

Please turn in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 20. So far in this series we have looked at what worship is. We have seen why worship is necessary. And we have spent the last two weeks considering how we are to worship. This week we come to the final foundational sermon before we begin to focus on the specific parts of worship. We come today to consider when we are to worship. Is there appointed in Scripture a specific time in which we are to worship, or are we free to assemble together in public worship whenever we like? This question is answered here in our text this morning. Flowing from the fourth commandment we see that there is one particular day in which the Lord has appointed to be set apart, sanctified, made holy, unto Him. Turn your attention now to the reading of God's holy Word from Exodus chapter 20 beginning in verse 8.

Read Exodus 20:8-11
Pray

Why are you here today? I'm not asking what you are doing here; we know that we are here to worship the triune God. But why are you here today? Why do we meet as the corporate people of God on the first day of the week to render unto the Lord worship as one body? If you were to look at the majority of the world their activities on this day would look completely different. Many people are out and about shopping. Parents are bringing their children to parks and zoos for times of fun and enjoyment. If you were to go down to Wrigley Field you would see that the Cubs are getting ready for their game and thousands of fans are making their way to cheer them on. What is it about today that brings you here? What is it about this day that separates it from the other six days throughout the week? Why are you here today? The simple answer that most Christians would give you is that it's just what we do. We go to church on Sunday because we have always gone to church on Sunday. It's our tradition. But this is a weak and elementary answer. We teach that it is necessary to come to the corporate worship of Jehovah on the first day of the week, to assemble together as saints to render praise unto Him. If we taught this as merely tradition then

we are guilty of the very same sins as the Pharisees that Jesus condemned in Mark chapter 7. We cannot teach for doctrines the commandments and traditions of men. So why is it that we gather together for public worship on this day? The answer is that it is a moral obligation that all men set apart one day in seven to be a holy Sabbath unto the Lord. This is what is taught here in the fourth commandment. From the creation of the world until the resurrection of Christ that one day in seven that was commanded was the seventh day. But we will see that from Christ's resurrection to the end of the age this Sabbath day is to be observed on the first day of the week. So our theme this morning is the first day of the week, called the Lord's Day, is to be observed as the Christian Sabbath. We will consider this theme under three heads: first, the Sabbath Day itself; next, Sabbath observance; and finally, Sabbath delight.

So first let us consider the Sabbath Day itself. We see here in our text that this command to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy is part of the moral law of God. The ten commandments are given unto all men, in all places, and for all ages to be observed universally because they are a reflection of God's moral character. Here we see the gracious nature of God in providing man with a day of rest from his labors. "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates." This is something that even nature itself teaches. Man cannot work continuously, non-stop, every day of his life. This is detrimental to his health and will ultimately lead to an early grave. Every society on earth understands this and implements limitations to work weeks. And yet, many in our society scoff that this idea that man must rest from his labors. I know of people who have labored non-stop for years, working in the workplace and then laboring in other endeavors, all without any sort of rest. They are broken down, exhausted, and burdened. But God in His

graciousness towards mankind requires that one day be set apart in which rest from labors takes place.

But the Sabbath is not only part of God's moral law. Here in Exodus 20 is not the first encounter we see of this sanctifying the Sabbath. No, it is also a creation ordinance. Our text roots this commandment in the creation story found in the first two chapters of Genesis. "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." This points us back to Genesis 2:1-3, "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." There are some who will say that the fourth commandment, Sabbath observance, is part of the ceremonial law given to the covenant people of old. But this cannot be the case because of this fact. The Sabbath was instituted thousands of years before the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. We even see that it was understood and observed prior to the giving of the law. We read in Exodus 16 concerning the gathering of manna, "And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning." We see this Sabbath principle continues on even into the New Testament. In Matthew 12 we see Christ and His disciples being hungered on the Sabbath and plucking corn to eat it. In verse 8 He declares that the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

But you may be thinking to yourself that you know all of this but that you're wondering how the Sabbath changed from the

seventh day to the first. This is an important question to answer. We are not Judaizers seeking to uphold the Torah as many heretical sects do. We believe in the continuity of the covenants, but we also recognize that there are certain things which are different. We see the shift in days foretold in the writings of the prophet Ezekiel in chapter 43 verse 27, “And when these days are expired, it shall be, that upon the eighth day, and so forward, the priests shall make your burnt offerings upon the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord God.” He says that after the times of old had passed that the offerings, the sacrifices would be made on the eighth day and the Lord would accept it. We know that the offerings and sacrifices of old were abrogated in the New Covenant following the redemptive work of Christ, and that now we offer unto the Lord our sacrifice of praise which is the fruit of our lips. But we do not only have the prophetic utterance to look to in order to show the change of the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first. We also have Christ Himself following His resurrection meeting with His disciples as the pattern for the church. John 20:19, “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.”

We see elsewhere that the observation of the Sabbath was to continue after the abolition of the Jewish Sabbath. This is implied in the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:20, “Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath-day.” Christ here is not speaking of the Jewish, but of the Christian Sabbath, because He refers to a flight which should happen at the destruction of Jerusalem; and this did not take place until forty years after the Jewish Sabbath was abolished. Even though the Sabbath was to be changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, the words of Christ certainly show that the Sabbath was still to be continued. Hughes Oliphant Old writes, “The Sabbath had been established by divine authority and only by divine authority could it have been changed. The old Sabbath would only come to an end when the

appointed Son of God brought in the final Sabbath of the last day, the Day of the Lord.” We also have the apostolic example to follow which is found in many places such as Acts 20:7, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” Then we see that John, while on the isle of Patmos, was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day in Revelation 1:10. Friends, the pattern and command is clear. Why are you here today? Because this is the Sabbath day.

So recognizing this is the Sabbath day, what is to be done on this day? What is Sabbath observance? “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.” It is a day to be kept holy. The Westminster Larger Catechism aids us in seeing how we are to observe the Sabbath, “The sabbath or Lord’s day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God’s worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose, and seasonably to despatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.” First we see that we are to rest from all world labors. This includes our jobs, our duties in tending to the house, all commerce, and even recreations. Unfortunately, even within Reformed churches, this aspect of Sabbath observance is neglected. There’s one Presbyterian denomination in which the majority of their ministers have taken exception to this duty in Sabbath observance. The Sabbath is to be sanctified, set apart, kept holy. It must look differently than the other six days of the week. Friends, you have the entire week to get done what you need to do,

to go to work, to do jobs around the house, to do your shopping, to go to sporting events and others forms of entertainment. The Sabbath day is not for those things, it is for the Lord.

Next we see that we are to take up works of necessity and mercy. This pattern is laid out for us in the actions of Christ Jesus Himself during His earthly ministry. In John 5 we see the account of the man at the pool of Bethesda who had an infirmity for 38 years. After not being able to reach the pool after the angel had stirred the waters, the man likely thought he would never be healed. But Jesus performed this great act of mercy in healing him found in verses 8 and 9, “Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.” We also see this in the account in Matthew 12:1-2, “At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.” It’s also plain to see that there are other works of necessity which must continue on the Sabbath. Police officers, paramedics, firemen, emergency nurses and doctors, are all necessary jobs which must be performed even on the Sabbath day in order to protect and aid the people of society. The military often is a necessary work which must be done on the Sabbath. Wars do not cease because of the Lord’s Day. But works such as retail, office jobs, convenience stores, and the like are neither works of necessity nor mercy, and so they must not be taken up on the Sabbath.

And lastly we are to spend the whole time in public and private exercises of God’s worship. This is where I believe our tendency is to fall into sin. Remember, it is the Lord’s Day, it is the Sabbath day, not just a few hours. So many within the Christian church practically act as though it is the Lord’s morning and then they can go and do whatever it is that they want to do the rest of the day. So many people view the Sabbath as simply going to church in the

morning and then lounging around lazily throughout the afternoon and evening. Calvin writes that God “did not merely wish that people should rest at home, but that they should meet in the sanctuary, there to engage themselves in prayer and sacrifices, and to make progress in religious knowledge through the interpretation of the Law.” We ought to long for that day when the shop windows of the town are all closed and all the entertainment venues have closed their gates so that there is nothing to be done on the Sabbath but to be taught by His Word, to meet together to make confession of our faith, to call upon His name, and to exercise ourselves in the use of His Sacraments. This day is to be wholly taken up in public and private exercises of God’s worship. I thank God that at our session meeting this past week we approved adding an afternoon service beginning at the end of May. This will aid us in rightly observing the Sabbath. But what about what you do once you get home? Unfortunately, many act as though once they have left the church that their Sabbath observance is over. Friends, you should be meditating on what was preached here in the service. You should be spending your time on the Sabbath meditating on the Lord, praying that He would cause it to implant in your heart and change you, digging deeper into the precious goldmine which He has given you. It is not enough for us to go to some sermon upon the Lord’s Day, to receive some good instruction and to call upon the name of God. We must also digest these things, and bend our minds to consider the gracious things that God has done for us: and by that means we must frame ourselves to the things that may lead us to our God. Dear saints, this is true Sabbath observance.

I have heard the accusation thrown around that if you were to observe the Sabbath in this way then it makes it a chore, a duty, a burden. Brothers and sisters, let me tell you right now that if this is how you view the Lord’s Day then there is much to be repented of. How can you see the day the Lord has set apart for your benefit, for the fixing of your eyes upon your risen Savior, for the public worship of God, as a burden? Friends, you must see the Sabbath as a delight. The Lord makes this clear in Isaiah 58:13-14, “If thou

turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” God’s intention was to bless his people through the constant and conscientious observation of the day, week after week and year after year. Believers are sanctified through a lifetime of Sabbath observance. Calvin says that this sanctification is “the death of the flesh, when men deny themselves and renounce their earthly nature, so that they may be ruled and guided by the Spirit of God.” How is it that you are sanctified? By the Spirit of God working effectually through the ordinary means of grace. In John 17:17 Christ makes this clear, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” The Sabbath is not a burden to you, but is for your edification. It is for you to be built up in the faith, to grow and mature in knowledge and spiritual wisdom.

Yet, so often we tend to find our delight not in the Sabbath but in other things. This is why so many people neglect the assembling together of themselves, forsaking the Sabbath, and instead go to sports games or sit at home or go to zoos and parks. They see those things as more enjoyable, more delightful, than the day that the Lord has instituted to be observed. Or there are others who would establish and observe a man-made holy day and find greater delight in it than in the 52 holy days that the Lord has instituted to be observed. I’m sure everyone here can attest to the great joy that we have experienced in opening up presents and gathering together as families on Christmas. Today, millions of Christians around the world are celebrating a man-made holy day called Easter, thinking that there is some sort of special significance to this Lord’s Day over the others. Kids will be running around with baskets, playing outside, looking for decorated eggs. All these man-made holy days do is take the delight out of the ordinary, normal, God-ordained

holy day which is the Sabbath. There should be no day throughout the year in which you find greater delight than in the Lord's Day. We will discuss holy days in greater detail later in the series, but suffice it to say now that all these man-made days and traditions do is blaspheme the Sabbath and strip the delight from that which the Lord has called us to delight in.

And friends, what does the Sabbath day itself point us towards? It points us towards that final rest, that great and never-ending Sabbath which we will enjoy in the age to come. There will come a day in which you and I and everyone else will pass from this earth. Those who are not found in Christ will be cast into the lake of fire along with satan and the demons. But those who are found in Christ will be welcomed into the New Jerusalem and will enter into that true Sabbath rest where all that we will do for all of eternity is worship Jehovah in the splendor of His glory. Friends, if you do not delight in the Sabbath that you have been blessed with here, one which is temporary, one which is but one day in seven, what makes you think that you will delight in that Sabbath that is eternal? If you find no delight in this Sabbath, then I fear you may not find delight in that Sabbath to come, for you may not be of those who are even permitted to enter into it. How can you claim that you have been brought from death unto life, brought out of slavery unto freedom, had your sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb, and yet not delight in the day in which the Lord has appointed for you to draw nigh unto Him? If that is you, if you do not delight in the Sabbath, then I urge you to repent and take hold of the blessed joys that are found in this day. "For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth

a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

Brothers and sisters, the Sabbath is a good gift which the Lord has given unto you for your benefit. It is not legalistic to insist upon its observance. It is not Judaizing to say we must keep the Sabbath. No, it is a duty required of every man, in all places, and in all times. “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” The word here translated ‘rest’ is literally translated Sabbath keeping. It is your duty to remember the Sabbath day and to keep it holy. Do not let the world convince you that it is just another day. Do not let those who are deceived deceive you by saying it has already been fulfilled. To be worldly in our observance of the Sabbath is to profane the day by treating it with contempt, desecrating and polluting that which God has set apart as holy. Dear saints do not neglect this important practice. Devote yourselves to finding your delight in this day, the Lord’s Day, which is the Christian Sabbath.