

Text: Exod. 20:8-11

Title: "Keep My blessed day holy"

Time: 5/16/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Perhaps more so than any other of the Ten Commandments, the Fourth Commandment has been at the center of controversy.

This was true in the life of Christ. As we study the vicious and hateful attacks of an apostate Judaism on their own Messiah, whom they would eventually crucify, we find the Fourth Commandment at the center of this controversy.

This has been true in the history of the church as well. In 1860 the Bampton Lectures at the University of Oxford was given in a series of 8 addresses by James Augustus Hesse, which were later published in a book titled, *Sunday. Its Origin, History, and Present Obligations*. In the first lecture of that series, Dr. Hesse identified a total of six positions that have been taken on the Fourth Commandment throughout the history of the church.

In our day we have an entire religion that has been founded on a distinctive interpretation of the Fourth Commandment, the Seventh-day Adventists. Washington, NH plays a big role in this history. SDAs believe that Mrs. Ellen Gould White possessed a spirit of prophecy that gave her insights into the interpretation of Scripture, some of which had not been available before.

In contrast to Paul's silence about his trip to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-4), Mrs. White reported that on April 7, 1847, she had an open vision in which she was taken into the heavenly temple's holy place, then the holy of holies, where

she was able to peer into the ark of the covenant and see the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, which included a golden halo around the Fourth Commandment.

Mrs. White and her church would go on to interpret certain passages in Revelation, which do not mention the sabbath, as teaching that the day would come in which civil authorities would require worship on Sunday rather than Saturday, a practice she believed was started by the papacy (although she never explains which pope in detail), and that obeying this law to worship on Sunday would be the mark of the beast condemning people to perdition. Mrs. White anticipated the return of blue laws requiring rest on Sunday. Though the threat of blue laws never quite materialized, her church claims to be a remnant called to summon true Christians back to worship on Saturday, not Sunday.

My position regarding the controversy is a simple one. I believe that the Fourth Commandment is unique among the Ten Commandments in that it was given to Israel at Sinai as a sign of the Sinaitic covenant God is making here with Israel, just as circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant God made with him. I have gone into a lot of detail in Sunday School on this controversy, and that material is available on our website's Resources page. I do not plan to rehash the controversy here. You can read my views there.

What I want to emphasize this morning is that God did not give us the Fourth Commandment to be a source of controversy, but a spiritual blessing (v. 11b). The enemy wants to make this Commandment a controversy for us, but the Holy Spirit wants it to be a blessing. I want us to understand what it was about the sabbath that God intended to be a

spiritual blessing to both Israel and to us. We will look at four reasons the Lord blessed the sabbath as holy.

I. The Lord blessed the sabbath as holy, because Israel was His people (vv. 8-10, "within thy gates").

Illustration: Last Sunday was Mother's Day. The idea of Mother's Day is to set apart a special day of appreciating the fact that you as a child have a mother that belongs especially to you. Mother's Day is a great celebration for those who know that they have a mother that belongs to them. It is less so for others not been blessed in this way.

Application: The Lord blesses the sabbath as holy in the Fourth Commandment at Sinai, because he had already set the people apart as holy, and He wanted them to be reminded of this by the sabbath day. Exod. 31:12-14, "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people." Ezek. 20:12, "Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them."

So when God sanctified the sabbath in the Fourth Commandment, He sanctified a day as a sign that signified that He had also sanctified a people who would be identified with that day. The Lord blessed the sabbath as holy, because His people who sanctify that day were greatly blessed to belong to Him. In a very important sense,

obeying the Fourth Commandment was the way Israel showed that they believed they belonged to Yahweh. The sabbaths were His days, and their respect of that would show the world that the Israelites were His people. When the Lord says, “Ye shall . . . keep My sabbaths: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 23:3), He is explaining that the sabbath belongs to Him, and it is something He wants to share with the people that belong to Him.

This is the God of the Fourth Commandment. He is the God who seeks a people to whom He belongs and who belong to Him. Do you belong to the Lord your God? Are you unashamed of the signs that tell the world this is true?

II. The Lord blessed the sabbath as holy, because Israel had been saved (v. 10, “thy manservant, nor thy maidservant”).

Illustration: Our nation’s Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776. Independence Day became a national holiday in 1870. As we celebrate what we are as a nation on Independence Day, we remember that we were once subjects under tyranny.

Application: It turns out that in the list of those who are not to engage in any activity on Saturday in the Fourth Commandment, the manservant and the maidservant are especially important to one of the spiritual blessings God intended for the sabbath. We know this from Moses’s own commentary on the Fourth Commandment in Deut. 5:14-15. And so, the blessing of the Sabbath was a reminder of Israel’s salvation. Their servants were free for a day, just like Israel was redeemed from Egypt forever.

Have you been redeemed from the slavery of sin? Do you know the joy of bondage broken, of the slave master sin no longer in charge, of freedom from the burden of guilt and

condemnation hoisted upon you as a sinner? The God of the Fourth Commandment is the God who sets the captives free and saves sinners from the bondage of their sin.

III. The Lord blessed the sabbath as holy, because the Creator is more important than His creation (v. 11).

Illustration: In the origins debate between evolutionists and creationists, some Bible-believers have tried to find middle ground with some iteration of what is called *theistic evolution*. This is the idea that God used evolution to create the world. In this paradigm, designed to garner Christians greater respect in academia, the days mentioned here are often interpreted to be long ages. Young earth creationists, like myself, counter by saying that the word *day* in this passage means one thing – a 24-hour period, and so the biblical account does not provide the time necessary for evolution.

But in some ways, the sabbath is an even more devastating point against the idea of theistic evolution. What God is saying by instituting this day of rest is that, however He created the world, the creating process stopped on Day Seven. No evolutionist, theistic or atheistic, would embrace the view that evolution has stopped. The whole point of evolution is that what we have going on today should be credited with creating everything. But that leaves no room for the stopping, the rest, the sabbath. Simply put, God stopped creating on Day Seven of the first week, so however He created, that work is not going on today.

Application: Of course, the Lord is not trying to win a debate about how He created all things in the gift of the sabbath. Instead, He mentions the sanctity of this day of rest from creation to teach His people that there is something far more important than God's creation. Time with the Creator is far more important than time enjoying creation.

Remember what Jesus said about Mary's rest and Martha's labors in Luke 10:38-42? He said, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." The many things of this creation that we are careful and troubled about can keep us from the one thing that is needful – rest at the feet of our Lord's teaching. God gave Israel the sabbath to teach them that Martha had it wrong, and Mary had it right.

Ronald Wallace, in his book on *The Ten Commandments*, spends a little time contemplating what the Fourth Commandment must have been like for an unbelieving Jew who had no love of Yahweh in his heart: "To be forced to keep the Sabbath was a sore trial for the unbelieving. The day was a burden to those who trusted in themselves, who wanted to get on with the struggle for life that they thought more important than communion with God. It was a frustrating and futile bar to human progress to those who believed that the true meaning of life was really to be found within the earthly effort of daily toil, and that the Kingdom of God was something to be built on earth. It was a vexing limitation of existence to those who were used to following their own plans and pleasures" (pp. 75-76). We need not be Israelites to be too much like Martha and not enough like Mary, too rapped up in the creation and neglectful of times at rest in sweet fellowship with the Creator.

IV. The Lord blessed the sabbath as holy, because sabbath-breakers need rest (Heb. 4:9-11).

Application: Like every other of the Ten Commandments, Israel, you, and I have repeatedly broken the Fourth Commandment. We have not found rest in our faithful sabbath-

keeping. We have found only labor and the burden of guilt, which makes our hearts heavy-laden with sin.

Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). He also said regarding the local church assembly time, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst" (Matt. 18:20). Jesus tells us to come to Him for rest, and then He tells us a place He can be found by us today. Yahweh told Israel, rest with me on the Sabbath. Jesus tells us today, rest in my presence with those two or three, who are gathered in my name because they are saved in my name, who keep a sabbath from works, trusting in Christ alone for salvation. He gives us that invitation as the one who arose from the dead on the first day of the week.

Conclusion: So as believers today, we have the Lord's Day with its local-church assembly times as blessings unknown to Israel. As we read the Fourth Commandment, how can we escape the conclusion that we too have a day to remember and to keep holy, one that identifies us as the Lord's people, one that reminds us that we have been redeemed from the slavery of our sins, one that must be sanctified in honor of the Creator, who is far more important than anything this creation has to offer us, and one on which we assemble together in His name, two or three with our Savior, as those who have rested from our works and come to Him for eternal rest, an easy yoke, and a burden made light?

From the very first time Israel was asked to not pick up manna on the sabbath in Exodus 16, they broke the Fourth Commandment. None of us here has kept it either. Nor have we remembered the Lord's Day to keep it holy. We have been like Martha and not like Mary. What can law-

breakers like us do, having responded so miserably to the spiritual blessings of the Fourth Commandment?

The answer comes again from our Lord – “Come unto Me.” Coming to Jesus, we come to the Lord of the Sabbath, the One who never violated the Fourth Commandment, the One who arose on Sunday morning after dying for our sins, the One who has never missed a local church assembly time on any day ever since, and wonder of it all, the One who nevertheless died in our place for our sins. “Come to Me,” He says, “and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

Hear Luke’s warning again: “Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb. 4:11).

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

–David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*