

God's Law For Today - 3

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 May 2018

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Now let's turn together to the first passage in Exodus that we read. I'm going to refer to Deuteronomy 5 as well. But Exodus chapter 20 and at verse 8.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. And so on these verses. Setting out the fourth commandment down to the end of verse 11.

Now we've begun looking at, well some time ago now with some interruptions, but looking at the law of God for today. And we began by looking at something of the context that makes it important for us to know the law of God and also to commend that law to those that we have around us.

Because, as we saw, there's something of an uncertainty among Christians even as to the relevance of God's law at the present time or in the context of today. And then along with that we saw that the condition of our society means that there is a need to return to the law of God and to what it sets out in relation to God's requirements of us as a people.

And then last time we saw the second study was from 2 Chronicles 34 where you remember that the discovery of the book of the law as it was called in the temple in the reign of Josiah.

[1 : 29] And I want to turn tonight to begin looking at the Ten Commandments.

The fourth commandment.

To neglect the others. Or so people think. Or so people imagine. I hope we don't do that. And there are times, of course, as in recent times, when we need to emphasize what the fourth commandment says.

What the law of the Lord's Day or Sabbath as it is in the Old Testament is really about. But it's important to begin looking at the Ten Commandments by looking at the fourth commandment because it is, in fact, a vital bridge between the previous three and the following six.

Because as you see the fourth commandment in its setting. And remember, God very deliberately gave these commandments out as they are written down to Moses to pass on to the people.

[3 : 12] And it's no accident that they are in the order in which God gave them to Moses and to the people. Where this fourth commandment stands, as we say, as a bridge connecting the previous ones and the following ones.

And that's what we're going to look at for a little this evening as to how that is the case and why it is important to see that connection with the previous ones and with the following ones.

First of all, it looks back to the previous three commandments. To the God who rests. To the God after he had created the universe, set apart the Sabbath day as a day of rest because he rested after his work of creation.

And that follows into the way in which we ourselves are required to maintain Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest, whether we use the word or not, it's very much an Old Testament word.

And it's probably better to use the Lord's day as a description of what the Lord's day and the Sabbath is for us. But Sabbath itself, the idea of Sabbath is important because that is what really focuses on the rest that is proper to the Lord's day.

[4 : 30] And that rest, as you see it belonging to the Lord's day, is something that God actually emphasized when he rested after finishing the work of creation.

In other words, God was even there at the very beginning of things saying, For a day to be different to the other six, for one day to be a day of rest, is no danger to the creation.

It's not going to fall apart if God rests on the seventh day, if he sanctifies it and takes his own rest. And that resting follows into our resting.

And that's, as we'll see tonight, something that we need to come back to and need to try and draw people back to. Because the incessant drive for productivity, for work, for consumerism, for materialistic gain, is something that so drastically interrupts the whole concept of rest, as if

everything was going to fall apart unless we work seven days, 365 days a year or thereabouts. Exodus 34 has in verse 21, something relating to that. Exodus 34 and verse 21, where God says to Israel, this is the covenant being renewed, remember, after the golden calf incidents in chapter 32. [6:01] So God is reiterating what he said at Sinai, but adding some particular details to it. And this is one of them. In verse 21, Now that's an additional detail to what he had said in Exodus chapter 20.

In plowing time and in harvest, you shall rest. Because he knew that the tendency, even of these people who knew the Lord, the tendency would be to interrupt the rest on the Sabbath day by thinking, I've got to get the harvest in.

I've got to get my plowing done. I've got to actually maximize my time. So I'll just give the Sabbath day a little squeeze to the side for this occasion, and I'll come back and pick it up later.

No, says God, even in plowing time and in harvest, you shall rest. You shall follow the pattern of the creation itself and of the Creator.

And you shall not be tempted, is the meaning of what he was saying. You shall not be tempted to think that somehow it would be more advantageous to do more work on the day of rest than the Lord himself allows for.

[7:15] So, it looks back to the first three commandments, and particularly looks back to the creation. It looks back to God emphasizing that he is the Lord, that he is both their creator and their covenant over Lord as their redeemer.

But it looks forward to the following six commandments as well. Here's the bridge in the fourth commandment, back to the creation, back to God resting. And here is looking forward because the following commandments have all to do with God freeing his people from toil.

Freeing his people from slavery. God as their redeemer. God as the one who had come in to rescue them from the slavery, from the incessant work of Egypt, and bringing them into a new beginning and new conditions.

So, that God who frees from toil is the God who emphasizes that Sabbath is set in that context. Now, that's why you'll have noticed, I'm sure, and you knew anyway, I'm sure, from Deuteronomy 5, that when God again reiterated through Moses the Ten Commandments there, that in the fourth commandment, he also added, In other words, the Sabbath for Israel and Sabbath rest was associated looking back, associated with the creation, associated with God resting at the work of creation being finished, and therefore sanctifying that day.

But it's also associated with his rescue of them from Egypt, his redemption, not only as creator but as redeemer. Therefore, they are to rest on the Sabbath day, because it is from the burdens of overwork and slavery that they were rescued.

[9:23] And therefore, the Sabbath is significant in relation to resting from that toil. But of course, the rest, the commandments from 5 onwards, have to do with the context of relations with one another, or you might say, our relation with our neighbor, whether our neighbor is a believer or otherwise.

Everything to do with these commandments is in the context of life with your neighbor. Whether it's your own immediate family or neighbor in the sense of someone living beside you or somebody you work with, all of these commandments, as they follow, really take the whole concept of rest.

The rest that's set out in the fourth commandment, the peace, the rest, you take it into these relations. You take it into the way in which you actually relate, God is saying here, to your father and your mother.

It relates to the fact that you preserve life, that you shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house, your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, and so on.

It's all to do with the context of living in a neighborhood, living in society. And so the Sabbath is the bridge between what is in the past as they look back to the creation, what is looking forward as they must live with one another, and in the context of living in the midst of a people of Canaan, who are very different to themselves.

[10:58] But they have to maintain this pattern that God has set for them of Sabbath rest, looking back and looking forward. Now, something of the teaching that arises from that.

That's the first two points, how it looks back and how it looks forward. What kind of teaching do we take from that? How is that applicable as we look at it in our own context?

Well, you can put it this way, something like this. The Pharaoh of Egypt, who really presides over this drudgery and this slavery that the people of Israel are subjected to, Pharaoh and the conditions of Egypt really are the equivalent of this restless human drive for what is materialistic and what is set on just producing more and more stuff, and how that leads to anxiety, how that leads to depression, how that leads to covetousness.

That's what Egypt really represents. Of course, you can take, in a more spiritual light as well, you can take the slavery of sin and the bondage of sin.

That too is part of what Egypt represents. But even without going as far as that, and that's not illegitimate to take that into it, but to keep it at that level of representing this drive, this materialistic, this terrible concern to just produce and produce and produce without arrest, giving slaves no rest whatsoever.

[12:36] Here is God coming into that context and saying, I have a different government. I have a different set of principles to those that you were used to in Egypt.

I am a different master to Pharaoh. I don't require you to work every single hour of the day to satisfy me. I'm not an intolerant master who will just keep whipping you until you've done more than you did yesterday, and then more the next day, and so it goes on.

And God, as bringing them out of that context of Egypt, is really bringing these people of Israel into a situation where their Sabbath, as he has given that to them, is both a counter and an alternative to what they knew in Egypt.

It's a different culture. It's a different set of emphases altogether to what Egypt was and represented. And it's not only just a countering of that, it's a valid alternative.

It's a vital alternative. It's something in which they themselves must see the place of rest for their overall well-being.

[14:02] Now, that's the logic, really, of the likes of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew chapter 6, for example, you know these well-known words that Jesus took.

And often, Jesus, of course, is, even if he's not directly quoting from the Old Testament, he's very often, as he speaks to the disciples and even to the public, he very often, you can see from his word, has the Old Testament in mind.

And in Matthew chapter 6, you remember how he actually speaks there in terms of, from verse 19 onwards, Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in.

And still, in other words, he's saying, What is the point of laboring merely and only for what you can get out of this life, for what you can store up for yourself in materialistic concerns and in the drive, this incessant drive towards acquiring more of what is essentially material and not really lasting. He's saying, because you have to lay it up for yourselves in heaven, where thieves do not break in and steal, and where moth does not destroy.

[15:17] For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. And he goes on there from verse 25, Therefore I tell you, don't be anxious about your life, what you eat, what you drink, and so on.

And you know the words very well for yourselves. And in verse 24, he finished that verse and led into the remainder of the chapter, You cannot serve God and mammon, or money, by which he means more than just money.

He means the whole materialistic mindset of the world. You cannot serve God and that. It's one or the other. But not both.

Because that is what he was teaching his people all the way through the Old Testament. And he taught it with a way that included, and a very important inclusion, on Sabbath rest.

Rest from toil. Rest in relation to their neighbors and God. And that's the logic of Sabbath rest, as Matthew chapter 6 puts it.

[16:20] And of course that follows into the fact that what you take from that is that Sabbath rest, therefore this is not just speaking, this is one of the things that we're often accused of doing, that we try and really apply this principle of Sabbath rest, or resting one day in the week, or keeping it different to the other days.

We're accused really of, as we do that, as something which is fine for Christians, but it shouldn't actually be made applicable to everybody else, to each and everybody else.

Confine it to the church, people will say if you like, but don't apply it to us because it doesn't belong to us. Well, God did not make such a distinction. Neither did Jesus.

When he said in Mark chapter 2 and verse 27, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

From that itself, combined with even what we've seen this evening, you can see that he didn't say the Sabbath was made for the church. Or the Sabbath was made for those who are my disciples.

[17 : 37] The Sabbath was made for man, for the benefit of human beings. That's why we've got to emphasize that the Sabbath and its maintenance in the Lord's day is part of the gospel and what it emphasizes, because it has to do with rest, with peace, with a pattern of work and of rest, that's designed by God, not only to follow what he did, but to be for human benefit and for human rest.

So there's something of the teaching. But let's more specifically follow on to look at the gods as against God. We've talked about this fourth commandment being a bridge.

If you go back to the first commandment, as well as the introduction, 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.

Now what's the relation between the fourth commandment as a commandment to rest and to observe that rest, and the first commandment, you shall have no other gods before me?

Well, go back to Egypt. Go back to the context of their slavery, of their being required incessantly without any rest as slaves of Pharaoh and his people to produce more and more and more.

[19 : 05] Well, the gods of Egypt are part of the system that held the people of Israel in thralldom in slavery.

Verse 3 has a particular reference, therefore, to them, to the gods that they knew in Egypt. You cannot just take the whole system of Egypt and the religion of Egypt and act as if the gods of Egypt and the thinking of the Egyptians and the paganism of Egypt did not feature in what was required of these Hebrew slaves.

The gods required more and more produce in order to satisfy them. And therefore, Pharaoh, as their representative, who was looked at as a god himself, required more and more and more produce.

And in order to have more produce, you need more slaves. And you need to get more out of your slaves. And in Exodus chapter 5, you just cast your eye back for a minute, you can see how that comes across so graphically in chapter 5, where the request is given by Moses to Pharaoh to let the people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness, God is saying.

But Pharaoh says, Who is the Lord? That I should obey his voice and let Israel go. I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.

[20 : 36] And then all the way down through the chapter, what you find is an emphasis on get back to your work, produce more. Even if I actually change your circumstances and don't give you straw and you have to collect the straw yourselves, you'll not produce less, you'll produce more.

It's all on this drive for production to the satisfaction of Pharaoh and his system and their gods. And that's why when you come to God speaking about himself and judging the people of Egypt, he doesn't leave out the gods of Egypt.

Exodus chapter 12 and verse 12. That's an easy one to remember. Chapter 12, verse 12. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast.

And on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment. I am the Lord. On all the gods of Egypt I will execute.

Why did he include the gods of Egypt? They weren't real. God knew that they weren't real. They were just pagan idols and deities that they had invented. But they were part of the package that held his people of Israel in slavery.

[21 : 59] Therefore, they were included in the judgment. They were included so that the people would be released and would find their freedom. And Exodus 15.

I'm flitting through a lot of references here but if you follow me briefly, Exodus 15, of course, you know that that's the great song of Moses and the people having reached safely to the other side of the Red Sea.

they sang this song to the Lord. And all the way through it's an emphasis on the triumph of the Lord and in giving the people triumph over their enemies.

It's a celebration of delivery. It's a celebration of a new society. It's a celebration of something entirely different to what they had in Egypt. Of freedom and of Sabbath rest.

And you notice in verse 11. Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?

[23 : 01] Among the gods that have been judged by you, Lord, there is none to compare with you. He has delivered them as their redeemer from their slavery.

Therefore, the Sabbath rest fits into that context. And then, it also relates to the second commandment which says, 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 in the water that is under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God and so on. Gods, you see, are liable and Moses knew that and God knew that as the people were going to enter into Canaan which was full of gods, full of the Baals, full of the gods of the Canaanites, he knew the temptation was to be drawn to these gods and that when they were being drawn to these gods, they were being drawn back into a very similar situation to what they had in Egypt.

No place for rest, no place for the pattern that God had given them. and the drawing of the gods makes us very, very liable to become enmeshed in materialism, in consumerism, in commercialism with no place for rest, with no place for Sabbath rest for us.

And therefore, it's no accident, you see that Wednesday, actually in 32, in Exodus 32 where we find an account of the golden calf. There was Moses away for some time.

[24 : 49] The people came to Aaron and pleaded with him to make us gods who shall go before us. But as for this, Moses, we don't know what's happened to him. And it's interesting reading through the passage, you can read it through again for yourselves just to compare these few references up.

They said, make us gods, plural, gods, who shall go before us. As for this Moses, we don't know what has happened to him. So Aaron made them take off the rings of gold and so on and gave them to him.

And he put it into the fire and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

See how soon they're back into the mentality of what they had experienced in Egypt, even though they were slaves in Egypt. They're still saying, these are your gods.

Why did it actually come out? Why did he fashion it into the form of a calf? Because a calf was very much part of what was the bull cult in Egypt, part of the paganism of Egypt, where the bull stood as a very significant feature in that aspect of the idolatry of Egypt.

[26 : 11] And it's no accident that that's what Aaron fashioned, that it's to that that the people said, these are your gods. As soon as you fashion something and make it represent God, you're in danger immediately of being drawn back to these things of gold, these things that enslave you, the mentality that does not find time for rest, the consumerism that doesn't have anything at all for resting and for the creation pattern and the redemption pattern that God has established.

And if you go through Deuteronomy, you'll find that Deuteronomy, because it's there just on the border of the promised land that they're receiving, the teaching of Deuteronomy, you'll find that frequently in Deuteronomy, it warns against images or creating images, representations of God. Why is that? Because that is what is going to bring them back to a situation where they're drawn into this lack of focusing upon Sabbath rest in regard to God's redemption.

Chapter 4 of Deuteronomy, for example, just to pick out one example, chapter 4, verses 15 to 19, therefore he says, watch yourselves very carefully since the day you fought, since you saw no form on the day that the Lord brought you, spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire.

Beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of anything that creeps.

[28 : 04] And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the hosts of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace out of Egypt to be a people of his own inheritance.

You see how foolish their thinking would be if that's what they were thinking of going back to a situation or a context similar to Egypt. God is really saying to them, why would you actually go to the furnace to produce these molten gods?

I took you out of the furnace. I took you out of Egypt. I put you in a new context. I set you in circumstances where I emphasize rest and a pattern that's for your good. And if you leave that pattern, if you go back to your idols, you'll have no place for rest. If you serve the gods, they won't allow you to rest.

[29 : 11] You'll be caught up in their materialistic world and you leave God behind. And that's finally taking us to Sabbath rest in the context of what we can call the gods of today.

These were some of the points just to emphasize as we've worked our way towards looking at Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt and how that context was one of restlessness or no rest at all given to the people, an absence of rest, a slavery, a toil, an incessant demand.

And how God rescued them from that and how this relates this rest of the fourth commandment to the first two commandments. Having no other gods before him and not making any image of God for themselves.

Now we're familiar, very familiar with the words, words like consumerism or materialism and that really has to do as you well know with the ideology, the thinking of well I still don't have enough. Even if I've got plenty, I still don't have enough, I need more. Or greater effort is needed to produce more. That's the world that we actually live in.

[30 : 31] Not just that ideology but an ideology that's pushed by advertising to the maximum. you've got your mobile phone for what's let's say a year or two years and then along comes an advert and says that's really old fashioned.

You need something else. It's out of date. You need a new model because the new model has got this and that extra. And it's the same with virtually all that we find advertised and pushed at us in the consumerism and materialism of today.

It's not what you need that you need to think about in terms of the way advertising presents it to you but what's sufficient. That's what God is saying.

He's placed us in a world where we're so prone to being drawn away by the spirits, the gods of consumerism and commercialism and materialism.

And you see that brings us back to Egypt. Brings us back to where there's no rest. Where there's an incessant demand made upon our time, personal time, family time, church time.

[31 : 45] It's all to do with serving the gods, the gods of today. And not only that but many of course sadly are left behind in this drive.

People that cannot keep up, people that don't have the means to keep up. no accident that there's increased poverty spoken about in our communities, increased debt.

Debt is often due to attempt to actually keep up with those who do manage to have the very most recent model of whatever it is we have in our position.

and that's why you have loans with massive interest, 1,200 and something APR.

Who can afford that? Even if just short term loans, it's people who are desperate for money that go for them. Then they find themselves in further trouble. slavery to the gods, slavery of the gods of today.

[32 : 52] And all of that is related to other problems in our society, the violence, the greed, the covetousness, the sexual aggression, the gambling, the drug addiction, the alcoholism.

That's the context in which God is in the gospel saying, turn from the gods that keep you in slavery and I will give you rest.

That's exactly what Jesus was saying, as you know, to the people. It's into that context today that God comes with that emphasis. That's what we have to present in the gospel.

That's your concern and it's my concern. Not just talking about the preaching of the gospel. We're concerned about your living the gospel. Remember, the fourth commandment is set, not just in relation to the previous three, but the following six.

The context of your neighborliness and my neighborliness and the context of living in a society where we're surrounded by people who need rest, who need to know the principle of rest and what it's about.

[34 : 03] Because the Sabbath day is not just about worship. It's far more extensive than that. It has to do with people's overall well-being. Leave Sabbath rest out of it and you're back in Egypt.

You're back among the gods. You have no time for rest. And it leads to all kinds of personal problems.

And that's why Jesus was so insistent in his loving invitation to the people with their burdens. Not just the burdens of Roman taxation, but the burdens also even of religious laws that the Pharisees and scribes had put together and added to the law of God so that the law itself was virtually buried under them.

An incessant drive to try and be perfect with all these laws. And you can place our context today there as well with all of these gods that people serve.

Sometimes, of course, without even realizing that they're serving gods other than themselves. That's where the gospel comes and says, Come to me, all you who are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

[35 : 32] And as Jesus went on to say, Take my yoke upon you. Take my regulation. Take my set of circumstances.

Take my set of principles. Take my yoke upon you, my service, and learn of me, and you shall find rest for your souls.

May God bless these thoughts to us this evening. Let's conclude our worship. now singing in Psalm 37. Psalm number 37, this is in the Scottish Psalter, page 252.

And singing verses 3 to 5. Set thou thy trust upon the Lord, and be thou doing good. And so thou in the land shalt dwell, and verily have food.

Delight thyself in God. He'll give thine heart's desire to thee. Thy way to God, commit him trust, it bring to pass, shall he. And you can see here that the alternative to serving the gods is trusting in the Lord.

[36 : 48] Verses 3 to 5 of, sorry, no, verses 3 to 7, that should be 3 to 7 of Psalm 37, to God's praise.

verse 3 to set thou thy trust upon the Lord, and be thou doing good, and so thou in the land shalt dwell, and veddly of food.

Delight thyself in God. He'll give thine heart's desire to thee.

Thine way to God's commitment trust, and bring to pass shall he.

And like unto the light he shall thy righteousness display, slay, and he thy judgment shall bring forth like noon tide all the day.

[38 : 38] But save the Lord and vision with.

With for him do not pray, for him who prospering in his will success in sin doth get.

not is it are going to him to help him to and united in another way I can ■■■ off him on anything