

Remember the Sabbath

TEXT: Ex 20:8-11

PHBF 10.07.12

Scr. Reading: Exodus 20:1-11

Walking Straight: Exodus, part 2

SOS verse:

Exodus 20:2-4, 7-8 *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁷ You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. ⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

Which commandment is most important? Perhaps...

- The first one revealed to them (16:22-30)
- The longest one, most explanation (5 words longer than #2)
- The one at the center (as in a chiasm)
- The one with the most severe penalty (death – Ex 31:13-17)
- The one stated positively and negatively (“Remember the Sabbath” v 8; “You shall not do any work on it” v 10)
- The one the prophets mention most often as a concern to God (Is 58:13-14; Is 56:2,6; Jer 17:19-27; Ez 20, 22, 23)
- The one that becomes a symbol and emblem for the whole covenant itself (Ex 31:13-17)

All of these criteria point to the Sabbath command as the most important. Is it? Probably not MOST important, but certainly more important than we make it out to be.

What?

Exodus 20:8 *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

“Sabbath” means “stopping, cessation.” “Remember the Sabbath Day” = remember the stopping day. “To” = purpose. I.e., “Remember it *in order* to keep it sacred.” This is contra the NIV, which has “by”: “Remember the Sabbath *by keeping it holy*. If anything, it’s the other way around. The Sabbath Day was already holy. God originally blessed the Sabbath and made it holy. They kept it holy by remembering it.

How?

Exodus 20:9-10 ⁹ *Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ 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.*

How did Israel keep the Sabbath? First, by ceasing from work. Everyone must work for six days, rest for one. Notice how careful God is to extend this work stoppage to everyone. Work isn’t to be shifted to children, servants, or foreigners. Everybody benefits.

“What is work?” The commandments don’t answer. We get hints elsewhere: gathering manna (Ex 16:29), kindling a fire (Ex 35:3), gathering sticks (Num 15:32), carrying a burden (Jer 17:21). Necessary activities were permitted: e.g., the priests continued their work in the temple on the Sabbath (Mt 12:5). But nowhere is a definition or list provided.

That’s because the Sabbath wasn’t primarily about avoiding activities on a list. It was about breaking up the routine and remembering to keep the 7th day different. It was about making space for certain other priorities. What priorities?

Well, one obviously was rest, cessation from work. The other was remembrance. Rest and Remember. Remember what? That answer is given in verse 11.

Why?

Exodus 20:11 *For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

The Sabbath Day – “the stopping day” – arises from Creation. Israel’s work week parallels God’s original work week. That first week is a pattern, and they must follow it. In other words, Sabbath keeping isn’t just following God’s *command*; it’s following God’s *lead*. He did it first; they mimic Him.

God didn’t give the Sabbath because we’re weak and we wear out. That’s true, but that’s not the point. We stop because He stopped. God

didn't need a break to catch His breath. Why did He stop?

Two activities God prescribed for the Sabbath: rest and remembrance. Cease from labor and remember God. Two sides: a "not-doing" side and a "doing" side. Do not work. Do remember.

Deuteronomy adds another aspect to their remembrance:

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 ¹² "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ 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 or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 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.

The Sabbath is a day of rest, reminding them of the period when their whole lives were characterized by work—hard, unending toil in Egypt. The Sabbath now reminds them that they are free: free to work for God, free to cultivate their own land, free to reap the profit from their labor, free to rest.

What a gift! How good of God to give His people this day to rest and remember. See how God keeps His glory and their good together? Rest for their good; remember for God's glory. What benefits would have come to their soul, if they stopped working and paused to remember that God alone is the Creator and He has become their Redeemer.

What this means for us:

1. Keep the Sabbath weekly.

NOT a Saturday observance

- Jesus rose on the first day (terribly inconvenient, unless God was reorienting our week)
- The church came to gather on the first day (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor 16:2)

NOT a rigorous Sunday observance

- No NT basis for transferring all restrictions and laws from 7th day to 1st day – no examples of people observing Sabbath or requiring others to keep the Sabbath
- In fact, Paul declares there is no sacred day any longer: **Romans 14:5** *One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.*

So how? Through a deliberate, ordered lifestyle with set rhythms of toil and rest, work and worship, doing and remembering. The Sabbath was designed to help people become spiritually stronger and closer to God. This is what Jesus meant when He said:

Mark 2:27 *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*

This undercuts one of the main idolatries of our hearts: our work – the center of our value and the source of our meaning. The Sabbath beckons us to set aside our work and consider God. It's a safeguard against breaking the first commandment.

2. Keep the Sabbath daily.

Colossians 2:15-17 ¹⁵ *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. ¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

The Sabbath was a shadow. Christ is the substance. Shadows are not binding, which is the expressed point of verse 16. In other words, Jesus is the Sabbath! "Remember the Sabbath" has now become "Do this in remembrance of ME!"

THIS is why the Sabbath was so important to the Old Covenant. Yes, it was a shadow, but it was the most complete, most significant shadow of the gospel!

Hebrews 4:9-10 ⁹ *So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*

Only if you stop working (v 10) can you enter God's rest. The Sabbath is a shadow of justification by faith alone. It eloquently prophesies that our own work will never be enough. It's the first whisper of what will ultimately grow into the shout from the cross: "It is finished!"

Feeling guilty? Jesus is your Sabbath. Concerned about your performance? Hoping God will notice your hard work? Read your Bible more. Pray more. Do more. Obey more. Work harder. Do better. Stop sinning. It's relentless.

My friends, the gospel tells us "It is finished." Jesus has done what we should have but never could. He is the Great Worker. When we take His perfect life and death as our portion before God, we God applauds us all apart from our hard-won performance and work. The gospel tells us we can relax! The work is done! Our hope is in the Lord, not in the fruitfulness of our labors.

What about you? Are you enjoying Sabbath in Jesus?

Matthew 11:28 ²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

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