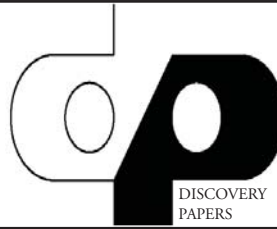


# KEEP THE SABBATH DAY HOLY

SERIES: LOVE GOD, LOVE PEOPLE



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Exodus 20:8-11  
4th Message  
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We all know that “our actions speak louder than our words.” It’s a cliché but of course there’s a lot of truth to that statement. Talk is generally pretty cheap. If your actions match your words, you have more credibility and more influence.

I’ve been especially conscious of this the last three or four years. I’m in that season of life known as “the driving instructor years.” I’m sure some of you have experienced the joy of that season. Those of you with young children are probably hoping that driverless-car technology kicks in before it’s your turn.

Nothing really prepares you to be a driving instructor. The only thing out there is an old Bob Newhart monologue. You just get in the passenger seat and start talking. At least that’s how I do it. I pass on all my accumulated years of wisdom and experience in a non-stop verbal stream of consciousness. I suppose the chatter masks my fear.

But all those precious pearls of wisdom are completely and utterly useless if I myself don’t drive the way I’m instructing my kids to. Why should they go 25 mph on Middlefield Road if I do 45? How can I expect them to come to a complete stop if I routinely roll through stop signs? If I’m using my phone to check the Giants score while cruising 280, how can I expect them not to text their friends? I can talk all I want, but they’ve spent their whole lives to this point as my passengers. I can’t fool them now.

I actually think I’ve done an ok job of modeling for my children reasonably good driving habits. About 20 years ago I got tired of paying for tickets and going to traffic school at night. And I was convicted by the Lord that I needed to submit and obey the traffic laws, even when no one else was around and even when the laws didn’t seem reasonable. Since then I’ve slowed down and paid better attention.

I’m sure you’re wondering what all this has to do with our topic for this morning. I think it’s this: my role as driving instructor has reminded me in a very vivid way that my children learn more from me by watching what I do than by listening to what I say. And I’ve been

reflecting on my example and thinking: Great, I have good driving habits, but what sort of spiritual life have I modeled for them? How genuine is my faith in Jesus?

This issue is especially poignant for me with respect to the fourth commandment, our text for this morning. While we have always made our worship here at PBC a family priority, I can’t avoid the question: How well have I demonstrated to them what it means to “keep the Sabbath”? Is it really just about showing up to church consistently on Sunday morning and then making sure nothing very strenuous happens for the remainder of the day? Or is there more to this whole idea of what it means to rest?

The title of our summer preaching series is *Love God, Love People*. Our goal for the duration is to use the Ten Commandments as building blocks for the two great commandments. They are the means by which we love God whole-heartedly and love our neighbors as ourselves.

## The Commandment

Exodus 20:8-11—

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

Israel was to keep the Sabbath “holy.” It was to be set apart, unique from the other six days of the week. You may recall from Genesis that the seventh day is the only one without an evening; all the other days of creation conclude with, *there was evening and there was morning* ... After six days, God’s creative actions were complete.

On the seventh day, he rested from all his work, blessing and sanctifying it. Therefore, ceasing from labor on the Sabbath was to be a weekly demonstration by Israel that their God was the true God. As his people, they would enter into the rest he himself enjoyed within his creation and receive his continual blessings of life.

They were already being taught this in the wilderness. In Exodus 16, we see that the Lord provided as much manna as anyone could eat for each day. In spite of what Moses commanded, some tried to save extra for the next day. But this surplus quickly bred worms and stank. However, on the sixth day, the Israelites were able to gather twice as much, so that they could rest on the Sabbath and still have something to eat. Miraculously, the extra manna did not spoil that day. This additional provision did not stop some from going out on the seventh day to gather even more. But, as Exodus 16:27 notes, *they found none*.

The Lord rebukes the people through Moses:

Exodus 16:28-9

**How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.**

Did you hear that? Sabbath rest is a gracious gift from God. It was a gift to Israel; it is a gift to each one of us. But it is more than just an individual gift. As Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke writes,

*Sabbath benefits the individual, but it is an act of grace for the individual to others. By virtue of resting, one takes the pressure off numerous others to work. A master who rests offers rest to the slaves and servants. A boss who rests takes pressure off the workers. In this light, God's rest on the seventh day is an additional act of grace, giving sanction for all of creation to rest as well.<sup>1</sup>*

I don't know if we think much about this. *Because God rested, we can rest.* And when we rest, we bless others. How many of us have a boss who sends out urgent emails at all hours that require immediate (and often, prolonged) attention? How many of us are this kind of boss? There's an old saying that dates back to the beginning of Silicon Valley's workaholic culture: "If you can't come in on Saturday, don't bother coming in on Sunday." The implication of course is that you will no longer be employed.

The never-resting mentality is not restricted to the workplace. Some youth sports teams require practice seven days a week, turning parents into a non-stop chauffeur service. Within our own families, we may be the kind of person for whom nothing is ever good enough, constantly criticizing our spouse, or our children. As consumers, we demand instant access to customer service, 24/7. We curse businesses that are closed when we want them to be open.

But blessing others through our own rest is an integral part of what it means to keep the Sabbath holy. When we rest, we demonstrate that it is the Lord who is the true Creator. He is the one who is the source of all life. It's tempting to laugh at the Israelites looking for manna on the seventh day. But if I'm honest, I realize I'm just like they were. Probably worse.

I want to ask a couple questions. First, as Christians in the 21st century, are we to keep the Sabbath in the same way as Israel was expected to? And second, what does it mean to really cease from our labors and rest?

## Sabbath Keeping Today

The first question has been a source of division among Christians. The debate has sometimes focused on Saturday vs. Sunday. Which day is now to be considered the Sabbath for Christians? Just last year, my daughter Haley and I were driving through the South for a college visit. We passed a large billboard that I found quite shocking. It said in no uncertain terms that those who worshiped on Sunday were going to hell. I personally thought that was a rather extreme position. There was an 800 number to call, where, presumably, you could get your theology squared away. I'm guessing if you called there wouldn't be much give and take.

Of course in the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath does refer to Saturday, which is the seventh day after all. But traditionally, in spite of the billboard I saw, most Christians have transferred Sabbath-keeping to Sunday, because that is the day on which Jesus was raised. Either way, the popular understanding is that there is to be a weekly day of rest, as in the Old Testament.

But is that all there is to it? Is Sabbath-keeping limited to one day a week of physical rest? You may recall from a couple years ago when Paul Taylor taught on giving. When we looked at the concept of tithing in the Old Testament, we saw that it was actually much more than 10%; more like 25%. 10% may be a guideline for what we give monetarily. But we see from the whole of Scripture that everything belongs to God. Caesar's image

is on the coin. God's image is on us. Therefore, we render our whole lives to him. We are simply stewards of what he provides.

Likewise, the Old Testament has more to say about Sabbath. In Exodus 23 and again in Leviticus 25, Israel is commanded to observe a Sabbath year every seventh year, so that the land could rest and the poor and the beasts of the field could eat from it. (Exodus 23:10-11) Are we to do the same ourselves? Who among us today voluntarily takes an entire year off from work every seventh year? We certainly aren't doing this together as a community. I doubt we've ever even considered the possibility. There's also the additional command to celebrate a Jubilee year every 50th year. We'll come back to that shortly.

What about the penalties for Sabbath-breaking? You may recall the episode in Numbers 15. There, the Lord commanded stoning by the entire congregation for a man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36). Does anyone here want to confess to mowing their lawn yesterday? I didn't think so. I haven't seen any stonings scheduled in the bulletin recently.

Reading beyond Exodus 20 raises several questions. For me, I find N.T. Wright, the theologian and historian, to be helpful. In his book, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, he describes a way for us to understand Sabbath-keeping within the scope of the entire story of the Bible. I would refer you specifically to chapter 9, his case study on the Sabbath.

For time's sake, let me try to briefly summarize what I understand Wright to be saying. I also want to include some reflections on Steve Zeisler's recent sermons from John 19 and 20.

The following is from Wright's chapter on Sabbath:

*So the picture of the sabbath we get from the Old Testament is of a commandment which is important as much for what it points to as for its actual observance. It is a sign that the created order is going somewhere.<sup>2</sup>*

There's much more that he says before and after this but I'll use this quote as my starting point. Again, Wright is saying that Sabbath keeping must be understood within the context of the Bible's entire story. We are living now in the last days, the age of the Spirit. The fourth commandment was given near the beginning of the story, the part where God was making Israel to be his covenant people. It is a sign given at a specific time in history, pointing to something of the greatest significance in the future.

Exodus 31:12-13—

**And the LORD said to Moses, <sup>13</sup>“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.’”**

Of course, if we keep reading, we again see the penalty for not keeping the Sabbath holy. It is death. The sign of the Sabbath therefore points to life itself. It points to acknowledging God as the true Creator and the supplier of all our needs.

The sign also points to something else. The re-giving of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5 introduces a second rationale for keeping the Sabbath.

Deuteronomy 5:15—

**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.**

Israel was to remember God as their Creator. But they were also to remember him as their Redeemer. He had rescued them from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the Land. So the sign of the Sabbath is pointing to the two great themes of the Bible: creation and re-creation.

Start at the beginning: God spoke into existence a good creation. He placed his image bearers in the Garden to enjoy it with him. But Adam and Eve were unable to enter his rest. They were not content. They fell when they succumbed to the temptation to be like God. In spite of their sin and its consequences, the Lord immediately makes the first promise of redemption right there in the Garden. The seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

Enter Israel into the story. They were to remember God as Creator and by their obedience to the Law embody him to the surrounding nations. But a good chunk of the Old Testament reveals that Israel had serious obedience issues. As we know, their track record was miserable. It finally got so bad that the northern tribes were wiped out by the Assyrians. Almost 140 years later, Judah was carried off to captivity in Babylon. 2 Chronicles 36:21 says that the exile was *to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its*

*Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.* In other words, the exile was God's way of finally providing rest for the land; rest that Israel had failed to give it.

Enter Jesus into the story. In him, the two great threads of creation and re-creation come together. How did he begin his public ministry? By reading from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue:

Luke 4:18-19—

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**

What did Jesus say as he put away the scroll? *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"* (Luke 4:21). And what did he mean? It's this: Proclaiming good news to the poor meant that Israel was entering into its long-promised Sabbath rest. Proclaiming liberty to the captives echoed the command to celebrate the year of Jubilee.

Leviticus 25:10—

**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.**

There's more to be said than we have time for this morning regarding how Jesus treated the Sabbath during his earthly ministry. But N.T. Wright summarizes it this way,

*... Jesus believed he was inaugurating the new age toward which the entire sabbath institution had been pointing. He had come to announce and enact the Jubilee of Jubilees, the sabbath of sabbaths, the time when God's purposes and human life would come together at last.*<sup>3</sup>

In short, just as Jesus is the Temple, offering true forgiveness, so is he the Sabbath, offering true rest. Remember what he said? *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28).

This is why there is virtually no discussion on Sabbath-keeping in the epistles. The apostles and the early church

understood that the sign was no longer necessary. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, they had arrived at the destination to which it pointed. Rigid Sabbath-keeping after the resurrection is like finally reaching Disneyland and then going back to the sign that said "Disneyland, 20 more miles." It's like rigid 10% tithing or trying to make sin offerings every day. Those shadows have been eclipsed in the light of Jesus.

In Christ, the two great themes of the Bible, creation and re-creation, come together. He is the apex, the fulcrum of all history. We saw this so beautifully and subtly illustrated at the end of our study of the gospel of John. When does Pilate present Jesus to the Jews? The sixth day. What does he say? *"Behold, the man!"* (John 19:5). Pilate, of all people, echoes God's voice from the sixth day of creation: *"Let us make man...."*

On the sixth day, the creation of the heavens and the earth was finished. When was Jesus on the cross? The sixth day. And what were his last words on the cross? *"It is finished"* (John 19:30). What day was Jesus in the tomb? The Sabbath! What could he do that day? Nothing!

I Peter 2:23—

**When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**

When his work was finished, Jesus entered into the Father's Sabbath rest. He trusted him completely, in his life and his death. And on Easter Sunday, as the apostle Paul wrote, he *was declared to be the Son of God in power ... by his resurrection from the dead* (Romans 1:4). Where do we find Jesus on that day? Steve reminded us: in the Garden!

## Entering True Rest

So I want to suggest this morning, that since the resurrection of Jesus, Sabbath-keeping is no longer limited to one day a week. Our Sabbath rest is continual. It is daily. It is moment-by-moment. And it is found in Jesus Christ. John 15:5 says apart from him we can do nothing. How do we enter that rest? By faith.

The writer to the Hebrews expounds on this at length in chapters three and four. He describes the disobedience of Israel in the wilderness, their grumbling and testing of the Lord in spite of seeing his works for forty years. Psalm 95 is quoted extensively in these chapters. And the overarching theme of this exposition is this: Israel could



not enter God's rest because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:19). Hebrews 4:1 warns us not to make the same mistake: *...let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.* Continuing in verse nine and ten we read: *So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*

In his commentary on Hebrews, Ray Stedman writes,

*... keeping the Sabbath is not observing a special day (that is but a shadow of the real sabbath), but Sabbath-keeping is achieved when the heart rests on the great promise of God to be working through a believer in the normal affairs of living .... We cease from our own works and look to his working within us to achieve the results that please him.<sup>4</sup>*

We enter into God's Sabbath rest by faith. That is the answer to the second question I posed earlier. *We cease from our own labors when we live by faith.* When can we enter that rest? In Psalm 95, David is emphatic: Today! *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts ...."* (verses 7b-8a). Instead, we worship and bow down. We kneel before our Maker (Psalm 95:6).

The world in which we live has deceived us into thinking rest is something that is always in the future. You may recall the commercial for a financial services company where the guy is carrying around a giant number under his arm. The number is the amount of money he needs to retire. Or, we might think, the number he needs to finally rest.

Now, I'm not suggesting that retirement planning is not prudent; it is. But retirement does not represent true rest. True rest is available TODAY. Every day; every moment; in any situation. Instead of grumbling and testing the Lord as Israel did, we remember all that he has done for us. He has created us. He has redeemed us. In Christ, he has filled us with his Holy Spirit. As Ray Stedman said, he enables us to live a life that is pleasing to him. He gives us everything we need. That is, if we will just rest in him.

That is why in Hebrews 4 it says *we must strive to enter that rest* (verse 11). It takes effort to rest! Every one of us is born trying to make life work on our own terms. The curse of American abundance is that we actually think we can pull it off; at least for a while. Most of the world doesn't have this problem. For those truly poor and truly captive, life doesn't work from the get-go. But we are fooling ourselves if we think we are any different.

It is only by faith in Jesus that we can find true rest, even when our lives seem to be going perfectly. It is only by faith that we can rest when everything is falling apart.

By faith, we rest when our bills exceed our income. By faith, we rest when our income is zero. By faith, a couple trusts the Lord to heal their broken marriage. By faith, a couple adopts an orphan so that one more child can learn what it means to rest. By faith, the orphan grows up to tell others that God is a Father to the fatherless.

By faith, the despondent one takes a step toward Jesus when it seems life isn't worth any more steps. By faith, the parents of a child bent on self-destruction release him to the care of the Savior. By faith, the one who feels useless and forgotten prays "Lord, use me." By faith, an aging father, whose daughter has preceded him to heaven, looks at her casket in the ground and says, "See you soon." By faith, an old man enjoys simple times with his family while others scheme for his estate.

By faith, a doubting student opens her Bible and reads, "Lord, help my unbelief." By faith, a young professional uses a week of her own vacation so that one child with needs can enjoy Vacation Bible School. By faith, a school teacher "retires" to teach the children of missionaries. By faith, a Silicon Valley worker shuts down his computer and goes home on time to his family.

By faith, we pay our taxes, which at times can seem like the greatest act of faith of all. By faith, we cheerfully, generously, share from our surplus, so that those who lack may have something. By faith, a man trapped in a cycle of repeated sin prays, "Lord, You can make today different." By faith, a concerned saint sees a world in chaos and gathers others with her to pray. By faith, the son who could never please his father knows that one day he will hear, "Well done."

I could continue but time would fail us. Suffice it to say, for those who enter Christ's rest by faith, *God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them* (Hebrews 11:16).

Because God rested, we can rest. When we as God's people rest, our actions come in line with our words. We bless others.

We bless others by enjoying regular times of physical and emotional rest. We recognize that rest is a gift from God. By resting, we take the pressure off.

But more critically, we bless others by resting in Christ at all times; good and bad. We demonstrate to the world around us where true life and rest is found.

And perhaps, maybe someone as far away from God as Pontius Pilate will see you resting in Christ and say, “Behold, the woman! Behold, the man!” because they will see, *Christ in you, the hope of glory*.

Please pray with me.

Psalm 127—

**Unless the LORD builds the house,  
those who build it labor in vain.  
Unless the LORD watches over the city,  
the watchman stays awake in vain.**

**<sup>2</sup>It is in vain that you rise up early  
and go late to rest,  
eating the bread of anxious toil;  
for he gives to his beloved sleep.**

**<sup>3</sup>Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,  
the fruit of the womb a reward.**

**<sup>4</sup>Like arrows in the hand of a warrior  
are the children of one’s youth.**

**<sup>5</sup>Blessed is the man  
who fills his quiver with them!  
He shall not be put to shame  
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, (Zondervan Publishing, 2007) 421.

<sup>2</sup>N.T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, (HarperOne, 2011) 150.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 155.

<sup>4</sup>Ray Stedman, *Hebrews*, (InterVarsity Press, 1992) 58-9.