

**Sermon File # 670**

**Scripture Text: Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:15**

**Sermon Title: *Commandment Four: Remember to Rest!***

**Manuscript written by Roger Roberts and sermon preached**

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**Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.**

**Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.**

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## ***Commandment 4: Remember to Rest!***

### **Introduction:**

Let's open our Bibles to our text, as we resume our series from the Ten Commandment as set forth in Exodus, the Old Testament book about God's deliverance of his people. At Mt Sinai God affirms his covenant promises to his people and gives these commandments as his guidelines for a life that pleases him. Israel would prove to be unfaithful to the demands of this covenant, and only God's Son, Jesus, would fulfill the requirements of the law and then give us the grace, through his cross and resurrection power, to fulfill them. Jesus calls us to obey these commandments in the spirit and with the broader application that he sets forth in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

Today's text is the fourth commandment, and we've noted that the first four focus on our relationship with God and the remaining six concern our relationships with one another. The Great Commandment, as Jesus called it, is to love God with our entire

being, as we see in the first four commandments, and then to love our neighbor as ourselves, expressed in the final six (Mark 12:28-31; Matthew 22:34-40). In review, the first commandment tells us whom to worship—God alone, with Jesus as Lord. The second tells us how to worship him, without images—in spirit and in truth. The third tells us that in place of images we have all we need for worship in the name and word of God, to be kept holy and sacred. And today, we'll note when we are to worship, on the Sabbath, which is symbolic of all of life and time.

Follow as I read this commandment and also a verse from Moses' "sermon" in which he reiterates the Decalogue in Deuteronomy. Read: **Exodus 20:8, 1-11**; and **Deuteronomy 5:15**.

The fourth commandment is one that has a longer commentary and explanation, maybe because the Israelites had such difficulty in keeping it (Durham, 288). Another thing that sets this commandment apart is that in the Exodus account, it's the only one not in the imperative mood, even though it is a commandment (Honeycutt, 49). It's not inaccurate to say that the fourth commandment is as much of a gift as it is a demand.

Unfortunately, even tragically, this commandment about the Sabbath became a restrictive burden instead of the blessing God intended for his people. By the time of Christ, the Jewish teachers and religious leaders had amassed some 1,521 things one could *not* do on the Sabbath (Davidman, 53). God's people were forbidden to tie a knot, light a fire, move a lamp or even heal on the Sabbath, a prohibition Jesus definitely defied. In case of illness or injury, someone could be kept from getting worse as long as nothing was done to produce healing, else the injured body would be working on the Sabbath (Barclay, 27).

God gave this commandment to be a blessing and not a burden. When we seek to understand his intention for the Sabbath law we'll see it as his great gift to us and realize why it's important to remember and to keep the Sabbath. The word "remember" is not just to store something in one's memory bank as a cognitive exercise. Important events are remembered, not just for historic interest or recollection of past pleasantries, but to call to action.

No better example of remembrance for action is the remembrance of one's wedding anniversary. You remember your wedding anniversary in order to celebrate it with your spouse. In that case, remembrance calls you into action, as you plan a special evening together with an exceptional meal and perhaps with a gift of flowers or whatever is appropriate for a special occasion (Enns, 418).

In the same way, the Sabbath command is God's gift to us, to be an occasion of celebration and affirmation of life, and not to be a restrictive law. When we understand the Sabbath commandment and its principle for work and worship, we will see it as life-affirming, renewing and vital for a life that pleases God and thus

brings us ultimate and lasting joy and pleasure. Commandment four is God's command to us to remember to, first of all...

### **Rest from work**

This command instructs us to labor and do all our work on six days, but then we are to set aside one day in seven as a reminder of...

#### *God the Creator and Lord of time*

God set for us the example by his own creation work and rest, the rhythm of six days of work, followed by a day of rest from his creative labor (11). The word "Sabbath" is Hebrew for "to cease, cessation" (Davies, 166). As the Creator rested from his labor, those made in his image were created with a need for rest. We saw the principle of Sabbath observance even before the giving of the Decalogue when God gave manna and restricted the Israelites gathering manna to six days and prohibited its gathering on the seventh/Sabbath day (16:25f).

The Creator has established time, and the Hebrews were the first to acknowledge the reality of God's gift of time by acknowledging one day in seven as dedicated to him alone. Just as the tithe, giving God ten percent of one's income, is an acknowledgment of his ownership of all we have, so to dedicate one day in seven to the Lord, giving him one seventh of our time, as it were, acknowledges that he is the creator and the owner and Lord of all of our time.

Because all of time is God's creation gift, it's imperative that we acknowledge his lordship over our time and that we give to him the dedicated time and days that he expects of us. When we give him dedicated, set-apart time, one day in seven, we acknowledge God the Creator as the Lord of time. The command to cease from work presupposes...

#### *The gift of work*

Some have the mistaken notion that work is a curse on mankind since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Instead, God assigned the care of the Garden to Adam, who was to "work it" (Genesis 2:15). After the Fall, God cursed the ground and made work "painful toil" (3:17) as a result of Adam and Eve's sinful rebellion. But God is a redeeming God, and also our work becomes a calling that he blesses and empowers by his Spirit and grace. As God's people we have a distinct calling, whatever our job and means of livelihood might be. Whatever job skill and profession we might have, our work is sanctified through our presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice and doing our jobs as a spiritual service of worship (Romans 12:1).

Work is a gift and also a responsibility. Even though his calling/vocation was to be an apostle and missionary, Paul himself worked as a "tentmaker" or leatherworker.

Paul supported himself by the work of his hands, being an example to others and rebuking those who had become idle busybodies (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). We are to earn a living, not only to provide for ourselves and our families, but also to be able to share our income with others (2 Corinthians 8 & 9).

In a culture that is clamoring for longer weekends and shorter work hours, it's difficult to imagine this command to rest one day in seven, assuming people normally worked six full days in this ancient time and culture. We can be grateful for today's shorter work weeks, but should consider using this free time for investing more in our families and doing more volunteer work in behalf of others and the Kingdom of God. And I don't forget those of you who are unemployed and are seeking work. God understands your situation and limitations, but I encourage you to use your free time to work at job searching and to resist the tendency to idleness and depression due to your circumstances. Consider looking for work as your work, your job at the present time.

But for many, the Sabbath command is given because of...

*The need for rest, leisure and "margin"*

The teachers and legalistic "policemen" in Jesus' day had made the Sabbath law an onerous and restrictive burden, prohibiting even the doing of good, such as Jesus' miracles of healing on the Sabbath. Jesus intentionally broke those Sabbath laws by leading his disciples in picking grain and more importantly, healing the sick on the Sabbath. In the midst of their condemnation of Jesus for violating their Sabbath laws, Jesus reminded them that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath and that "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). One translation has Jesus saying, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath" (NLT).

The gift of Sabbath rest, the cessation from work, was revolutionary in a society that had no such provision. Even today, here in Western Europe we can be grateful for the Old Covenant Sabbath and for the New Covenant Lord's Day that we have at least one and now usually two days per week off work, even though in this secular society the reason is no longer spiritual but just humanitarian and cultural. A day of physical rest and cessation from the strain of work is essential to physical health.

During the French Revolution, when an attempt was made to purge the culture of all things religious and Christian, it was decided to drop the observance of the Sabbath and Sunday as a day of rest. But this experiment failed when officials discovered that the health of the nation of France was suffering and work efficiency seriously diminished toward the end of the week (Barclay, 40).

Our bodies are created in the image of God, and as the Creator rested on the seventh day, so must we. Some people have a compulsion to drive themselves to the brink of exhaustion in order to prove themselves to themselves or to others or to

reach the pinnacle of their careers. Workaholism is as much of an addiction to them as is alcoholism is to those addicted to alcohol. And such work addicts expect the same kind of work addiction and fanatical devotion from others.

Note that this fourth commandment says the members of the family, of the household and employees, and even animals are to rest on the Sabbath (10). Interestingly enough, it doesn't say wives are not to work! As one has remarked, noting how wives and mothers have to prepare meals and get kids ready for church, "The Bible never asks for the impossible" (Park, 985). In any case, our bodies need rest, even in the purely biological sense.

A Methodist preacher told about a friend of his "seeing two groups of donkeys at a certain mountain resort. These donkeys were used to take sightseers to the top of a lofty mountain. 'One group,' he declared, 'looked well kept, but the other was lean and weary, with no seeming interest in life.' Why the difference? One man sent his donkeys up the mountain seven days a week; the other refused to work his more than six days. The difference in their appearance indicated that even a donkey knows that one day in seven should be used as a day of rest" (Chappell, 68f).

The concept of a Sabbath speaks to the need we have for leisure, for a balance of work and relaxation (See L Ryken, below). Some go overboard in the area of leisure. As one pointed out, many in this Western culture work at their play and play at their work (P Ryken, 598).

But the ideal is to find balance and to surrender our time management to the Lordship of Christ, realizing he is Lord of our time. He commands our rest from work, and will give us adequate rest and will provide what Richard Swenson calls "margins." Just as the bulletin and sermon outline you're holding in your hands has margins, and the print doesn't go all the way to the edges of the page, so we need to build margins into our lives. Instead of booking engagements so that we rush from one to the next, usually arriving late and frazzled, we need to provide time margins in our lives (quoted and summarized by Smith, 128-131). The Sabbath commandment "clears the space" by our obediently ceasing from our normally crowded and over-calendared activities (Motyer, 226).

God has given this Sabbath command and we are to remember it as his gift to our humanity, providing rest from the work he also has given us. And we are to remember this Sabbath with...

### **Rest through worship**

The Sabbath was a day to be dedicated to the Lord God, given to him in special remembrance. As noted earlier, to remember the Sabbath is not just a cognitive exercise, but rather is a call to action, to do something in response to the special day

the Lord has given. Not only was the Sabbath given for rest from work but to focus on the Lord God. Those of us in the New Covenant can see the Sabbath as...

### *Christ's invitation to rest*

God gave to Israel this special day to be dedicated to him and to be spent in celebrating him and his great acts for Israel. Instead of a day of legalistic drudgery, this was to be a day when all could celebrate the Lord with joyous worship. The Sabbath was given as a day to remember and celebrate the salvation deliverance the Israelites found in Yahweh, the great I Am. When Moses recounted the giving of this commandment, he reminded the children of Israel that the Sabbath was to be a day of remembering, not only God's creative work but also his work of redemption (Deuteronomy 5:15). Sabbath was to be a time to celebrate God's creation but also his redemption. God delivered the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, where they toiled as slaves seven days a week, 52 weeks a year.

We know the great I Am as Jesus Christ, and in him we have found our salvation and deliverance from sin's bondage through his death and resurrection. The Sabbath is in fact an invitation to find our spiritual rest in Christ Jesus, our deliverer. The Book of Hebrews, written to converted Jews being tempted to return to empty legalism, were called by the writing preacher to find their rest, not in a legalistic Sabbath, but rather through the rest of faith in Christ, our great High Priest (Hebrews 3:7-4:11).

Christ himself invites us to come to him and find his rest from our weariness. It's the rest of forgiveness and of a personal relationship, sharing the yoke and easy burden of a life lived with him as Lord (Matthew 11:28-30). Salvation through faith in Christ is all of grace, just as the Sabbath commandment reminds us that there are limits to our time, efforts and work. Just as we need physical rest, we depend on God for the rest of our souls' finding his forgiveness (rest from guilt) and peace (through reconciliation). God intended the Sabbath to be a day when his children would stop their normal activities and work in order to focus on him in joyful, refreshing worship.

The fourth commandment referred to the Creator God's rest from his work of creation (11). We in the New Covenant remember to rest through our...

### *Worshiping on the Lord's Day and every day*

With the resurrection of Jesus and the Day of Pentecost as the great events to celebrate our new life in Christ, it was normal for Sunday to become the Sabbath for his disciples. We see already in Scripture the believers worshiping corporately on the first day of the week (John 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). In AD 321 Emperor Constantine made Sunday the officially new Sabbath with its attendant laws and restrictions (Rordorf, 162ff).

Although, as Paul warned, we aren't to be legalistic about the Sabbath or even which is the proper day for worship (Colossians 2:16f; Galatians 4:1-11; Romans 14:1-

15:7), the principle of a day of corporate worship and rest from normal work and activities still stands (Wiersbe, 130). In ceasing from our work pursuits we're acknowledging that the limitations of our work efforts and physical strength and energy and our total dependence on God's grace and strength to provide for our temporal as well as spiritual needs.

Instead of seeing Sunday as a burden, we should see it as a great blessing, and not just as is regarded over here in Western Europe as a "continental Sunday," or a "second Saturday" (Motyer, 226). As followers of Jesus in a culture that thinks of Sunday as an extra day of leisurely walks to the bakery or cycle races, we have the opportunity to give witness to friends and neighbors that for us Sunday is a day of great joy and delight when we experience dynamic worship and rich fellowship with the Body of Christ, the church family.

If we're not excited about the opportunities Sundays give us, perhaps we need to wonder if in fact, as one has said, "God bores us" and we desperately need to learn to enjoy and delight in him (P Ryken, 600). We should be able to say with David, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'" (Psalm 122:1).

As followers of Christ, how are we to observe, to remember our Sundays, our God-given Sabbath days? We mustn't be legalistic, but certainly Sundays should be special days set apart to the Lord. We should give priority to corporate worship, to glorify and focus on God and hear his word preached and to encourage one another in our fellowship (Hebrews 10:25).

Following the example of Jesus, we see that the Lord's Day can be a day also of doing good, of ministry to one another and to the needy. We can also honor Christ on his day by engaging in family activities that strengthen our ties with one another. Sundays can be a great day for spiritual reading or journal writing to enrich your personal walk with Christ. I realize that today's Christian family has to struggle with the issue of children's sporting events, particularly those that crowd out Sunday morning worship. These may be opportunities to express our faith convictions and concerns with the secular and educational world that sometimes schedule these conflicting events.

American billionaire Bill Gates speaks for many in the secular, non-believing world when explaining why he doesn't believe in God:

"Just in terms of the allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning" (P Ryken, 590).

There are a lot of things all of us could be doing, but God gave us this commandment and this gift for a reason. Christ is our Sabbath Rest and he calls us to worship him, as did the Apostle John, who was in the Spirit "on the Lord's Day" when he was in a position to hear a word from the Lord (Revelation 1:10).

And our worship on the Lord's Day is critically important for re-adjusting our lives once again to their proper priorities. Corporate worship, rest, and refreshment are essential in preparing us to live worshipful lives every day of the week. We need to have a "short but sweet Sabbath" every morning, preferably, a time of listening prayer as we read God's word and gather our agenda and thoughts into proper focus and perspective. We then are ready to present our bodies for the day as living sacrifices, proving the pleasing will of God as an act of daily worship (Romans 12:1).

We then discover what Jesus meant by inviting us to come to him for his rest. But it's not the rest of idleness or inactivity, but a spiritual rest and strength that enables us to share his yoke and carry with him his burden. As we worship every day we also work every day, including Sunday. There are those of us who must find another day as our Sabbath rest day since we have to work on Sunday. This includes, besides pastors and ministers, health, medical, law enforcement and public safety personnel.

The joy of our labor with the Lord is that it is in his strength and with his rest. Jesus worked on the Sabbath and said that he was working alongside his Father who cannot rest as long as there is Kingdom work to be done (John 5:17, 19; 9:1-5). As we find our Sabbath salvation in Christ we learn to walk and work with him, doing what we see the Father doing in sharing his life with the world. Amazingly, we find our greatest rest as we join him in his work.

There's no better example of rest through worship in joining God in his work than that of Jesus' ministry to the Samaritan woman. He was sitting at Jacob's well in physical exhaustion and hunger when he was joined by the needy, sin-wrecked woman who came to draw water. After Jesus had opened her heart to her lost, thirsty condition and had given her his living water to drink, Jesus himself was revived to the point of having forgotten his fatigue and hunger. When the disciples returned to bring Jesus food he explained that he had food that they knew nothing about. "My food," Jesus said, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Jesus found rest through joining the Father in giving his life to the lost woman. In the same way, as we worship and join with the Father in his work he turns every day into a Sabbath and gives us his rest, refreshment and renewal.

God is at work and will work until all his chosen ones are gathered into his kingdom and his consummated kingdom will break into and have fulfillment in the New Heaven and Earth. And then we will enter...

### *Our everlasting rest*

As the writing preacher told the converted and yet wavering Jews, Christ is our Sabbath and we have found in him the rest of salvation, the meaning prophesied in the Sabbath commandment. Yet there remains the promise and hope of entering our everlasting rest (Hebrews 4:1).

The vision we have of the renewed, fully redeemed heaven and earth is one of total glory and will be the context for unceasing praise to our Creator and Redeemer. But everlasting rest will not mean cessation of activity or even unending playing on harps while lounging on clouds. We will serve the Lord in his presence, with the fullness of joy and our work will be fully profitable and satisfying, unhampered by the thorns and thistles of the labor that was cursed in the Garden after the Fall (Revelation 22:3).

What a blessed hope we have of everlasting rest and of restful service that brings a depth of joy we cannot now imagine! Such a blessed hope encourages us to labor with the Master while we can work in his kingdom, knowing the time is drawing near when all earthly work and activity will cease (John 9:4). As we find the rhythm of work and rest, and learn to live in the spirit of worshipful dependence on Christ's working in and through us, we're preparing for the dawning of our everlasting rest, when we'll discover the joy and delight of restful and blessed work, which God had in mind for us in the Garden (Genesis 2: 15).

### **Conclusion:**

"Remember the Sabbath" is God's command and also his gift. It's our privilege to remember this special day, to protect and cherish it as his gift to us, a time to restore our souls through worship and refreshing fellowship and inspiring service. We are to remember it with action just like you remember a special person's birthday or your wedding anniversary.

It's time for me to remember our 44<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary, which will take place in less than two weeks. But I'd better not just note it as a day on the calendar, but must make it a special day. If you're married, you'd better do likewise.

Did we prepare our minds and hearts to meet God this morning as we gathered to worship and honor him today? Do we remember to enjoy the Sabbath? Are we enjoying Christ as our Sabbath Rest? Are we taking pleasure in him and finding joy and not boredom in our corporate and personal worship of him?

All of us are told to remember God' Day, a day to celebrate his creation and also his great salvation. It's a day to reaffirm our love for and commitment to Christ Jesus the Lord, our Savior and Friend. It's time to examine our lives and our use of time and to rearrange our time priorities that reflect his ownership of our lives. Some of us need to repent of our stress-filled lives and our neglect to find proper physical rest and also the spiritual refreshment and joy Christ offers us. As we walk with Jesus and learn to worship him daily, he turns each day into Sabbath and gives us his renewing, refreshing grace.

Someone here today needs to find life-saving and renewing rest in Christ's forgiveness made possible through his death on the cross and received by your turning from sin and your futile efforts and receiving him as the risen Lord and

Master of your life. Come to him and find his rest and accept the yoke of a life-changing relationship with him. Your efforts to try to work for or to earn his salvation are condemned from the start, are rendered totally invalid by what he has done for you through his cross and resurrection. By his grace alone can you enter into his present and everlasting rest.

When we come to the Lord's Table in a few moments we'll acknowledge that Christ, through his death for us, gives us rest. He is our Sabbath Rest and our only hope for everlasting rest and peace. Let's prepare to receive him in a new way with joy and gratitude for the rest we find in him.

By God's grace, let's remember to rest!

### **Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. In what ways can the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment be a gift as well as a demand?
2. What blessings and benefits do you think God intends for us with this commandment?
3. What does this commandment say to you about the right stewardship and use of time?
4. Reflect on your weekly and daily routine. Do you have a good balance of work and leisure and do you provide "margins," i.e. space between scheduled tasks and activities?
5. What priority do you give to corporate worship and how does it (or should it) refresh and renew you?
6. How should your personal worship (daily Scripture reading, prayer) give you spiritual rest, focus for time/priority management and refreshment?
7. What does Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28-30 mean to you?

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