

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “Keeping the Sabbath” (from the “Written in Stone” sermon series)

Scripture: Exodus 20:8-11

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of Exodus, we are exploring the fourth of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses for the people of Israel. The first three commandments dealt with “No other gods” (20:3) and “No idols” (20:4-6), “No misuse of God’s name (20:7), and now we are exploring observing the Sabbath in verses 8-11.
- Verses 8-11 tell us, “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.”
- There are two reasons given in scripture as to why there is a Sabbath day. The first establishes a day of rest after working six days based on Genesis 2:1-3. This is where God rests on the seventh day preceding six days of creating the heavens, the earth and the sea and thus making this day a holy one. This seventh day of rest became known as the “Sabbath,” which comes from the Hebrew word *shavat*, which means “to rest.”
- The second is rooted in Israel’s salvation from slavery. In Deuteronomy 5:15 we read, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.” Thus, the Sabbath is also to serve as a reminder for God’s rescuing of the Israelites freedom from bondage in Egypt.
- Violating the observance of Sabbath was a serious infraction that resulted in the death penalty for the ancient Israelites. In Exodus 31:14 states, “Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it is to be put to death; those who do any work.” This is also discussed in Numbers 15:32-36.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- The fourth commandment is contrasted with the previous three, in that this is the first commandment so far that is expressed in the *positive*. It is an appeal for positive action and not a prohibition.
- The word for Sabbath in Hebrew is *shavat*, which means “to stop” and “to rest.”
- A proper observance of Sabbath in ancient days demanded that all labor cease. It started with the lighting of two candles by the mother of the home, and the two candles signified remember and participate or reenact.
- The Jewish Sabbath began at Sundown on Friday and ends on Saturday at dusk. Everything taking place between these hours were things like prayers or teaching in the synagogue. Any activity that would contribute to personal profit was forbidden.
- Rabbinical tradition listed 39 categories of acts prohibited from the Sabbath!
- These actions might sound impractical...but that is the point! Life is not designed to be purely practical. The Sabbath helps us to guard against a common form of idolatry in creation...work! You are a human *being*, not a human *doing*!
- Remember in Matthew chapter 12, Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath which outraged the religious leaders. Christ is telling us that it is ok to do good for others on this day! Some work must continue...even on the Sabbath!
- We cannot become so legalistic that we make the Sabbath a burden and not a blessing. The Sabbath is built into creation itself (Exodus 20:11).
- Sabbath Rest: Israel rests because God rests...it is part of the rhythm of creation! The world was not created to be a place of constant production and motion.
- It is difficult for us to get behind a day of rest in such an achievement and goal-oriented society. There is nothing wrong with hard work and a work ethic. However, a good *rest ethic* is absolutely necessary!
- There is a parallel text to this in Deuteronomy 5 which adds one other dimension. It states that part of the purpose of Sabbath is to remember creation and also to remember God’s redemptive action from bondage in Egypt.
- The whole purpose of their deliverance and redemption is worship! Keeping Sabbath is a sign to the world that our devotion is not to a pharaoh but to God!
- The Sabbath binds us to God, but it also binds us to community and connects us.
- The Sabbath is what keeps the world sane and humane. When you keep the Sabbath holy it will keep us holy unto God.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- What does this commandment teach us about the nature of God?
- In what ways are we, as Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ, called to observe the Sabbath? Does this differ from some of the verses we read in the Old Testament? If so, how?
- Read Romans 14:5-6. Does this help to shape our views of the Sabbath? Why or why not?
- Why is Sabbath rest so hard?
- What benefits come to us from the observance of the Sabbath day?
- How do you observe Sabbath?
- Why was ancient Rabbinical tradition so meticulous in pointing out what was forbidden during the Sabbath?

