

Four!

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[0 : 0 0] We turn with me to Exodus chapter 20, we are looking at the Ten Commandments in our evening worship. The young people are then going on to answer some or discuss some questions that arise out of these in identity which we will meet in our house as soon after the services people make it there, to which you are all, if you are of that age, teens and young twenties, very welcome to come. Exodus chapter 20 and it is the fourth commandment on page 78, remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your man servant or maid servant, nor your animals, nor the alien or the stranger or the visitor within your gates. 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.

So I would like to, in the light of also the later reading, the early reading we took from Hebrews to consider this commandment this evening. I am sure in a congregation, an eclectic congregation like this there will be many different views about this commandment and how we obey this commandment from God. We will all come at some level or another with our own presuppositions and our own traditions. If you come from a tradition which many people do that have no real sense of this command being one continued from the New Testament and you have grown up within that tradition, then you will be one side of the discussion in many ways, but you also from within our own tradition might come from a very strict Sabaterian background where Sunday or the Sabbath was absolutely kept as closely to this command as is possible to do. And I guess there are two extremes that we want to avoid in looking at this evening. We want to avoid a position of legalism where we make this day something that we need to legally follow as if it is some kind of way of pleasing God, holistic. And we want to avoid at the other extreme just licence, just throwing out everything the Bible has to say about the Lord's Day or the Sabbath Day which we will come to as we move through it. There are maybe two extremes where it is just like any other day or it is a completely strict legalistic day that we must obey or be holy on this day alone and keep it separate and judge others who do not think the same way as us. So there are maybe two extremes there that we want to. What I want to do is try and let Scripture interpret itself and remind ourselves that sometimes things are not necessarily as clear or as easy for us to make clear or strong decisions on. I want us to think biblically and I think in many ways probably quite a number of us need to repent on the way we spend and think about and act on the Lord's Day. I would not be surprised if, I certainly feel that, the need to reconsider a little bit whether we have moved too far towards this licence, this free position where it is just like any other day. Partly because of the society we live in and the secular nature of that and the freedoms as it were that allow us to do that and also the pressures that are put on us to live in a certain way.

So what I want to do is look at some of what the Bible does tell us and remind ourselves of how the moral of God translates into the New Testament and how that is important. Because there is a challenge isn't there that we seek to obey this command without really understanding the complexities that are involved within it. We just see it in black and white here and we just feel well, that's it there and that's what we must do. But we must remember that biblically this command is part of scripture, it's part of the moral of God but it's the moral of God that was given in a particular historical situation to the people of Israel as a nation under God, a theocracy and this was the rules for living. And that we take the principles from this moral law and we see them applied in the New Testament in different ways for example in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. He reiterates all of the commands actually apart from this one. He reiterates them and internalizes them a lot more so that the New Testament prescription is deeper and it's not just about murdering your, it's not about you

shall not murder, it's about you shall not hate and it's about motives and it's about internal feelings and so we find there's a new on-sing and a changing and a deepening as it were of the commands of God in the New Testament and we also need to remember that there are changes. We no longer from the very beginning of the New

Testament church, we no longer worship God on the Sabbath day, we can't call it the Sabbath day really because the Sabbath day is a Saturday, it's the seventh day of the week and from the very beginning of the New Testament the church worshiped God not on the seventh day of the week but on the first day of the week, I'll say more about that later, so there's a change already there. It's not exactly, when we talk about the command remember the Sabbath day, we're already changing it because we don't remember the Sabbath day, we remember the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection, the New Testament day when we come together, so there's a change and at no point in the New Testament is that day called a Christian Sabbath. The only reference to that day is, we'll maybe mention that later also, is the Lord's Day, it's called the Lord's Day once. We do have to be aware also of that kind of thoughtless obedience that doesn't work through into our heart motives, that legalistic obedience, that legalistic observance or remembrance of a day which is merely outward, because isn't that what Jesus spent so much time doing, internalizes the command and saying, look, our motives need to be right, that's why we need Jesus because our motives for obeying the commands need to be right and we have to be aware of that danger of being legalistically observing a day as if somehow that makes us right with God. That can become miserable, it can become like, we become like Christian policemen, we're policing what other people do and we're being legalistic about what they do and we're observing it in an outward way that is not stemming from a heart of love and desire. That for me, I think, is what made sometimes in our tradition, people like myself rebel a little bit against the position that we took because as a child, the Lord's Day could be miserable. It could be a miserable day and I don't think for anyone in a covenant family, it should be a miserable day. It should be a day of rejoicing and happiness and fellowship and joy but not misery and in some of our traditions it became a day that was despised, a day that was, you woke up dreading that day, particularly in the holidays, dreading that day because it was Sunday and it was a day of don't, a day of never do and that we need to be aware of that and we need to also recognise that even in the Old Testament, the Sabbath was, or in the New Testament it was recognised that the Sabbath is a shadow of what is to come in Colossians 2.17 and therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to religious festival or new moon celebration or a Sabbath day, these are a shadow of the things that were to come, the reality is found in Christ. So there's a sense, however we go on to interpret it, that it is a shadow of what we find in Christ and that's important for us to remember.

We read about the spiritual rest, I'll come back to that briefly. But I'd also want to just pick out, and I hope you'll stick with me on these things because I think as we kind of go through it, I hope it'll begin to make sense as we come to the end, okay? But there's a verse in Romans which a lot of people will use as a verse to say that there's no longer any difference in all the days of the week, you can do whatever you want in all the days of the week because they're all the same and it's entirely up to ourselves what we're doing. Romans 14 and verse 6, one man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day special does so to the Lord. He who eats meat eats to the Lord for he gives thanks to the Lord and so on. And that is often taken by many people as being a verse which says to us, well we have no right to make any kind of teaching on the Lord's day or the Sabbath day as being a different day because it's entirely up to our own conscience.

[11:02] But you have to be fully convinced of that verse and recognise where that verse comes from and recognise that it was very much in the context of a transitional period where Jewish believers were becoming, or Jews were becoming Christians but they still had a lot of the old traditions of the Jewish faith imbibed within them and so that Jewish faith had a lot of festival days and also many of them still obeyed the Sabbath on the Saturday but also went to worship on the first day of the week with the Christians and so there was a kind of dualism going on and it would be much more in fitting with the context that Paul is saying there, well if there are Christians in that position who still observe the Sabbath and who also observe the Jewish festivals, well that's up to them, it's up to their own conscience, don't judge them, it's not clear at all that that's referring to a blanket rejection of any day being different from any of the others.

But we do also remember that in the New Testament to the churches there's a lot of lists of sins of the flesh, a lot of lists of things that are wrong and things that are abominable to God and at no point is breaking the Sabbath or breaking the Lord's day mentioned within that and I think that might be significant for us to consider.

So there's a danger of obeying without recognising the situation changes and the principles remain but it's in a different context but the other side of that is what I was mentioning also that people will argue that well it doesn't matter anymore, we don't believe that there's a Sabbath day anymore, it's completely gone, Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath day, that day of rest when he died in the cross as we were reading in Hebrews and we now rest in Christ and that's really an ongoing Sabbath for us and that is significant.

All life is worship, every day is to be holy, of course that's right, it's legalistic to separate out one day but we do have to recognise that it's not as simple as that, it's not as simple as just wiping away what is part of the moral law of God and it's a moral law of God that doesn't start with the people of God in Exodus or in Deuteronomy, it starts from creation, it's a creation ordinance that God set apart one day and on the seventh day he rested from his labour and he blessed that day so it's part of God's moral law that goes back to the very creation of the world and Christ came to fulfil the law of God not to break it or not to abandon it as we see from Matthew 5.17, he himself observed the Sabbath day and he recognised that there was a significance there of eating, of resting, of teaching and of worship and he does, there is a very clear link between the rest of the

Lord's day and the rest of salvation, I think that's a very important link to make and I'll speak about that just towards the end of the service but it is also more than that, it's a model for life, it's a model for how we live our lives and the pattern with which we live our lives.

[15:01] So nothing is too easy just to say it no longer matters anymore because also clearly in the New Testament there was a day that was set apart for worship, it wasn't called the Sabbath day, it wasn't the seventh day of the week, it was the first day of the week and it was because the first day of the week was the day that Jesus rose from the dead, there was such a radical change between old and new that they changed the day of worship and there's many references to that first day of the week, Mark 16, 9, John 20, 90 and so on, they're on the questions for the young people that they come to, there's many references to the people being gathered together on the first day of the week, there was collections taken on the first day of the week, the disciples are in the upper room on the first day of the week, Pentecost was on the first day of the week, there is this link between the first day of the week and gathering together and worship which links it to the Old Testament

Sabbath day. An interesting, the only mention of the Lord's day in the whole Bible is in Revelation chapter 1 where the Spirit was with the Apostle John on the Lord's day on the island of Patmos where he was exiled and gave him the revelation of John.

So even by that stage there was a recognised day that was different from the Sabbath, that was called the Lord's day, that was the first day of the week that the people gathered together, they brought their collection, they worshiped God and it was a day that they were not to forsake the assembling of themselves together as we saw this morning in Hebrews.

And I think it is quite interesting whether it's relevant that John was exiled on Patmos, he was on his own as it were, but the Spirit gave him a message on that first day of the week for the churches and about heaven.

So it's a day interestingly that's about the people of God together and about what that points forward to which is the heaven that we will enjoy.

[17:23] So there's two things we want to avoid, we want to avoid a thoughtless obedience that makes no recognition of the changes between the Old and the New Testament and we also want to avoid a thoughtless casting aside of the day as if it doesn't matter anymore.

So what are the principles that we can take bearing in mind what we've looked at and allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture? The first thing I need to say is that it's not an easy application because I don't have all the answers and I don't think we should ever be looking at saying things like, can I do this on a Sunday?

Is it okay to do that? What do you think I should do? And looking for black and white answers for what we should do on Sundays because or what we should think in many ways about every individual act that we perform and how we keep the day holy and what makes it different because we need to, it needs to come from a heart that's right with God and it needs to come from a respect that people will think differently about these things and there are principles that we need to consider

rather than rules and regulations.

The first one I would say is that there remains a principle of the rhythm of life that God gave us in Genesis chapter one, a rhythm for living.

Six days of work, one day of rest and worship, one day of rest that was set apart. Now that is a rhythm for life, one day and seven that is a day of rest, a different day from our other days.

[19 : 04] Now what we often forget about the commandant is that it says six days you shall labour. We always can focus on this one day of rest but it's a command about labour as well, about working, about the dignity of work, the importance of work, the biblical command to work and the responsibility God has given to His creation to work and it's a good thing, that is part of the rhythm of life.

Now in the society in which we live it tends to be five and two, four and three sometimes, not so much six and one. But really what we are reminded of is that God gives us this working pattern, this working week which the world has to a greater or lesser extent followed right through history, a seven day week.

Now when I was a minister in Invergarden many men in Invergarden worked on the rigs and they worked 21-3 or 21-4 or 14-1 and it wrecked their lives, it wrecked their homes, it wrecked their families because we are not created to work 14 days on, one day off, 21 days on and four days off. It's not how we function best, God knows best how we function, we are made in God's image, God gave us that image or gave us that model, six days that He created, one day rest.

God didn't need the rest did He? God was in times, I've created, I'm exhausted, I better take a day off. No, it's a different day, it's a model, it's a pattern for life that He's given humanity and again within that we see that even within that model the six days are different because they all had a morning and an evening but on the seventh day we were not told there's a morning and evening so that again slightly sets it apart.

[21 : 08] But there's a rhythm for life and we are made in God's image and I think it's important for us to realign our time towards that. We need a day every week to stop and get off the rat race and get off the wheel, the ferris wheel and remember that we're eternal beings and remember that God is sovereign in the Lord and we need that balance and we need to rest.

Yes, we need to work, students you've got six days in the week to do all your studying, I don't believe for a moment you need another day to study and as workers we've got six days in the week to work, if your employers are demanding more of you then that is a huge problem and the one that you need to address because we can't function beyond that and we need to realign our time so that we give that ourselves, our bodies, our mind, our souls, our beings one day that we rest and realign our time and that ought to have universal validity.

We don't have any time really to go on to consider that Sabbath principle or the year of Jubilee that's spoken of in the Old Testament but there could be such great social and natural environmental good done.

If the world in which we live, society and political powers recognised that economic leaders, business, those who drive business, it would stop the exploitation, the slavishness and the exhaustion that they cause to so many who are under them who work for the benefit of finance. This is a good God and He wants us to balance our lives and not to think that the world revolves around us and if we don't we have to work all the time. He says take a day off, rest, the world will survive if you don't do that extra piece of work.

[23 : 16] Realign your time, make time for a day when you are not doing what you do the rest of the week. That's good thinking, He's a good God and He cares for us and that's what He's given us.

There's a rhythm of life principle there but there's also a redemptive reality. This is the only command that speaks about remembering.

All the other commands are do or do not do. This is a command to remember and that is because if you look at the deuteronomical version of the commandments you find there that in Deuteronomy chapter 5 when they are restated there's an additional bit that isn't in the one that we read it said it goes towards the end it says remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe to remember that Lord's day.

And it was a great day for the Israelites to remember that they'd been freed from slavery that when they were in Egypt that they were working seven days, 24 hours that they didn't have the material to work with that they were oppressed and that they never had a day off and they never had a day of

rest and He's saying remember now that the manner, remember the miracles, remember the release, remember the freedom and remember that it's speaking of a spiritual redemption that I have done in your lives and also will do in the future through Christ.

And we need to remember in the same way that as the seventh day that they had not only looked back to their freedom from Egypt but looked forward to the redemption that God was going to work in Christ, our first day looks back to the cross and looks back to that finished work of the cross and the resurrection and it's a reminder to us.

[25 : 13] We have to remember this day of rest physically because it speaks of a spiritual rest that God has won for us. We have entered His rest as Hebrews says if we've come to Christ.

That means we don't need to work out our own salvation and the irony of having a legalistic Sabbath day is that people are doing quite the opposite. They're thinking that by observing the Sabbath day they are working their way into God's kingdom.

Nonsense, we can't do that. But we rest spiritually on that day because we remember that we are free and we remember that we don't need to work our way into God's presence.

We don't need to do good things to be accepted by God. We are accepted because we're covered in the righteousness of Christ. We're no longer slaves to somehow live in a way that might please Him and therefore get our entry to heaven.

We are redeemed because of what Jesus has done and that's why we remember this great day and remember that we are loved. We are free in salvation, not to work our way to heaven.

[26 : 22] We're free to use the day to rest physically as well, to recuperate, to enjoy.

And we are to use the day to remember that redemptive reality that we have a hope and a future. Isn't it interesting that that remember links into the Lord's Supper?

Remember, remember what I've done. Because God knows our proneness to forget, dovetails with that sacrament, doesn't it?

Beautifully. Remember what I've done for you. This is a day of rest. Remember that it's a day of rest. Remember the spiritual picture that it gives of rest.

And remember that it's a day that speaks of the rest we will enjoy in heaven. And so is a day for worship and a holy day and a special day.

[27 : 18] So there's a redemptive reality in the Lord's day which we need to keep in mind the rest that He's given us. There's a rhythm of life reality. It means that we need to stop working, stop studying, stop doing essays, stop doing extra things that are work related and rest from that.

And have the freedom and not feel guilty about it because God ordains that. Line our day so to do. But there's also the third thing is really Lordship. Lordship and love.

And that's the key I think for us to understand this day. Is that we enjoy this day, this Lord's day, this first day of the week and we link it to the Sabbath day because He is our Lord.

And Jeremiah 31, 33 says, the law of God will be written on our hearts, this law, this moral law of God is written on our hearts.

And therefore we have this sense of recognizing this is a good day because it's His day for us to enjoy Him because He is Lord.

[28 : 27] And He is someone who is important, therefore I will give Him this day because it's a good day and He is a good God.

You know if you love someone, you want to spend time with them. This is the Lord's day and He gives us it because He knows it's very difficult in our world to spend time with them.

He knows that there are pressures coming on us from every side not to spend time with them. He knows there's pressure from within our own heart. And from our microphones.

Sorry. Not to spend time with them. He knows that. He knows what our hearts are like. He knows that we would rather do other things. So He says, I'm giving you a day which makes it easy, which helps you to remember me and I'm your Lord.

And it's a special day that we set apart for Him because if He is and we are to desire Him.

[29 : 37] So it's a day of worship. A day because the New Testament church gathered together on that first day of the week. They came together. And that was their day of worship. And it was their day of setting aside for worship.

People argue that, and I've heard people say that it's great God just asks us to have one day for Him and six days for ourselves. That's not really true, is it? The New Testament is much more demanding than that.

New Testament says every day is mine. Every day. It says you're living sacrifices. You're not just living sacrifices one day and seven. Every day is the Lord's.

But that being the case, we still are given by God this day. A wonderful day that we can realign our lives and think our lives through that is for Him.

We teach our children that it's a day different. A day we set apart. Not a day of rules and regulations that they despise and they learn to hate and that makes them rebel against Jesus.

[30 : 43] A day that they will love. A day that they will fellowship with God's people. A day where we can be hospitable when we can be together. A blessed day. A day of being with friends in church.

A day of worshiping God together. A day that speaks, where we can speak of Christ freely and fully. Of course we can do that in other days, but we're freer in the sense of the company we keep to do so.

A day that helps us to think more about heaven, which will be that eternal Sabbath that Hebrews spoke about where we read.

Now obviously there's people that have to work on Sundays, me included. And we recognise that and the Bible recognises that and Jesus recognises that. And increasingly in a secular society it's very difficult to know what is, you know, in work that isn't necessary and work that isn't.

And that's not for me to decide. It's not for, we need to pray through these things in our own individual lives. But we need to recognise His Lordship. That it's a day of love, a day of worship.

[31 : 51] As we remember this morning, don't give up the meeting of each other together. It's not forsaken, the assembling of ourselves together. And that is an important part. He is a good God and He's given us this day to build us up, to encourage us, a day for us to rest physically and to rest in Him spiritually.

And I just want to leave you with the question, why is it that we maybe don't want to have a Lord's day?

As Christians, as people who love Jesus Christ, who recognise who He is, why is it that we would argue against having a day like this?

Because it's a gift. You know, why would we spend our lives on this day saying, what can I do on this day and not be sinning? Isn't that coming to things the wrong way?

As if somehow there's a God who's growling down over us and watching what we do to knock us down. And we're seeing how close to the edge of sin we can get and how much we can make this day just like every other.

[33 : 05] Is it, maybe the problem is that it's the Christ we don't want sometimes, not just His day. The company of His people we don't want, not just His day.

Because we prefer doing other things. And that is probably an issue for us all, to a greater or lesser degree. What we live in, in days when it's very difficult, isn't it?

I mentioned this afternoon, people in the house, that the Bible doesn't say much about leisure. I think primarily because the societies in which the Bible was written didn't have much leisure time. It has certain principles, but it doesn't say much about leisure and that's obviously a big issue today about rest and leisure and what accounts as rest and what is leisure.

And also because of the tide of secularism, where when I was growing up I could walk to church here on a Sunday and every shop would be shut. There would be no buses running and the lords day was a very different day.

[34 : 10] Today it's just a commercial day like every other day to a greater or lesser extent. And there will be increasing pressures on us to make that day simply like every other day.

But please be thinking of what the Bible says. Think about the moral law of God. Think about in Christ what He enables us to do in terms of fulfilling that law, that it's a good law.

It's given for our benefit and for our blessing. And consider the New Testament church which met on the first day of the week and the lords day which was a separate day.

And it may be that some of us might need to repent of what we're doing and thinking and how we're living on the lords day either from being too legalistic or being too licentious.

We need to come round to just looking at our hearts again. And that's the great thing about the commands. They encourage us to look at our hearts and to see where our hearts lie.

[35 : 15] Amen. Let's put our heads in prayer. God help us to understand your day and understand your law and understand your love and understand your goodness.

And may we see that significant creative or creation pattern of God creating, working and resting. And how He condescendingly has given us that pattern so that we might work and rest in the same way because it's good for us.

Or we know you could have created the whole universe in a nanosecond that you chose to reveal your creation in this way to us for our benefit.

And we pray that we would recognize that and also recognize your resting from that work. Speaks of your great rest in Christ or the great rest in Christ that He has finished from His work of redemption and that we find our spiritual rest in Him.

[36 : 28] So may a lords day for us here be a good day, a happy day, a smiling day, a restful day, a refreshing day, a worshipful day, a holy day.

And may it be one that revives us for the challenges and the battles and struggles and the difficulties of the weeks that we enter into for Jesus' sake.

Amen.