

Sunday . . . Holy Day or Holiday

Exodus 20:8-11

Introduction

I pulled a book off the shelf in my study this week, entitled, *The Workaholic*. I would have read it sooner, but I did not have time! I began reading and found it very interesting that there are some universal characteristics of workaholics.

One characteristic of the workaholic is that they have an unending or unchanging schedule. They are tied to the same routine day in and day out – there is never any change or any break.

A second characteristic is that a workaholic's conversation is riddled with personal accomplishments. When you start a conversation with an individual like this, in five minutes they are going to tell you what they are doing at the job and what they have accomplished because, in their mind, it is produce, produce, produce.

It is also interesting, thirdly, that this individual will experience an inability to say, "No." They are always going to say, "Yes," whether it is to an employer or to a pastor or whoever. If they are asked by their employer to work overtime or take a trip or whatever, they can think of no reason to say, "No."

The fourth characteristic is more the result of being a workaholic, and that is, they have cardiac and circulatory problems. If you have had cardiac difficulty, that does not mean you are not taking time off, but it is a characteristic of those who never stop.

The Scripture's Solution to Man's Need

We are, I think, a little more tied to a universal law than we would like to admit. We are a lot like my Ford pick-up truck that has 104,000 miles on it. Do you feel like that today? I know that if I have any hope of that truck reaching 150,000 miles, I have to put it on a regular maintenance schedule. I have to change the oil, not every 10,000 miles, but every 2,000 miles. I need to rotate the tires. I need to make sure there are clean spark plugs and that the carburetor is cleaned periodically. All of these things that I have mentioned, I need to do yesterday. If I ever hope to keep that truck running, I have to do these

things; I have to put it on a regular maintenance schedule.

We are so much like my truck. In fact, God has designed a maintenance schedule for us. And whether we want to follow it or not, it is clearly in scripture. It is the principle of rest. Turn to Exodus, chapter 20, and let us look at it together.

We are covering the Ten Commandments, as we go through the book of Exodus, and are now on the fourth. Look at Exodus, chapter 20, verses 8 through 10.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.

Now that does not leave any loophole. It is as if He almost anticipates an argument from us. And before we can let out a peep, He comes along in the next verse and says,

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the 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.

In other words, if *God* took a break and stopped, we certainly should, as finite creatures.

Now did God take a break because He was tired? No. Did He take a break because He had reached the exhaustion point? Did He look back at all He had done and say, "I really need to get the battery recharged?" Absolutely not. He is sovereign; He is omnipotent; He has infinite power; He is never tired.

Do you know why God took a break? To establish an example for people like you and me who get the feeling *we* are omnipotent and *we* can go without a break.

The Sabbath Day Replaced By Sunday

Now when I preach on a passage like this, I have to answer a question. Even though most of you would have no problem with this, part of my responsibility is refuting doctrinal error – and there is a body of people that need refuting. It is the group of people who still believe we are under Old Testament law and worship on the sabbath. The sabbath, or “Shabbath,” really means “rest or cessation”.

Why is it that you and I did not worship on Saturday, but are worshipping today (Sunday)? Let me give three reasons. I suggest that you write these down as you do not know when someone will knock at your door. Writing helps the memory a little better than simply hearing.

The sabbath was a covenant sign between Israel and Yahweh

1. The first reason that we worship on Sunday instead of the sabbath is that the sabbath was a covenant sign between Israel and Yahweh.

Turn to Ezekiel, chapter 20. Verse 12 clearly tells us that this is a covenant sign between Israel and their God. Let us start with verse 10. God is speaking.

So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.

Continue to verse 11. This is the Ten Commandments that God is talking about, as well as everything else in the Pentateuch.

I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live.

Now note verse 12.

Also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.

Now that passage of scripture means that this command is unique to the Israelite nation; that this command specifically deals with the Jewish nation. This is a covenant sign, just as circumcision was. They were commanded by God to reveal their separateness; to reveal the fact that they belong to Him by taking this day out and resting and worshipping. So, it was a covenant sign.

We, as a New Testament church, are obviously not under the covenant signs of the Jewish nation. In

fact, Colossians, chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, tells us that the cross was the substance of the shadow. The shadow was the sabbaths, and the new moons, and the festivals. But now, with the cross, we have been given reality. We will discover in a moment, why and what that reality is.

The rebellion of Israel

2. The second reason to notice is that the covenant sign was set aside because of the rebellion of Israel.

Turn to the book of Hosea, chapter 2, and look at verse 8. The history of Israel is again being recounting through scripture.

For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal.

Continue to verse 9.

Therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time and My new wine in its season. I will also take away My wool and My flax given to cover her nakedness.

Skip to verse 11.

I will also put an end to all her gaiety, her feasts, her new moons, [and] her sabbaths . .

So, Israel rebelled and we know that ultimately, that rejection took place when Jesus Christ offered the kingdom and they said, “No,” to Him. At that point; at that rebellious moment, God took away the covenant sign of the “Shabbath,” or “the rest; the cessation,” because they were now no longer a distinct nation under this new dispensation called grace.

The New Testament church

3. Now, thirdly, something new is on the horizon. Now God will deal with men – both Gentile and Jew – on a similar standing and something else is created; something happens in the New Testament. We can observe it – it is called the Sunday worship, or the Lord’s day.

Now there are several reasons why we are worshipping on Sunday. There were two significant events.

- The first event was the resurrection.

We learn from every gospel writer that the resurrection took place on the Lord's day; that is, the first day of the week. That is where we hear the first day of the week.

Actually, it was the apostle John, in the book of Revelation, who called it the Lord's day. He said, in chapter 1, verse 10,

I was in the Spirit [when I was receiving this vision] on the Lord's day . . .

That is where we get the title, so it is very biblical. Sunday is the Lord's day.

- Secondly, not only the resurrection, but something else interesting happened on the first day of the week, and that was Pentecost, the day after the preparation.

So Jesus Christ rose from the grave on the first day of the week and every gospel writer considers that significant enough to include it. Then, Jesus Christ creates this new body – when? On Sunday, the first day of the week.

- Now there is something else and that is the practice of the New Testament church. We learn, as we go through the book of Acts, that the New Testament church set aside that particular day, the first day of the week, and began to worship.

In Acts, chapter 20, verse 7, we discover that they are worshipping the Lord, specifically, on the first day of the week. In fact, they are taking the elements. They used to take it every day, but now are reserving that element, or the Lord's table, for Sunday. That is a very important example to follow as we observe the New Testament church.

So why do we worship on Sunday? Because of the resurrection, and we celebrate that; because of Pentecost, and we celebrate what Jesus Christ has formed. And, in this local manifestation, which happens to be our church, we follow the example of the New Testament believers by observing this particular day.

Are we under law? Are we condemned to hell because we do not worship on the sabbath? No. The sabbath was given to the Israelite nation, and then, was set aside because of their rebellion.

Let me mention this, if we have trouble worshipping one day out of seven, we had better get ready because we know, from the prophets, that in the millennial kingdom, when Jesus Christ reigns on earth,

guess what He re-establishes? The "Shabbath," or the sabbath; that is, Saturday. We will not worship on Sunday anymore. We will go back to the sabbath because He will then deal in that Israelite genre where we will once again join the nation in worshipping and resting on the seventh day, the sabbath.

Now, turn back to Exodus, chapter 20, and look at verse 8. Jesus Christ, through revelation, believing that these are the words of Christ, as scripture tells us, says, not only to rest, but,

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it . . .

What?

. . . holy.

"Holy" means, "set apart for sacred use". It is interesting that historians have given us a lot of insight into the early church. From studying them, we learn that after Jesus Christ ascended, they began worshipping, as I mentioned in Acts, chapter 20, on Sunday. We know that those first services, held on those first Sundays, were Sunday evenings. They had, what was called, the "agape" feast around the dinner table. Everyone would bring food and they would meet on Sunday evening to eat together and to worship.

However, as the church began to develop, historians reveal, and I am talking about people who were living in that day and have writings still existing today, they had so many slaves coming to Jesus Christ that they began a Sunday morning worship so that the slaves could meet with the body before they went to work.

No longer than seventy years after Jesus Christ had ascended into heaven, Ignatius lived. He gives a description of a Sunday morning service. It is interesting that they had prayers; they had scripture reading, like we had this Sunday morning; they had singing that would be developed within the congregation. People would also stand periodically and share a testimony or maybe a passage of scripture. Then, every Sunday, they always had communion.

It was fascinating that Ignatius mentioned that, if you were absent from the body, then after the service, the deacon took the communion elements to your home and gave them to you there because evidently, you were sick. So they made house calls back then. Would the deacons in our church like to do that? We would have a time, wouldn't we? We would come into your home to give you communion and the

neighbors would be looking out their windows and wondering, “What in the world is going on?” But that is exactly how they did it.

The Symptoms of a Biblical Sunday

Now, let me give you two ingredients of a biblical Sunday, if we believe that this day is to be set apart for sacredness. This is not a holiday, this is literally, a holy day; this is when we recognize the living Christ. We need at least two ingredients. Even though the form has changed from Exodus, chapter 20, the principles remain. We have already mentioned them but, let me specify these two.

Rest

1. One ingredient of a biblical Sunday is rest.

Write this down because you are stubborn enough not to rest.

I can remember growing up in a home where we were not allowed to play outside on Sunday. I know that really sounds strange to you. Actually, I wonder how my mother ever survived with four kids in the house all afternoon. I would shuttle them out the door! Maybe that is why we had to take naps on Sunday afternoon.

Taking a Sunday afternoon nap, by the way, is one thing that has stuck with me. I do not know about you, but for heaven’s sake, do not call me at 2 o’clock on Sunday afternoon. I will give you bad advice on purpose! I am asleep, so wait until 3 o’clock.

There was something instilled in us that gave us the distinction that this day is different. It is set apart for rest.

Three changes we all need

We all need, I believe, three changes. God has designed Sunday to provide those three.

- First, we all need a physical change and that is where rest takes its place.

We need to pull ourselves out of the jungle, if possible. I realize some jobs keep an individual there – perhaps police work, a job in the medical field, or utility work – and I know that cannot be helped, but, if you can on that day, pull yourself out of the jungle and *rest*. Turn off the television. Wait until after the football season before you do that – I do not want to

tell you to do something that I am not going to do! I have to be honest with you, so let us wait a couple of months!

- Secondly, we also need an emotional change.

This is important. We need to hear a different set of vocabulary than what we get during the week. We need to hear different music. We need a different emotional experience. That is the purpose of meeting together and taking this day out.

- Thirdly, along that same line, we need a spiritual change.

It is interesting that in the Old Testament, this law was relegated not just to humans and animals (you were to take the yoke off the oxen), but to agriculture. Isn’t it interesting that they had a sabbath, or a “Shabbath,” for the land. One year out of seven, they were not allowed to plow or plant; they were to leave the land alone. In the sixth year, God would give them such fertile crops that they would have enough left over to survive in the seventh year. They disobeyed, obviously, and God sent them into captivity for stealing the “Shabbath”. But it is interesting that the land was to lay dormant so that it could keep its productivity.

Do you get the implication? We are to take one day out of seven so that we can remain productive. We get so spiritually drained throughout the week, and if we keep up that kind of practice, we will run out of spiritual fuel. So, God set aside Sunday for a spiritual change.

Worship

2. We not only need a physical change, a spiritual change, and an emotional change, which are part of rest, but we also need, secondly, worship. Not only is Sunday set aside for rest, it is also set aside for worship.

Worship accomplishes four things

Let me give four things that Sunday will provide in its worship.

- Number one, our worship services are designed to strengthen you.

Acts, chapter 4, verse 31, is fascinating. It talks about the apostles who with great boldness and courage, went out to share the news that Jesus Christ was alive. That came immediately after praying and

studying with the body. It says, almost inconsequentially, that they got up from their knees and their study and then, went out and proclaimed that He is alive,

. . . *with boldness.*

That is the intention. Worship is to equip us for the purpose of ministry. It is to strengthen us, as we rub shoulders and worship our God, to go back into that jungle and take His name with us and share it. It strengthens.

- Secondly, worship cleanses.

Worship should cleanse. I want to give the suggestion that you prepare for cleansing.

If we go back in history far enough, we discover that the Puritans had what they called, “the vigil”. I would not really want to come from a Puritan family, as they were very stern and austere. Yet, they had a principle, called “the vigil,” in which on Saturday night, they would begin preparing for worship on Sunday. The vigil was a literal reference to the warming of the oven, so that on Sunday, when they put the bread in, it would bake. They would prepare their hearts through vigil. They would pray; they would meditate; they would start slowing the gears down.

I think that is a tremendous principle that we have lost. We get up frazzled on Sunday, because Saturday nights are often so hectic and so busy that we are ill prepared. I believe we bring into the worship service, hearts that we have cultivated throughout the entire week. I believe the preparation is important, even on Saturday night.

In the gospels, of course, they called it “the preparation”. The evening before the “Shabbath,” they would start slowing down, meditating, and saying prayers.

So we come into church on Sunday to do what? To sit here? To sing a little bit? We come to be strengthened. We also come to be cleansed. We come to allow God to change our hearts; to refocus our attention.

- There is a third thing that worship accomplishes, and that is, it refocuses.

Worship refocuses, strengthens, and cleanses. I think the refocusing is so crucial in the society in which we live and work that tells us to produce, produce, produce. We are significant in terms of what

we produce; we are significant in terms of what we accomplish.

When we come to church, however, we find out what? A totally different story. We are significant because of who we are in Christ Jesus, *period*. Apart from the promotion; apart from the wealth; apart from the scramble for the top, we are refocused into the things that are really significant; that is, who we are in Christ Jesus. We have to have that.

- Fourthly, worship not only strengthens, cleanses, and refocuses, but it encourages.

Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 25, is a classic passage of scripture that preachers love to quote. It says,

not forsaking our own assembling together, .

..

Do you know what I believe is sad about that? They have forgotten the rest of the passage. Why should we not forsake the assembling of ourselves together? So that, as verse 24 says, we can come together,

. . . to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

It does not mean a thing for people to come to church and fill up a chair. That is insignificant. But if we come together to encourage, to provoke, to stimulate, to motivate unto love and good deeds, then we are accomplishing something.

G. Campbell Morgan was a great expositor and one of my favorite authors. I have a number of his books. He was pastoring a church and went to visit a man who had stopped coming. He sat in the man’s parlor, in front of a crackling fire, and the man was telling G. Campbell Morgan, “It’s not important for me to be there. I can worship God anywhere. I don’t need the encouragement of the saints.”

G. Campbell Morgan sat there quietly and then, leaned forward, took a poker, and stuck it into the coals. He pulled one of them out and pushed it aside. Without saying a word, they both watched that coal as it grew cold, while the pile stayed hot and glowing. Morgan never said a word, but the man turned to him and said, “Now I understand.”

Men and women, I need you and you need each other. Together, we collectively form a pile of hot coals that encourage and motivate unto love and good works.

Conclusion

Someone once wrote something that I have never forgotten, and it is this, “The stops of a good man, as well as the steps of a good man, are ordered by the Lord.”

What we have done today is talk about the stops.

Ladies and gentlemen, for God to get our attention, it is as if God will have to:

- A. make an appointment,
- B. take a number, or
- C. forget it.

I am convinced that He will not run to catch up. He waits. I believe there is a principle that exists even today. It is the law of rest. It is the law of worship.

The question is, “Will I establish that law that demands so little and yet, provides so much, in my life?”