



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Market Day of the Soul

Reverend Scott Johnson | November 9, 2025 | Exodus 20:8-11

Old Testament Reading

The Old Testament reading is Exodus chapter 20, verses eight through 11. And this is the inerrant, the infallible word of God. 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 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 the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Old Testament Reading

Let's hear from the New Testament. Our New Testament reading is Mark chapter two. Mark 2, verses 23 through 28. Mark 2, 23 through 28.

One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grain field, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? And he said to them, have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him. And he said to them, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

The Fourth Commandment

We are working our way through the Book of Exodus, and we are working our way, therefore, here in Exodus 20 through the Ten Commandments. And today, in our walk through the Ten Commandments, we have come to the one commandment that is the most controversial among Christians. Christians have long debated exactly how or even if the fourth commandment applies to us as Christians today, and exactly how we are to keep this commandment. One Dutch theologian of the last century estimated that in his country, the Netherlands, 10,000 families had serious arguments about what is not and what is permissible on the Sabbath day. And he calculated that that works out to about half a million quarrels per year over the Sabbath day. And my guess is if that were someone to attempt to do such a count today among Christians in our nation, he would find that the number of arguments over what's permissible on the Sabbath would be far lower, much closer to zero perhaps than half a million. And that's not because all Christians today have come to a universal agreement on how to keep the fourth commandment and how it applies to us, but rather it's because by and large, the church in our day just doesn't give too much thought to the fourth commandment at all. We don't give much thought to what it means to keep the fourth commandment is probably the most neglected, the most ignored of all the 10 commandments that God has given to us.

Now, I wouldn't say that when families were fighting over the meaning of the fourth commandment, that those were the good old days. I'm not in favor of more arguments in Christian homes. However, I do think the church would do well to give much more thought and attention to the fourth commandment, even if we don't come to a universal agreement on how we are to keep it. Nevertheless, at least we would be wrestling with the meaning of it, taking it more seriously. The fact that we don't have disagreements over the fourth commandment reveals just how little importance that we attach to it. In fact, for many Christians today, Sunday has become virtually identical to Saturday, just another Saturday with the exception of a couple of hours for church in the morning. And I believe that, sadly, this is one very visible way in which the church has capitulated to the secular spirit of the age. Just like for the world, for unbelievers, so for too many Christians, Sunday is not the Lord's day, but it is my day.

Now, like all the Ten Commandments, God first gave the Sabbath commandment to the people of Israel. And the commandment itself, as we just read the words of it on the surface, it is very simple, very straightforward. The Israelites and their households were not to work on the Sabbath day. The seventh day of the week, that was to be a day which they were to rest from

their usual labors. The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word, which means to stop or to cease, to desist. And so the Israelites, they would cease their ordinary labors on the Sabbath day. And that's how they kept the Sabbath day holy. But as we'll see, there's more to this commandment than merely the rule to rest on the seventh day of the week. The fourth commandment is a sign as well as a commandment. It was a sign to the Israelites of the great truths concerning God and the salvation that he accomplished for them. And so the commandments to the Israelites and the commandment for us is both a sign and a commandment. It is a commandment and a sign.

The Fourth Commandment as a Sign

And those will be the two points that we use to consider this commandment today. And so first we'll consider the fourth commandment as a sign. What did it signify for the Israelites? And what does the fourth commandment signify for us today? So first we'll consider what it meant for the Israelites as a sign. With the people of Israel, the fourth commandment signified something both that was past and something that was future. And so first it was a call to remember. It was a call to remember what God had done for the Israelites. It was a call to remind the Israelites that God was their creator and their redeemer. Look at verse 11. Verse 11 says, 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. And so here in Exodus, when we have the 10 commandments given to us for the first time in Exodus, the ground or the basis for the fourth commandment is the work and the rest that God himself did. And so God created the universe, all things, the heavens and the earth in six days, and then on the seventh day, he rested. He ceased from his work. And therefore the Israelites, for that reason, in order to image God, to be like God, they were to work six days and then they were to rest, to cease from their labors. And as they did so, as they did this week after week, they would be reminded that they served the God who was the creator of all things, that the God whom he revealed himself to the Israelites, who made himself known to them, that he was the author of life, the giver of life. They honored the Lord as the one in whom they lived and moved and had their being.

But this fourth commandment was also meant for the Israelites to be a reminder to them, not only that God was their creator, but also that God was their savior, their redeemer. The second time that we read the 10 commandments after the book of Exodus is in the book of Deuteronomy. And there, Moses, when he restates the 10 commandments, he gives another reason why the Israelites were to keep the seventh day holy. This is from Deuteronomy 5, verse

15. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. And so the Sabbath day then, as they heard it from Moses, the ground or the basis for the fourth commandment was not only that they were a created people, but they were a saved people. They had been redeemed, saved by the power, by the grace of God, when he delivered them from their bondage to slavery in Egypt. And so the Sabbath then was a weekly reminder to the Israelites of who the Lord was, that he was both their creator, the one who gives them life, who sustains their lives in this world. He was also their redeemer, the one who had delivered them from Egypt, who set his love upon them, who rescued them from their bondage to Pharaoh.

And so the Sabbath was a sign for the Israelites to look to the past, but it was also a sign that pointed them to the future. The Lord also intended the fourth commandment to fix the eyes of the Israelites upon what was to come, that in the future, God would bring them into the land of Canaan, the promised land. In Deuteronomy 12, verse nine, Moses refers to the promised land as the place where the Israelites would find rest. They would find rest in the promised land. And the rest that they would find there would be rest from their bondage to slavery in Egypt, rest from their wilderness wanderings. And so the Sabbath was meant to point the Israelites forward to the promise of God that he had made to them that in Canaan, in the promised land, they would find their rest. However, even entrance into the land of Canaan was not the final or the ultimate rest that the Lord had promised the Israelites. The book of Hebrews sheds light upon the fourth commandment for us so that we can understand the full meaning of it. And according to the book of Hebrews, the true rest that God held out to the Israelites was the rest, the eternal rest that would be theirs of the world to come. Resting in the presence of God, resting from their struggle with sin, rest from living in a sin-cursed world, the rest that the New Testament calls eternal life. And so the fourth commandment pointed the Israelites to the promise, ultimately, of eternal rest with the Lord. And so it was a sign for the Israelites that pointed them forward to salvation. Not only the rest that would be theirs in the land of Canaan, but the eternal rest, the eternal salvation that God had promised to give to his people.

The Fourth Commandment for Today's Christians

Now, having considered what the fourth commandment meant for the people of Israel, let's consider what does it mean for us today as Christians? Well, just as God gave this commandment to the Israelites to be a sign to them of what he had done for them in the past,

what he would do for them in the future, so for you and me today, the fourth commandment is a sign both of God's dealings with us in the past, but also of his promises to us for the future. But before we consider that, I want to make a more fundamental point, a more essential or basic point that I hope all of us, if we're not agreed on now, that we will be. And that is this, that the fourth commandment is still valid for the church. It hasn't been abrogated, it hasn't been canceled or voided. It is still very much in effect, in force for us as Christians today. The words that we heard from our Lord Jesus in the New Testament reading, these words that he spoke concerning the Sabbath would be very, very difficult to understand if by his coming into the world, he meant to do away completely or abolish the fourth commandment. Jesus said in Mark chapter two, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And then he said in verse 28, so the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath. It is strange to consider that Jesus would claim his divine Lordship over the Sabbath only in order to abolish it, to get rid of it. And it's also strange to think that Jesus would take away something that God had given to us for our good. The Sabbath is made for man.

And why would Jesus then as Lord of the Sabbath take away this gift that God has given to you and me for our blessing? And so as Christians today, we still have 10 commandments. We don't have nine commandments, but God has given us 10 commandments written in stone, written with his finger. And so the fourth commandment is just as binding on us today as it was for the people of Israel under the old covenant. And as a sign, the fourth commandment functions in the same way for the church today as it did for Israel, that is, it points us to the past of what God has done for us, but also to the future of what God will do for us. And as for remembering, as for pointing us to the past, what the fourth commandment reminds us of as Christians, as the church, is not so much God's great work of creation, which of course is still in the commandment. And so yes, we are still to think of God as the creator. Nevertheless, what God is pointing us towards as we look to the past with the fourth commandment is not so much his work of creation, but his work of recreation. And God's work of recreation began on the day in which he raised the Lord Jesus from the grave for our salvation. Because Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week. As Christians, the day that we now remember and keep holy is not the last day of the week, but the first day of the week. Not Saturday, but Sunday.

The day on which God raised up Jesus from the dead. On this day, something more significant, something more momentous, took place that was even greater than the work of creation itself. And that is God was beginning on that day, on that resurrection day, God was beginning his greater work of recreation. And this is what the resurrection is.

It is the beginning really of all that God has promised us in the scriptures of the coming of the new heavens and the new earth. The end of the ages, the coming glory, the world that is to come. All of this really began on the first Easter morning when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. And so, in the forward progress of God's work of salvation through history, the fourth commandment remains the same, but the day is changed. We look back to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and so we worship on the first day of the week. And accordingly, Sunday, the first day of the week, was a special day, a holy day in the eyes of the church from the very beginning. It was the day on which the church met for worship in the scriptures. In Acts 27, chapter 20, verse 7, we read that on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, that Paul instructed the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 16, verse two, on the first day of the week, each one of you is to put something aside and store it up. And most importantly, perhaps in the book of Revelation, the inspired apostle John, he tells us in chapter one, verse 10, I was in the spirit on the Lord's day. And that could be no other day, but the day that the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead. And so, here's one day that is called in the scriptures, in the New Testament, the Lord's day. And that of course is the first day of the week, the day that is holy, that we are to keep holy. And so for us, our Sabbath rest is not on Saturday, but on Sunday. In the words of our confession, the Lord's Day is the Christian Sabbath. It is the Christian Sabbath. The theologian B.B. Warfield, he put it this way, he said, Christ took the Sabbath into the grave with him and brought the Lord's Day out of the grave with him on the resurrection morn. And so for us as Christians, the fourth commandment points us back to the great work of God's recreation, that work of recreation that has begun with the resurrection of Christ from the grave. But as with the Israelites, the Sabbath also points us ahead to look forward to what God will do for us. And what we are looking forward to is not different from what the Israelites were looking forward to, and that is the day of eternal rest. The day that we will have the fullness, the completion of our rest in Jesus Christ, our Savior. Hebrews 4.9 says, so then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. And what Hebrews calls the Sabbath rest is nothing other than the eternal glory, the eternal life that God has promised to give us in Jesus Christ, that He will bring us into on that day. And so on the day of our resurrection from the grave, that will be that eternal rest that we will enter into in fullness when we are free from sin, when we live in this new heaven to new earth in which there will be no more sin and death forever. That is the goal of our salvation. That is heaven. And that is what the fourth commandment points us to, that eternal rest. And it will be a rest, a rest from all the struggles, the temptations, the sufferings, the spiritual warfare, the shadow of death in which we labor and strive as people living in a sin-cursed world. And at this point, we need to ask ourselves, is this

the rest that I am hoping in and looking forward to? Is this promise of eternal rest in the Lord Jesus Christ. Is this your hope? Are you trusting in Jesus Christ as your savior from sin and death, and as the one who promises to give you this everlasting rest? Perhaps there are some here today to whom the Lord Jesus is calling out, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I'm gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only one who can give us true rest from our struggle with sin, from the fear of death, from the guilt that is ours. He can give us true rest and he promises to bring us the fullness, the perfection of this rest one day when he comes again in glory, but even now, He calls you to come to Him, to come to the Savior Jesus, to find even now that rest that will be yours in fullness in the life to come. And if you have come to Jesus Christ by faith to receive that gift of rest, you have received the greatest gift in the world. You have received the Lord Jesus, the forgiveness of your sins, but he has also given you so many other gifts along with Christ. He has given you the gift of the Sabbath day, the gift of the Lord's day, a day in which you can rest from your work, a day in which you can turn your thoughts to the Lord Jesus Christ and to worship him and to find your contentment, your joy in him. And so for us, the fourth commandment is a sign of God saving work for us in the future. And it is also, or it's a sign of God saving work for us in the past, what he has done for us in Christ, but also of the hope that we have for the future. So it's a sign. But the fourth commandment is also a commandment.

The Fourth Commandment as a Commandment

God tells us what we are to do. And this brings us to our second main point, the fourth commandment as a commandment. And the question is, as Christians, how are we to keep it? How do you keep the fourth commandment? How do you keep the Lord's day holy? And inevitably, when we ask this question, all kinds of particular specific questions come to our mind. Can I go out to eat on Sunday? Can I travel on Sunday?

Can I watch sports on Sunday? Can our family play Settlers of Catan on Sunday? Or do we have to only play Bible trivia on Sunday? Now, instead of me standing here and telling you the answers to all these questions, or at least what I think the answers are, I want us to consider together some biblical teaching concerning the fourth commandment that, Lord willing, the Spirit of God will guide you or will use to guide you in your thinking about how you are to keep the Lord's day holy. And this, Lord willing, will help you as you consider, well, what does that look like specifically in terms of these activities that inevitably we have questions about?

The Sabbath is a Gift

So first of all, one thing that you must keep in mind is this. The Sabbath day is a gift from God.

It is a gift. God did not give the Israelites the fourth commandment to burden them, to inconvenience them, to make their one day in seven a drudgery or a chore, but he gave the Israelites the fourth commandment, the Sabbath day, in order to be a blessing to them, a gift, a day of rest from their work. The Lord did not give as the world gives.

The Lord did not give as Pharaoh gave. There's no doubt that Pharaoh did not give the Israelites any rest, but the Lord did. And like every gift from God, the Sabbath day is a good thing. It is intrinsically good because it is from God.

Jesus said in Mark chapter two, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. And Jesus was speaking specifically to those who had taken the fourth commandment and had turned it from a gift to a burden. They cause it to be a burden for the people of Israel. And Jesus says, no, the fourth commandment is good.

Man was not made to keep it, but it was given for man's blessing. The Sabbath was made for man. God knows our frame. He knows our limitations, our weaknesses. He knows it's simply not good for you and me to work seven days a week without a regular break. Nor if you are an employer, is it right for you to demand unceasing labor from those who work for you? And so you have to remember this, that the Sabbath day is meant for your good. It is a gift from God, a blessing from heaven.

The Sabbath is a Delight

Secondly, the Sabbath day is meant to be for you a delight. Consider the Israelites. If they took the Sabbath day seriously, and when you read through the New Testament, you find out that woefully, they did not take the Sabbath day seriously, but if they would, if they did, how could it not have been a delight for them? How could they not have rejoiced as they rested from their work on the Sabbath day and remembered that God was their Savior, that He had delivered them from Egypt, that He was the source of every blessing and good thing for them? How could it not be a delight for the Israelites? In fact, the Lord tells the people of Israel in Isaiah 58, He tells them to call the Sabbath a delight. And the same thing applies to us. How can we not find delight in the Lord's day, in our Christian Sabbath, if we take it seriously? If we cease from our

work, if we devote ourselves to God, to worshipping Him, and to remembering that He is our Savior, that He loves us in Jesus Christ, that He is the source of every good gift and perfect gift. How could it not be a delight for us? And so the Sabbath day is basically a good thing. It is meant as a gift to give us rest. It is meant to be a delight, to rejoice, a day to rejoice in God's goodness and grace to us. And I have never met a Christian, and I don't think I ever will meet a Christian who has ever or ever will regret that he made an effort, that he prioritized his week and his time in order to keep the Sabbath day, the Lord's day, holy, to rest, to worship him. There is great blessing in keeping the fourth commandment.

How Do We Keep the Sabbath Holy?

With that in mind, let's ask the question, how do we keep the Sabbath day holy? Well, first of all, just on the basis of what the commandment says, we keep it holy by resting. That means you take a break from your usual everyday labor. You don't devote the day to it. This is the first concern of the fourth commandment, to cease, to desist from your usual work. And I would include in that schoolwork as well. If you're a student, that is your work. And so you rest from your studies on Sunday.

And so for that reason, if you choose to do any kind of regular work on Sunday that you could with a little forethought, a little planning, do another time during the week, you are not keeping the fourth commandment. Now we do have to say, we have to add some qualifications to this. There are certain kinds of work that must be done all seven days of the week. For example, hospitals, they have to keep running seven days a week. Police officers have to keep working seven days a week. Unfortunately, sickness and criminals don't take a day off. The utility companies, they have to keep providing power all seven days of the week and so on. Also, any kind of work of mercy, for example, visiting the sick, practicing hospitality, that kind of work is not breaking the Sabbath, but those works of mercy are really honoring the Sabbath because you are showing forth the love of Christ to others. And of course, that's something that God commands us to do all seven days of the week. And so there is necessary work that must be done on Sunday. There are works of mercy that we do on the Lord's day. But if you are working or studying on Sunday only to advance your career, to achieve your conception, your goal of what success is, to increase your income, if this is why you work on the Lord's day, that's exactly the kind of thing that the Lord is telling you not to do on the Lord's day. But you are to rest from that work. God has given us six days to work. He requires that we set apart one day, one day for Him.

A Day for Rest and Worship

He gives us six days. One is for the Lord, a day for us to rest from our work, devote ourselves to his worship and service. And so you keep the Lord's day holy by resting from your usual work, but also by worshipping the Lord on Sunday. Notice how the commandment says, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. And in Leviticus chapter 23, we read this, six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places. And so what the Lord requires of us in the fourth commandment is that we are to rest and worship. It is the Lord's day. Rest does not mean sleeping in, sitting on your couch all day, watching movies, but it's a day that's to be devoted to the worship of God. And obviously one, crucial way that you keep the fourth commandment, one way that God requires us to keep the fourth commandment is that we come to church for worship on the Lord's day. Hebrews 12.25 or Hebrews 10.25 says, let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another in all the more as you see the day approaching. Now I recognize that everybody's life situation is different. There are some life circumstances that may prevent you in some way from devoting the entire day to the worship of God on Sunday. But I do want to mention, of course you know this, but I want to remind you that here at Mount Rose, we do have an evening service on Sundays, at least on most Sundays. And if the Lord's day is truly the Lord's day, and not just the Lord's half day, then what better way to devote the whole day to Christ than to make evening worship a regular Sunday routine. And I've said this before and I'll say it again. You may be thinking to yourself, that's not practical. It's not possible for us, our family, to come every Sunday evening to worship God. Well, why don't you try to come once a month?

Or maybe once every two months. You might find that as you get into the routine, the habit, it becomes easier for you to do.

What Can I Do on the Sabbath?

Now let's go back to the question of what exactly can I do or can I not do on Sunday? Can I do this thing?

Can I do that thing? Well, the first thing to do before you try to answer those questions is this. Ask the Lord that he would fill your hearts with these truths from the scripture that we have already heard. The truth that the Lord's day is a gift to you, that it is for your good, that the

Lord's day is meant to be a delight. A day to set aside your work, to give your full attention to the God who loves you, the God who has saved you from sin and death, that God gives you one day in seven to worship Him, to grow in the grace and the knowledge of your Savior, the one who is the inexhaustible source of every joy and every blessing. And when the Lord puts you in that place where your heart is filled with a desire to worship Him, where you are rejoicing in Him, where you are in that place spiritually, where you desire to worship God, where you long to come to church, where you long to be blessed by the grace and favor of God, where you are looking forward to serving and worshiping God with His people, when you are in that place, then these specific questions tend to answer themselves. They kind of work themselves out. Because instead of trying to figure out what you can do on Sunday, or maybe it's more accurate to say what we can get away with on Sunday, what you are really trying to figure out is, how can I make the most of Sunday? I want to be worshiping God. I want to be at church. I want to be in the gracious presence of my God and Savior to find my joy and delight that He gives to those who genuinely seek Him. And so, when your heart is there, then these particular questions become much easier to answer. And another reason why we should want to keep the fourth commandment is because this is one way in which we bear witness to the world of the truth of the gospel. And I believe that as we, as the church, as we have forgotten the fourth commandment, as we have abandoned the fourth commandment, we have robbed ourselves of a wonderful means of testifying to the world of the truth of the gospel, the truth of God. The reason the unbelieving world has no interest in a day that is set apart to God is because those who do not know God, they seek their lives entirely in this world alone, naturally. This world is all they have. And so they seek their life in this world, in this life. And if your life is only in this world, if your life is only in this present age, then each and every day must be for you a never-ending pursuit, a restless pursuit, an anxious pursuit to somehow to seek and to find your happiness in this world, to somehow get as much out of this world, out of this life as you possibly can. And so there can be no rest from work. There can be no rest from seeking your own desires, your own pleasure. There can be no rest from recreation.

The Sabbath as a Witness to the World

For the unbeliever, the Sabbath is literally a waste of time. Because that's one day out of seven that he has taken out of the world when his life is in the world. But the Sabbath day then, for us who know Christ, it is our witness to the world. That there is a greater life than this world offers, that there is something better, far better, that we have life in the God who created us and who

has redeemed us in his son, that our life is not in this age, in this world, but our life is hidden with Jesus Christ above, that we are not of this world, but we are citizens of a heavenly country. And so we gladly devote one day of the week, not to pleasing ourselves, not to advancing our own interests, not to increasing our wealth, not to becoming more and more productive, not to squeezing everything we can out of this world, but one day in seven, we rest in, we worship, we enjoy the loving, the merciful God who does not give as the world gives, but gives us true life, abundant life, eternal life. And I believe that if the world saw that, if they saw the church devoting themselves in that way, to the Lord's day, at least some would say, I don't know what these Christians have, but I know I don't have it and I want it. And so I know the reason to keep the fourth commandment is that it is one way that we bear witness to the world of the truth of the gospel.

Let's let the Lord have the last word this morning. This is from Isaiah chapter 58, verses 13 through 14. If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, and from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy day of the Lord honorable, if you honor it not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly, then you shall take delight in the Lord. And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth. I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Let's pray.