

PM Exodus 20:1-17 Rest and Worship - Commandment 4

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[0 : 00] Number 4 this evening, which we have in verse 8 down to verse 11, but we're going to read from verse 1 down to verse 21, as we did this morning, to get the context and the sense of all these Ten Commandments.

Moses is writing these commandments under the inspiration of God, and he says these words in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 1, and God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. 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 waters under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

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. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

[1 : 40] Six days you shall labor 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, 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.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.

Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not be a false witness against your neighbor, you shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that is your neighbor's.

[2 : 58] Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled and they stood afar off and said to Moses, you speak to us and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us lest we die.

Moses said to the people, do not fear for God has come to test you that the fear of him may be before you that you may not sin.

The people stood far off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. Amen.

And we'll finish our reading there and ask that God will honour the public reading of his word. A passage that we read a moment ago and as I say we're going to focus our minds this evening hopefully on verses 8 down to verse 11 which contain for us the fourth of the commandments out of 10 of God's decalogue, the 10 commandments.

Of the 10 commandments that God gave to his people Israel, perhaps none has provoked more controversy and debate than the fourth commandment.

[4 : 30] Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy that we read of here commencing in verse 8 of Exodus 20.

Does the fourth commandment still apply today? Today Christians disagree.

Arguments have raged about the validity or even the application of how we should or should not apply this fourth commandment.

The fourth commandment is about, amongst other things, the use of our time. And what God expects of us.

Now as we begin to approach this commandment, and it is a complex, big commandment, and Christians have differed in their views for thousands of years as I've said about it.

[5 : 37] So in half an hour or 40 minutes there is no way that I am going to cover all those controversies or debates or resolve what many other Christians have not been able to do themselves.

But as we begin to approach this commandment, we need to face, I submit to you, at least three difficulties. Firstly, this is the only commandment not explicitly repeated in the New Testament.

So does that mean for us as Christians who live after the coming of Christ, that this commandment is not relevant or applicable to us?

We need to address that difficulty. Secondly, the church, the New Testament church, has historically worshipped on Sunday.

What the New Testament calls the first day of the week. Does that then mean that the first day of the week is the same as the Sabbath?

[6 : 58] Is there such a thing, as many Christians believe, as a Christian Sabbath? Is the day of rest a Saturday as it was, as we shall see, in the Jewish calendar?

Or has that day changed in some way to become a Sunday? Or what we call in the New Testament the Lord's Day?

Thirdly, one of the difficulties that we need to face when we come to this commandment to a certain extent is a very practical one. We now face the fading tradition in our society of Sunday as a holy or a sacred day.

And even in the church, there is confusion and differences of opinion on how we should celebrate even this day.

Now as I say, we can't go into all the history and the disputes or the differences, but every one of the Ten Commandments is still binding on us as believers.

[8 : 29] But, but, many of them have been deepened and transformed by the coming of Christ.

And that is why, actually, many Christians disagree as to the use of this commandment.

Are we to use this commandment? Are we bound to this commandment in exactly the same way as the children of Israel were? Or have there been some changes?

And we need to look at that this evening to a certain extent. Some of us may feel guilty or even be made to feel guilty by others about the way that we spend our time on Sundays.

When we read remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy many of us I would think start to get a bit worried.

[9 : 45] Most of us are not clear exactly about what it is we are to remember or exactly how we keep the day holy.

and for many of us the day and it is a day a full day was or has become all about what we are not to do.

That was certainly my experience being brought up even in a Christian house. There seemed to be a lot of rules and regulations about what you could or could not do on the Lord's Day.

many of those rules I would submit and I would agree were well intentioned but many were actually man-made rules and perhaps not totally founded upon the Bible.

Now however whilst there may be much confusion and debate and controversy about this commandment the commandment remains important no less so than the other nine commandments.

[11 : 08] It's important I submit to you its importance is seen in the fact that it is the longest commandment of the ten.

Let's read the commandment again. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Well the commandment doesn't end there does it?

Doesn't it not? God goes on to say and elaborate and expand he says six days you shall labour and do all your work but the seventh 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 and then he gives a reason why we are to remember the Sabbath day and to keep it holy but it's not just a bold statement as it were at the start of verse 8 it says remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy contrast it with the other commands that just say simply you shall not murder you shall not commit adultery you shall not steal it's very elaborate it's the most detailed of the commandments Sabbath observance or resting from work as we shall see because that's what a

Sabbath is is the commandment actually most mentioned in the whole of the Old Testament it is mentioned more than any of the other nine commandments so God obviously places a high importance on this fourth commandment now tonight what I want us to do just in the time that we've got is to look at three things about this commandment number four firstly I want us to think about the roots of this commandment secondly I want us to see the reason or the relevance of this commandment and then thirdly the rest that we can enjoy in keeping this commandment first of all then the roots of the commandment what is the commandment based on well the clue is given in the opening word of the command isn't it in verse eight as you go back to your

Bibles it says remember the Sabbath day the first word is remember and so God is directing Moses and the people of God the people of Israel to recall something that was not new to their thinking and hearing this is not the first time that they are exposed to this commandment it is a commandment that he gave earlier in chapter 16 if you were to go back and look in Exodus chapter 16 it was a commandment that he gave that applied to the children of Israel as they came out of Egypt and went through the wilderness and God gave detailed instructions about what they were or were not to do on the Sabbath day the seventh day and you can read about that in Exodus 16 but the real big reason the real root of this commandment is founded actually on what

[15 : 05] God did when he created the world look at the commandment again remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy don't work on that day he says I'm paraphrasing don't encourage others to work on that day and then we get to verse 11 and he says for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth the sea and all that is in them and he rested on the seventh day therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy so the roots of this commandment take us back to the opening chapters of Genesis let's go back to Genesis 2 so that we can see that Genesis chapter 2 verses 1 to 3 and this is the account that

Moses gives of the creation of God's creation and he says in chapter 2 thus the heavens and the earth were finished in six days 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 Sabbath day and sanctified it set it apart made it special because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made and so in Genesis chapter 2 in these opening verses we see a Sabbath principle at work from the very beginning of the world before the law was given here in

Exodus 20 the week the seven days that were created by God himself he created the world in six days and on the seventh the last day the Sabbath day God rested from all his work that's what a Sabbath is the Hebrew word means to rest and God rested he completed his work on the Sabbath day and he rested from his work so every time that you and I and all human beings cycle through or travel through Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday we reflect God's week that ends or ended in a day of rest so for the children of

Israel specifically here to remember the Sabbath day was to acknowledge that Sabbath principle of work for six days and rest on one day in seven and to own it and to embrace it and to be obedient to that command because it was based on what God did at creation but if you were to turn over to Deuteronomy 5 and verse 15 and can I ask you just to do that and I'm going to ask you just to keep your Bibles open this evening so that you can see these things if you were to turn over to Deuteronomy 5 and verse 15 where the commandments are given again by God you'll see a different emphasis this time in

Deuteronomy 5 verse 15 and so the Ten commandments as it were are given a second time and verse 15 says and remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath the Sabbath observance is also linked not only to the creative act of God in Genesis chapter 1 and 2 but it's linked to the fact of their redemption and their freedom from Egypt you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of

[20 : 18] Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm therefore he says the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day in other words keeping the Sabbath day for the children of Israel making it a special day is rooted in both creation and in redemption from Egypt it is a sign of God's creative purposes and also of his saving grace and mercy and those two factors I think believe convicted about are eternally relevant so the roots of the Sabbath day relate to rest to remembrance and redemption so there are three

R's for you in a way for you to remember rest and remembrance and redemption there are three R's in my life I have a wife called Ruth and two daughters one called Rebecca and Rachel but three hours here are rest remembrance and redemption and so the roots of this command are in creation and in the children of Israel's redemption but secondly then let's look at the reason and the relevance of the command the command was a call to cease from work cease from work that they did for the other six days of the week or of their lives it was a call to treat it as a special day to make it holy as the

ESV says it is a call to rest and to treat this day as a special day a different day a day that is set apart a holy day the Israelites weren't to work nor were they encouraged were they to encourage anybody else associated with them to work look at what it says it says on it you shall not do any work you or your son verse 10 or your daughter your male servant your employees or your female servants or your livestock so it was a call to cease from work for them for their families for their employees and even for their livestock the reason is surely that

God realises that they all need rest they need time to recharge from the past six days of labour and the impending six days ahead of them you see to work 24 7 365 days of the year is impossible that's why in the new testament the Lord Jesus who upheld the sabbath day says that the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath and the rest that was envisaged for the children of Israel was for their own good it was for their physical well-being and also their spiritual well-being rest and remembrance of

God's deliverance rest and worship it's God's way really of saying to them and to us that if you don't slow down you're going to kill yourself the day wasn't meant to be a burden it was God's gift to them now we have to be careful again because these commands with all the detail that we can't go into this evening but one thing we can be sure of is that these commands were given to a specific people at a specific time and a specific place rules and there were some very specific rules and we'll see what some of those specific rules were

[26 : 07] Exodus 35 and verse 2 and 3 it's again another repetition in one sense of this commandment but it says six days shall work be done but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day a Sabbath of rest to the Lord now these are the interesting specifics whosoever doth work therein shall be put to death and then in verse 3 you shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day you see if they the children of Israel disobeyed God there was severe punishment there was severe and very very strict repercussions for them but if they obeyed and enjoyed the

Sabbath then Leviticus tells us that there was innumerable blessings for them now as people who live after the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ I submit to you that we aren't required to follow the exact laws that were given specifically to the Israelites here yet or but again the wisdom of these laws and the principles of the Sabbath day a Sabbath rest is both God honoring and beneficial and required for ourselves as Christians in 2022 the specifics may not apply and I don't mean to trivialize this but verse 3 says you shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations so if we were to take that strictly to the letter of the law would that mean that you can't put your coal fire on would that mean that you can't put your gas fire on well for the

Israelites it would have but not for those of us who live in New Testament the specifics may not apply to us as Christians today but the principle of the Sabbath as we shall see remains valid for all times and does apply to us because it's rooted in creation as we saw in Genesis 2 verses 1 to 3 Genesis 2 verses 1 to 3 as we read contains a principle that transcends and predates the giving of the law that we have here in Exodus 20 it is therefore a creational ordinance that is applicable for all time the principle is that we are to work and we are to work it is a good thing to work it is a biblical mandate to work but one day in seven is to be given to God since seven days out of seven actually belong to God anyway but what about thirdly the rest that we can enjoy in keeping the commandment how can we apply this really to our lives in 2022 in the

Old Testament as we've seen the Israelites were to call the Sabbath a delight it was a gift from God to them for their own physical and emotional and spiritual well-being it was a high day a day to be enjoyed a day to be looked forward to and so when we come to the New Testament there is a sense in the coming of Christ and the rest that he offers to us that he the Lord Jesus in some sense is a fulfillment of the Sabbath in Matthew chapter 12 the Lord Jesus said these words come unto me and I will give you rest come unto me and I will give you rest and as we move into the days of the early church recorded for us in the book of

Acts there seems to be a deliberate attempt to reckon the Lord's day as a new kind of day the resurrection of Jesus Christ took place on the first day of the week on as someone said one of the Sabbath or let me put it another way the Sabbath day plus one because the Sabbath was the Saturday and the Lord's day the day in which we have now come to know as Sunday was the first day of the week it was the Sabbath plus one this day the Lord's day today as we know it Sunday was the day that Christians met together to worship

[32 : 41] God you can read about that in Acts 20 and verse 7 and in 1 Corinthians 16 verse 12 it was the first day of the week that Christians met to worship Sunday is never called the Sabbath in the New Testament it is always Saturday and there is no evidence that the Sabbath day was ever changed in either the Old Testament or the New Testament so if Sunday the Lord's day today for us is the Christian day of worship how should we observe it today since it's not the Sabbath although we all need a

Sabbath rest well let's think positively about this about this day because as I say and it may be your experience certainly was mine that in so many ways for perhaps all the right reasons and all the right intentions the Lord's day became a day of do's and do nots and more do nots than do's but God has given us one day in seven that we can enjoy and rest so I think we need to ask the question not so much what can I do what am I allowed to do but rather we should ask ourselves the question what good things can we enjoy what godly activities can we engage in on this day that

God has given us because there is actually in one sense no list of do's and don'ts given in the New Testament and I submit to you that we like rules because they are easy to live by and you know exactly where you are when you set rules but that kind of mentality is sort of foreign I believe to the New Testament so how should we enjoy the Lord's day how should we enjoy today because we are meant to enjoy it well I just want to bring us four things really I suppose in closing firstly why don't we use the day to relax and recharge that's the Sabbath principle six days to work one day to rest six days to work and one day to rest that is the rhythm of life that God has given to us that is still valid what are the things that we can do in this day we can read a book we can enjoy a meal with friends enjoy

God's creation go for a walk go for a run go for a cycle do things on that day to enjoy the day that you cannot or may not be able to do on the other six look at it positively secondly we could focus on our family as we are enjoying to do enjoy your family enjoy time with your family phone your parents take time with your children keep up relations with other people that you can't do on the other six because of time constraints or busyness don't ask the question am I allowed or can I do this ask is this good for me ask does it help my spiritual growth ask does it honour

God don't just ask the question also is it good for me but perhaps ask the question is it the best thing for me to engage in is it the best so firstly enjoy the day to relax and recharge secondly focus on your family thirdly celebrate with other believers the resurrection of Jesus Christ the first day of the week was the day in which Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and it was a day in which the Christians in the early church met to worship so in other words we too I submit you should go to church not only go to church but engage in Christian more Christian activity celebrate the work of Christ celebrate what he has done sing praise to God as we have done already this evening celebrate the rest that he has won for us practice hospitality as the scriptures enjoin us to do invite your neighbours in take time with other

[38 : 44] Christians read your Bible read good books do things that will promote holiness and improve your relationship with God these are all things that we should aim at you see it's a day to forget the mundane cares and problems of life and focus on the greatest things and the greatest person who is God and Jesus Christ and then finally and certainly not the last do good on the Lord's day you know as you read through the New Testament and especially as you read the Gospels the group of people the religious group of people that were always trying to trap the Lord Jesus the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the way that they always tried to capture him was what was he going to do on the

Sabbath day every time you read in the New Testament and the Gospels it was a Sabbath day you know that there's going to be trouble because Jesus the Lord Jesus just did not subscribe to all of the rules that the Sadducees and the Pharisees were imposing on the people of Israel and the Lord Jesus did many good things on the Sabbath day and we should do good things on the Lord's day visit people the Lord Jesus healed people on the Sabbath day visit people make their day visit some housebound people visit people perhaps in hospital phone those who are discouraged send a card or a letter to someone perhaps a missionary share the gospel with your neighbour you know you and I live in a society don't we where Sunday by and large is no different from any other day of the week even in my lifetime

Sunday has become completely different there was a day wasn't there when we did not have Sunday opening but all the temptations are there now when I was a boy we didn't even have sport by and large on a Sunday but that is there now and it's a temptation for us all and a challenge for us all as to how we keep the Lord's day separate different distinctive for many it's only a catch up day and God is crowded out I submit to you that the Sabbath principle needs to be followed rest yourself encourage others to rest don't encourage others to work devote the day to God and to doing good it's the

Lord's day let's honour him by honouring that one day in seven rest remember and rejoice let's make the day a delight and enjoy God's presence may it be so for his name's sake let's pray together father we thank you that you have given us one day in seven to rest and to remember and to rejoice peace and we know that you own all the other days as well father but especially on the Lord's day as we have it we pray that we might make good use of it and that we might honour you and as we do that father you have promised that you will bring a blessing into our lives as we devote that one day to you father we understand and we feel the pressures to just do things on the

Lord's day that we think we need to do that we could do on the other six days there is so much pressure to work and to conform and to be no different but father we ask that we might be different and that we might be holy and that we might treat the day as a separate day too father we thank you in closing that your son is the one who came to give us rest and father we thank you that when we come to him by faith we find in him a resting place and he can make us glad so father wherever your word is preached this evening we pray that people who do not know you and who do not have faith in your son the

[44 : 54] Lord Jesus might come to him and find rest and redemption we ask this just now in Jesus name amen now we're going to close a hymn that's on your sheet out You