodus 20 says that we are to keep the Sabbath **holy**, it means to be set apart, to be made special, because of who this God is.

This needs to be done for two reasons.

Two reasons which are the two aspects to why it's holy.

The first is about what it does for us now; the second about what it will do for us in the future.

The first aspect is that as we make this one day in seven holy now, we are blessed with rest physically and communion spiritually.

The physical rest shows that the LORD knows that we do need a break from work.

It's interesting, in this light, to consider the various times in history when men have tried to establish a different pattern than one day in seven.

Both at the time of the French Revolution and in Communist Russia there were attempts to have ten day weeks, in order to get away from the biblical pattern of a seven-day week.

Their way was to try a ten day week, with the one day off in ten!

Naturally this didn't work, not only because it was anti-Christian, but also because they didn't give the people enough rest.

It led to decreased production and a host of other problems.

But we also have the physical results in our own society today if people don't take this break.

For much as they may chase the almighty dollar, the stress of always being at it wears them away very quickly.

If you don't take the break God gives you, no one else will give it to you!

In the words of Hebrews 4 verse 10, "anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."

It's just as true spiritually.

As much as we do set aside today, Sunday, for communing with the LORD and with His people, that's as much as we can look for His blessing too.

And if we hold back on giving ourselves over completely to the worship of the LORD, it's something which comes back on us and our loved ones.

Congregation, this is... A DAY TO REMEMBER.

Notice, not a minute to remember; not an hour to remember; not a morning to remember; it's a whole day in which we are meant to remember!

Then, secondly, there is what the Sabbath means for the future.

In the Garden of Eden, before the fall into sin, the Sabbath **at the end** of the work week reminded Adam and Eve of the **eternal rest** into which God had entered, and which was waiting for them.

That is, provided they stuck to the covenant about not eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

We know the terrible failure that was.

We fell into sin.

We couldn't do anything to enter that rest.  
Only One Person could.  
God Himself!

So, for what we had forfeited of that final rest and glory by our sin and fall, God promised in the Old Testament **by grace**.

It's this looking forward to the fulfilment of the promise which continued right throughout the Old Testament.

It was no condition that they **had** to do, as though that would save them.

But as they remembered it the Word about the promised coming Messiah came fresh to them again.

Congregation, aren't we reminded again that you can't separate one command from any of the others - altogether they make up that response to the glorious Gospel!

And in the middle of all the curse of having to labour, of struggling with sin, there's this looking for the eternal rest.

The rest that became denied those who had hardened their hearts against the LORD, as David says in Psalm 95.

The rest which didn't come even by entry into the promised land under Joshua, or in the days of Israel's earthly splendour and power under David and Solomon.

So why is it, if this rest is still future, that we in the New Testament age have the first day of the week, as the rest day, instead of the last?

This is a question which has led to much controversy in the church universal.

But that doesn't mean we should avoid it, as though somehow by avoiding a difference we can pretend the difference isn't there.

That's a fool's gold.

But, with the right spirit and truth, which is God's Word, we should and we do consider it.

That will find the real gold!

Now, going back to the Garden of Eden, the Sabbath rest showed the rest of **final glory**.

Since it was the aim of what Adam and Eve were covenanted to do, it happened on the seventh, or last, day of the week.

After the fall into sin, the Sabbath remained at the end of the week because it pictured the rest of

Messianic salvation promised by God and enjoyed by hearts that looked forward to Christ's coming.

But now, **Christ has come.**

He fulfilled that covenant we ought to have done; He paid the penalty of our sins by His dying on our behalf.

So salvation isn't anymore future, it's a **present rest** to be entered into by faith in Jesus Christ.

One reason sometimes given for why we worship on Sunday is because that was the day our Lord Jesus rose from the dead.

That's true, and each Sunday we're meant to remember His resurrection too.

Though what Christ's resurrection showed with this truth is that the Messianic salvation was no longer a future expectation, but an **accomplished reality**, which we enjoy by our union with Him.

Congregation, that's happened - it's absolutely true!

As Jesus has invited us, in Matthew 11 verse 28, to come to him and receive His rest, so we do enjoy that with Him now.

A rest, congregation, that we should all share.

For it is not only... A DAY TO REMEMBER, it's also... A DAY **FOR ALL** TO REMEMBER!

The second point to this text... A DAY **FOR ALL** TO REMEMBER.

The verses 9 and 10 of the text show that keeping the Sabbath is far from being just a personal response of faith.

It's actually a demonstration of family faith - it's a public and clear witness to our faith.

Matthew 12 confirmed this.

For much as the Pharisees were arguing that Jesus wasn't keeping the Sabbath by healing a man on that day, He actually brought out the point **of the Sabbath** by the praise raised to God through such mercy shown on that day.

The stomachs fed and the body healed proved that the Lord of the Sabbath was there.

Now, some people may make all kinds of rules restricting the Sabbath.

The Jews by Jesus' time had cut the Sabbath off from so many people.

There was a vast network of trivial by-laws, in 39 separate sections.

There was a rule which told you what to do if you cut your finger on the Sabbath; a rule which limited the help you could give to your wife if she was unlucky enough to start delivering a baby on the Sabbath; and another rule which set out instructions for action you could take if a wall fell on top of your neighbour.

Somewhere, somehow, it had stopped being.. A DAY **FOR ALL** TO REMEMBER.

As Jesus replied to the Pharisees, who upheld this monstrous system, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

And then Jesus made the point, "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27f)

The Sabbath was there, congregation, so that all people would be worshipping the LORD God.

Verse 10 in the text is most definite, "the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God."

And then there is the list of all the people who are part of God's people, who had set it apart for Him.

Even the animals, because as a farming community that was their source of income.

Just as today we keep our work machinery closed.

It didn't mean that they and we can't do what's necessary.

If a cow ended up in a pit, it would have to be rescued.

You also need to eat today.

And there are what we call works of mercy as well.

My conducting this worship service now is part of this.

For just as the priests in the temple could "desecrate the day and yet are innocent," in the words of Matthew 12:5, so gospel preachers today can lead the Lord's people in their public worship of God.

If anything, these works of mercy also open up the Sunday for us to visit the sick and shut-ins; to share the gospel; to do those things which promote the work of God, in the salvation Christ gives His people, which we wouldn't be able to do otherwise.

Six days a week we can do the everyday jobs we need to do, or the study important to get a job later, or the household work we do to support the work others do to bring in an income; but the one day we're different.

A DAY **FOR ALL** TO REMEMBER.

Now, I'm not saying this won't cause difficulties as we're involved in our work or sport or hobbies or whatever.

There are even many Christians who don't understand this.

To them Sunday is much like any other day.

Some churches have taken to having services on Saturday night or mid-week, to make Sunday free from any need to be special.

How could we answer this?

We could quote famous sportsmen, like Michael Jones the former All Black, who refused to play on Sunday, saying, "It's the Lord's Day and it is the day I set aside to honour and worship Him."

But others may quote equally famous Christian sportspeople who do play on Sunday, and who say they can use this opportunity to witness to unbelievers.

Though, when will they have a break?

In fact, by not giving God His own break, is it any wonder the Christian witness in our society is at an all-time low?

The way the Church has taken on the standards of the world, also extends to the way the world treats the Lord's Day.

And by not insisting on it as the Lord's Day for themselves, how are those believers going to ever make it... A DAY **FOR ALL** TO REMEMBER?

Dear believer, doesn't the Lord say, "Those that honour me, I will honour." (1 Sam.2:30.)

And He will.

For it's in this way, congregation, that the Sunday becomes...A DAY **OF BLESSING** FOR ALL WHO REMEMBER.

Our third aspect.

This is what verse 11 declares: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.

**"Therefore** the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

Notice how the word "blessed" appears?

It appears in connection with the Sabbath day.

But that doesn't mean the other six days aren't meant to be the Lord's either.

It's actually because you live with Jesus Christ as your Lord for the other six days of the week that the seventh day becomes this special.

We don't really gain anything without a struggle - a good night's sleep comes with an honest hard-day's work.

Then we've done our best.

So Sunday caps off everything else we do for the LORD.

There is a peace for the believer.

"But," as Isaiah 57 says, "the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up more and mud.

"`There is no peace,' says my God, `for the wicked.'"

I've heard that quote, 'There's no peace for the wicked,' used by Christians, as though we should expect to have trouble.

But it shouldn't be that way at all - we believers are not wicked in God's sight.

Sunday proves it!

You see, we rest already now from our evil ways, and so the LORD works in us through His Spirit and begins in this life the eternal Sabbath.

The promise at the end of Isaiah 58 still stands.

If we call the Sabbath a delight, and so we honour it by not going our own way, we will have such a joy in the LORD that we'll ride on the heights.

Then we'll be feasting even now from the divine banquet table of Christ's which feeds forevermore.

Nothing else really satisfies - does it?

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Lord of the Sabbath,

You are the Christ who, in Messianic fulfilment, has given this day the rest we now enjoy in Your finished work; O Jesus please bless us in this knowledge now.

Make us by Your Spirit to go Your way, and so realise all the more the joy of the Spirit which we have in You.

And then the fruit of the Spirit will come too.

The fruit which so many talk about and try to obtain, but which they cannot fully gain.

Help them, together with us, to worship You on Your Day - Sunday.

Then they'll enjoy that much more the true joy in You.

Amen.

