

January 26, 2020

—The Gospel Changes Everything—

The Sabbath at Mt. Sinai

Exodus 19:1-20:21

The threefold use of the Sabbath

What is Sabbath? It means rest. We saw in our first message that Sabbath has a threefold use—a temporal use, a spiritual use and an eternal use. But in all three *the essence* of the Sabbath is the same. Why did God give us one day in seven to be our Sabbath (temporal use)? So that we could regularly *rest* in His presence. Why did God send us Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath (spiritual use)? So we as sinners could be at *rest* in His holy presence. Why did God promise us a Sabbath to come (eternal use)? So we could *rest* in His everlasting presence. That is the ultimate goal of humanity: to dwell in the presence of God. That is the essence of what Sabbath is—to rest and rejoice in the presence of God forever.

The poison that God does not love us

But what we saw last time, is that because of the fall of Adam and Eve we have swallowed the poison that God does not love us. That was the first lie of the devil: “If you obey God, you’ll never be happy. He doesn’t *really* love you. You have to take things into your own hands.” And we have been listening the devil ever since. And his most subtle lie today is that any talk of the Sabbath *at all* is legalism. To mention the word *means* your a legalist. Don’t get me wrong, there has been much legalism regarding the Sabbath. Out of all of God’s commandments, the Sabbath is the most tortured by legalism. But as I said last week, the Sabbath is not the problem, we are. We’ve swallowed the poison that God does not love us and therefore the Sabbath *to us* is the law of a harsh and restrictive father who mercilessly demands us to obey his rules. What is the cure for this poison? How can we see the Sabbath as a delight?

The Sabbath at Mt. Sinai

We must go to Mt. Sinai. The place where God forever encapsulated the Sabbath law in the Ten Commandments. Much to the devil's displeasure, it is not here that we find a distant god who is restrictive and harsh and unloving, but rather a loving Father, who, like any good physician, is carefully remove the poison of sin even if it cost Him everything.

The Big Idea...

God gives us the Sabbath Law so that He can show us the Savior's Love

- ☆The Covenant at Sinai
- ☆The Sabbath From Sinai
- ☆The Christ of Sinai

I. The Covenant at Sinai

Eden to Sinai?

How did we get from the Garden of Eden to Mt. Sinai? That question is vital in understanding the whole OT, and in fact the entire Bible. The fall of man leaves us asking "How do we get back into the presence of God?" How can sin be overcome? Not by us. Genesis 3 made abundantly clear. First, man is dead in sin. Meaning, he's dead when it comes to the righteousness he needs to enter God's presence, and he's dead when it comes to loving God. Like Adam, all men hide from God and blame Him for what's wrong in this world. As Paul said thousands of years later "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God" (**Romans 3:11**). So if we are to be saved, it

must come entirely from God. Dead men cannot resurrect themselves. “Salvation belongs to the LORD!” (**Jonah 2:9**).

A covenant-making God

So what does God do? He makes a new covenant. There are essentially only two covenants in Scripture. We already saw the first covenant last week, what theologians call the Covenant of Works. The Westminster Confession of Faith describes it this way in 7.2: “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” Adam broke that covenant for himself and for all of us. But God, instead of sentencing the entire human race to eternal death, made a second covenant called the Covenant of Grace.¹ We see the first glimpse of this in **Genesis 3:15** when He promises that this mysterious seed of the woman would one day come and crush the seed of the serpent. The whole OT is aimed at uncovering who this mysterious seed will be. Each successive covenant that God makes is *not* a different covenant but a renewing of the *one* covenant of grace. Each successive covenant is meant so shed more light on *who* this Seed of the Woman is.

The Figure in the darkness

Imagine a dark room. When God establishes this first covenant—that first promise in **Genesis 3:15**—God, as it were, lights a candle and illuminates part of the room. As time marches on, God makes successive covenants with Noah and

¹ “Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.” WCF 7.3

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Consequently we can find expressions of these two covenants all over Scripture described in various ways: as *two different trees*, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life (**Genesis 2:9**); as *two seeds*, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (**Genesis 3:15**); as *two Adams*, the first man of the old race and Jesus Christ of the new race (**1 Cor. 15:45**), as *two mountains*, Mount Sinai and the Mountain in Jerusalem, (**Gal. 4:21-31**); as *two laws*, the law of works or the law of faith (**Romans 3:27**).

Abraham and Moses and David and with each covenant He lights another candle, and consequently the room gets brighter. And you can start to see this Figure standing in the room. And then, when the fullness of time came, God tears the blinds off the windows and the blazing brightness of the noon day sun reveals who this Figure is: the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the seed of the woman. He is the ark that saved Noah and His family. He is the Isaac that Abraham went to sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. He is the true and better Moses who would deliver His people from their slavery to sin. He is true and better David who would reign on His throne for everlasting ages. Jesus is in the OT concealed, but in the NT revealed.

The covenant with Abraham

Adam and Eve couldn't see that. When they left the garden, all they knew was that it would be that one of *her seed* that would save them. But *that seed* would have to come from a specific family. Enter Abraham. God called him of Babylon and chose his family to be the one family on earth through whom this seed would come. That is why the OT is about Israel. Not because there is anything special about Israel considered by herself, but because God chose her to be the nation that would give birth to the Seed that would bring salvation. God told Abraham "...in your *offspring* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (**Genesis 22:18**). Paul made it clear in the NT that God meant this offspring to be Jesus. He says in **Galatians 3:16** "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ." God called Abraham—God gave birth to the nation of Israel—in order to bring about the God-man.

From Abraham to Moses

So then what happened after this covenant was made? Abraham beget Isaac, Isaac beget Jacob, Jacob beget twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph, one of those sons, was betrayed by his brothers and sold into

slavery. He ended up in Egypt, where through the power of God rose to second in command. Then famine hit the entire earth, and drove Jacob and his sons to Egypt for food where they were reunited with Joseph. Years later a Pharaoh rose who did not know Joseph and he enslaved the entire people of Israel. For over four hundred years they were slaves in Egypt. Then God raised up Moses to deliver His people. 10 plagues later, and with Egypt completely ruined, Israel makes their exodus.

At the foot of the mountain of God

In Exodus 14 God delivered Israel through the Red Sea, and drowned the Egyptians. Here in **Exodus 19**, we find Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai. So let's pick up in **v.1**.

On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and *brought you to myself*. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be *my treasured possession* among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a *kingdom of priests* and a *holy nation*.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

The love sick God

What's vital to see here is how much God delights in His people. Notice in **v.4** He rescued them, not merely to free them from slavery, but to bring them to Himself: "I bore you on eagles' wings and *brought you to myself*." He calls them "*my treasured possession*" in **v.5**. It wasn't because Israel was deserving of this

love. He tells them later “The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people of his treasured possession...not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart...but it is because the LORD loves you” (**Deuteronomy 7:6; 9:5; 7:8**). The Father’s love is free and gracious. It was not based on something in them. That is the quickest way to legalism. ‘God will love me *if I do this.*’ That’s a false gospel. God never begins to love. He doesn’t wait for us to love Him first. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us...” (**1 John 4:10**).

His sin sick people

But the vast majority of Israel *did not believe this*. She was poisoned by the serpent’s tonic. God rescued them from the slavery Egypt but vast majority of them had not been rescued from the slavery of sin. They constantly accused the LORD of not loving them.

Exodus 14:11 “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?”²

Exodus 16:3 “Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

Exodus 17:3 “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

That was in their heart. They acknowledged that God brought them out of Egypt, but they still believed the lie from Satan that God didn’t really love them. So look how they respond. Picking up in **v.7** “So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had

² Exodus 15:24 “And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?”

commanded him. All the people answered together and said, “*All that the Lord has spoken we will do.*” Now that looks like a good answer on the surface. But this is the answer of the legalist. They were perfectly fine with God giving them a new set of commands, *because*, now, they believed, they could obligate God to bless them. That’s what the spirit of legalism says: “God I’ll do my part and you do your part.” It’s the heart that thinks: “If I offer God obedience then I will convince Him that I am worthy to bless.” It is the attitude that motivated to offer God mercenary obedience: “I’ll offer you obedience *if* you pay me my reward.”³ That’s what was underneath their answer to obey. It was mercenary obedience. The heart that is poisoned with the thought that ‘*God doesn’t really love me*’ can only offer mercenary obedience. Israel didn’t yet understand the covenantal love of God.⁴

³ It’s the heart that thinks “I can offer certain things—my ethical goodness, my relative avoidance of deliberate sin, my faithfulness to the Bible and the church—that support Christ’s work and contribute to God’s goodwill toward me.” Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, (New York, NY.: Viking, 2015), pg. 49-50. He later says “Legalism stems from the belief that we will have to pry blessing out of God’s begrudging, unwilling fingers will all sorts of observances and performances” (*ibid*, pg. 54)

⁴ Dear congregation, do you understand this covenantal love of God? What kind of obedience do you offer God? If it’s a quid pro quo obedience “I’ll do this if you do that”; if it’s an obedience that believes you have to earn God’s favor; if it’s a mercenary obedience that demands payment, then you don’t *yet* see how much the Father loves you. You still have the poison of the serpent in your veins. Don’t you realize that, like Israel, you have already been delivered from slavery? But your deliverance is infinitely better! Your deliverance is not from the physical chains of Egypt but from the chains of sin and death and the devil. God has entered into an everlasting covenant with you. God doesn’t call you to obey Him in order to earn His favor, but rather because He has already given you His favor. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” (**Ephesians 1:3**). That is covenant love. You are God’s treasured possession. That’s not sappy sentimentalism. That’s inspired Scripture. “I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to myself...you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine...” (**v.4-5**). [NOTE: It is without doubt or controversy that we can apply these verse to ourselves—to the Church— because Peter applies it to us “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).]

That is our **first point**. Before God renewed the covenant with Israel: two things were crystal clear: **1)** God *loved* His people. **2)** His people *as a whole* did not believe it.

II. The Sabbath From Sinai

How to cure the poison

How should God deal with them? Remember two things are going on **1)** They didn't believe that God really loved them. **2)** They thought that they could earn His favor through their obedience—*“All that the Lord has spoken we will do.”* So how does God deal with them? He deals with them exactly the way the Jesus deals with the rich young ruler. Do you remember? He comes to Jesus and asks “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (**Matthew 19:16**). Jesus sees the man’s heart perfectly—sees that He is a proud man—so Jesus doesn’t start with the gospel, He starts with the law. “If you would enter life, keep the commandments” (**Matthew 19:17**). Now Jesus knew this was impossible. But the young man had not seen the depth of His own sin. So Jesus administered the law to show the man his heart.⁵

God deals with them after the manner of their heart

Now that is essentially how God is dealing with Israel. He’s dealing with them after the manner of their heart.⁶ If you don’t see this, you’ll miss the very heart of this passage. So look what God says after Moses reports back. **v.9** “And the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.” Then in **v.10-15** He tells Moses to have the people to prepare themselves for

⁵ This is the Evangelical Use of the Law (the 2nd Use)—law terrorizes us, shows us our guilt, and drives us to Christ.

⁶ The problem with reading the ten commandments all by themselves, is that you don’t see the self-righteousness of the Israelites on the front end, and their terror and crying out for salvation on the back end.

when He shows up on the third day. And He warns them that anyone who touches the mountain shall be put to death. Look what happens next in **v.16-17** “On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.”

God speaks from the fiery mountain

Then as the thunder is pounding and the lightning is flashing and the mountain is burning, God speaks.⁷ Look at **Exodus 20:1-2** “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.’” Two things you must remember here.

Not another Covenant of Works

First, God’s not giving another version of the Covenant of Works. In other words, He’s not providing another test like the one given to Adam in order to secure for themselves salvation.⁸ God already instituted the Covenant of Grace promising that it was the Seed of the woman—the Offspring of Abraham—that would bring them salvation. We should not think has now discovered a better way to save man than He had already planned.⁹ Ultimately what God is doing is lighting another candle in that dark room, in order to drive Israel to see their need for that mysterious Figure standing in the room.

⁷ This is really clear from the parallel passages in Deuteronomy 5:22 “These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he added no more.”

⁸ Certainly the Ten Commandments and the rest of Israel’s laws were conditions for staying in the promised land. That can’t be denied since God specifically points to their disobedience as the cause of their captivity. But this is different than saying the Ten Commandments belong to a re-published Covenant of Works. Certainly for unbelieving Israelites it acts as a Covenant of Works, I will not deny that. But for a redeemed saint, it is clearly one of the treasures of the Covenant of Grace. They are God’s loving Word for us to order our lives by.

⁹ “Neither, yet let an man suppose, that God now in the process of time had found out a better way for man’s salvation than He knew before.” Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, (Scotland, UK.,: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), pg. 84

The Moral Law

Secondly, the Ten Commandments belong to the Moral Law. They are not part of the ceremonial law—those rituals that instructed Israel how to worship. Nor are they part of the judicial law—those codes that instructed Israel how to judge civil matters. “It is...clear from the New Testament that [the] ceremonial, and [the judicial] law that belonged to Israel as a theocracy, terminated with the new covenant.”¹⁰ But the Moral Law—the Ten Commandments—reflect God’s unchanging character. They can never be changed. They stand *all by themselves* in the entire OT. God couldn’t have commanded different than these Ten Words. He could *not* have commanded us to worship other gods or to blaspheme Him or to commit adultery or kill or steal or lie, *because* He would be denying His very nature. And **2 Timothy 2:13** says “[God] cannot deny himself.”¹¹

The command in the midst of all the others

Now right in the middle of all these laws stands the fourth commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” Now we can divide this up into three parts 1) the explanation of the command; 2) the reason for the command and 3) the heart of the command.

¹⁰ Iain Murray, *Rest In God & A Calamity in Contemporary Christianity*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), pg. 13

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WCF 19.3 “Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the New Testament. [19.4] To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging under any now, further than the *general equity* thereof may require.”

¹¹ And “if the law is [based] on God’s [nature] and humans are made in God’s image, then the law *fits* our nature as well.” Dr. Art Lindsley gives an example: “if a person jumps from a plane, he may feel as free as a bird for a moment, but unless he has a parachute, the law of gravity will [kill him]...God’s law is like a manufacturer’s manual showing human beings how to act according to their nature. There are consequences to each action.” Source <https://tifwe.org/resource/moral-law-and-the-ten-commandments/> accessed September 13, 2017

1. The explanation of the command (v.8-10)

The command itself is simple. That we are to “*Remember* the Sabbath and keep it holy.” Notice “The commandment does not begin, ‘Know [that] there is a Sabbath day’, but ‘*Remember...*’”¹² This first word “*remember*” clearly demonstrates to that God is pointing to something already known.¹³ The Sabbath was instituted at creation which means it belongs to all of humanity not just Israel.¹⁴ v.11 emphasizes this by grounding the command in creation itself, but we’ll get to that shortly. The point is that the God is not giving something new. But He is re-educating Israel.¹⁵ For over 400 years they had been slaves being forced to go without the Sabbath.

So how were they were to treat the Sabbath? He says “keep it holy.” That word means “set apart.” In other words, “Remember the Sabbath and keep it *set apart*.” Set apart from what? All other days. Look how He explains this in v.9 “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” In other words, God has given us six to be occupied with our God-given callings in the world—these are good—but on the seventh day, He’s calling the world to stop from these and attend to Him.¹⁶ Look how comprehensive this is. v.10 “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.” Everyone in the family, all

¹² Iain Murray, *Rest In God & A Calamity in Contemporary Christianity*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), pg. 11

¹³ cf. Exodus 16:23

¹⁴ The rightness of keeping 1 day in 7 holy to the Lord didn’t start in the 4th commandment, just like the rightness of not murdering didn’t start in the 6th commandment (also see Murray pg. 13-15 for 5 reasons the Sabbath doesn’t belong to the ceremonial law). It is also noteworthy that the light of nature itself teaches us that is fitting to spend time with our God—cf. WCF 27.1.

¹⁵ Nehemiah 9:13-14 “You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant.”

¹⁶ Nicholas Bownd, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), pg. 39

servants, even animals are to rest. And He includes even the sojourner who is within your gates. Which is another evidence that the Sabbath doesn't belong to the ceremonial law because the sojourner—those outside of Israel—weren't required to keep the ceremonial laws.

2. The reason for the command (v.11)

The reason for the command is found in v.11 “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.” It's noteworthy to point out here that this is one of the best verses to show the universe was created in 6 - 24 hour days. Here you have the very grounding of the Sabbath command in the fact that God worked six days and then rested on the seventh day. It would torture the way that we interpret the Bible if we read this verse to say “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy...for in *six metaphorical days* God created the heavens and the earth.” We can't let the unbelieving world dictate how we interpret the Bible.

But what is significant, is that when the 4th commandment is repeated in Deuteronomy, the reason for keeping the Sabbath changes from creation to redemption. In **Deuteronomy 5:15**, after Moses gives the command to rest, instead of saying “*For* in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth,...and rested on the seventh day,” he says “[*For*] 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.” This change in Deuteronomy 5 foreshadowed that great redemption to come. Sabbath keeping was not only to recognize God as creator but God as Redeemer.

3. The heart of the command

But it's the heart of the Sabbath command that is the most vital part. It's clear that resting from our works is part of the command. But God never intended resting from our normal activity to be *the essence* of the command. Rest

is subordinate. Worship is ultimate.¹⁷ v.10 says “But the seventh day is a Sabbath *to the LORD your God*.” That’s the beating heart of the command—that we set apart one day in seven to delight in God, to give ourselves over to Him. That’s the chief end of our existence. That’s the plot line of the whole Bible—that humanity would truly know and love Him and to live with Him in everlasting happiness, all to His praise and glory.¹⁸ And He has given the world the Sabbath, so that nothing would hinder us from coming into His presence at least once a week.¹⁹ Calvin says it so eloquently: “When our shop windows are shut in on Sunday, when we travail not after the common order and fashion of men, *this is to the end* [that]we should have more liberty and leisure to attend on the which God commands, that is...[that we] be taught by His word, to assemble ourselves together to make confession of our faith [and] to call on His Name.”²⁰ God has given us the Sabbath because He takes pleasure in us. Remember what He said: “I bore you on eagles’ wings and *brought you to myself...you shall be my treasured possession*.”²¹ And He promises in **Isaiah 58:13-14** “If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth...”

God demands to be the all-consuming center

But that was *precisely* the problem with Israel. They didn’t delight in God. They didn’t want to be in His presence. They were offering mercenary

¹⁷ “...the weightiest thing in this commandment is that the day of rest should be bestowed upon God’s service...profanely do they dream, that though not all, yet the greatest part of obedience unto this commandment consists in abstaining from all worldly business.” Nicholas Bownd, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), pg. 296

¹⁸ Heidelberg Q.6

¹⁹ See Psalm 92 “A SONG FOR THE SABBATH”

²⁰ quoted in Nicholas Bownd, *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), pg. 296

²¹ Exodus 19:4-5

obedience. But the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath, forbids such obedience, rather they require God to be the passionate all-consuming center of our lives. If you look at the back of your notes in the bulletin, we included a summary showing what God requires in the Ten Commandments. What does God require? That we worship Him alone, in all truth, in all spirit, with all of our calendar, with all authorities, with all human life, with all our sexuality, with all our property, with all our speech and with all our desire. No commandment can be removed—including the Sabbath—without denying His Lordship. As Iain Murray once said “The law enlightens us to a universe in which God in His majesty is at the center.”²²

Merely knowing truths about God vs. knowing Him personally

You see, it’s now enough to simply know truths about God. Israel knew truths about God. In fact, they had the greatest theological training. They saw God defeat Egypt, the mightiest nation in the world. They experienced His miracles in the wilderness. They heard Moses speak the heavenly Word. They knew truths about God, but they didn’t know Him Personally. And they didn’t delight in Him. And now they were being confronted with God’s Ten Words that required everything of them.

Could this said about you? I know that you know God. Some of you have great knowledge about God. But do you delight in Him? That’s the vital question. Christianity is not about having all your theological doctrines perfectly in order. Doctrine is important. Doctrine is essential. You can’t be a Christian without doctrine. But doctrine is not the ultimate thing. Knowing Him, personally, intimately, is. Without delight in God, we are no better than the devils. They fear God, they tremble in His presence, but they don’t delight in Him. That’s how the Sabbath command exposes the raw nerves our hearts. Do I really delight in the undistracted presence of God? Is He worth one day in seven to us?

²² Iain Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), pg. 9

That's our **second point**. The Sabbath shows that God clearly wants to be with us. But sin so corrupted Israel and it has so corrupted us, that mercenary obedience is what we are all too ready to offer to Him

III. The Christ of Sinai

The people were afraid and trembled

Please look with me at what happens after God stops speaking. Starting in v.18

“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 far off ...”

Clearly the lightning and thunder communicated that the penalty for breaking any of the Ten—including the Sabbath command—meant death.²³ God doesn't compromise with His law. The wages of sin is death. Suddenly all their previous confidence in their own obedience vanished. So they cry out to Moses in desperation, v.19

“You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”

We need a Mediator!

What's going on here? They realized they could not approach God *on their own* so they cried out for Moses to be their Mediator. And this is *precisely* what God was aiming at! Remember I said that God was dealing with them after the manner of their own heart? They thought “we'll do our part and God will do His part and all will be well.” But they now realized they have never done their part. They now see that they have never obeyed at all. This is what every

²³ The Israelite man who thought his calendar belonged to him was stoned—Numbers 15:32-36

human being must come face to face with. You have never obeyed any part of God's law in a way that would obligate Him to bless you. Ever. On your best day, you have never put God in your debt. And this should make you afraid. Who in this universe can stand up to a such a holy God and live? You and I need a Mediator!

The true and better Moses

And it is just here where we see the glory of the gospel. Moses tells them in v.20 "Do not fear, for God has come to test you..." Do not fear? Why? Because God did send a Mediator. But it wasn't going to be this Moses. Listen to how he points them to the true and better Moses. **Deuteronomy 18:15-18**

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, *'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'* And the Lord said to me, "They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them..."

This prophet, this mediator is Jesus Himself. He said in **John 5:46** "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me."

The two givings of the Ten Commandments

And Jesus completely changed the way the Ten Commandments are given to God's people. The Law was given twice. Once here in Exodus 20, and again in Exodus 34. But oh the difference between the two.²⁴

²⁴ So much help here from John Bunyan's "Of the Law and a Christian"—John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 387-388

When God gave the law the first time, His terror so engulfed the mountain that all the people, including Moses trembled to the very shaking of their souls (**Exodus 19:16; Hebrews 12:21**).

But when God gave the law the second time, He said “I will make all my goodness pass before you...”(**Exodus 33:19**).

When God gave the law the first time, it came with thunder and lightning and thick darkness and fire and smoke and the tearing sound of the trumpet (**Exodus 19:16-18**).

But when God gave the law the second time, it came with the proclamation of His name “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (**Exodus 34:6-7**).

“Let me hide myself in Thee...”

What was the difference between these two givings of the Law? The first giving represents those who try to approach God without a Mediator. But the second are those who hide themselves in the cleft of the rock—Jesus Christ. That’s what God told Moses “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by...” (**Exodus 33:21-22**). That’s why we sing the song:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee
 Let the water and the blood, from Thy wounded side which flowed
 Be of sin the double cure, save from wrath and make me pure

Not the labors of my hands, can fulfill Thy law’s demands
 Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow
 All for sin could not atone, Thou must save, and Thou alone

Dear congregation, God has sheltered you from the wrath you deserve for not obeying all the demands of His law—including the Sabbath—by hiding you in His Son. Do not fear the threatenings of the law. Your Mediator, the true and better Moses, the Rock of Ages has already endured the fiery storm of God's wrath for you. Do not fear the law. The record of debt that stood against you with all its legal demands, God has set aside by nailing it to the cross (**Colossians 2:14**). Do not fear the law. Jesus was raised from the dead for your justification, which means when God looks at your record, He sees all the righteousness Sabbath keeping of His Son. Do not fear.

A call to the unconverted

But if you are here this morning, and you are not hiding in Jesus Christ—if you are not trusting Him for all righteousness—if you are depending on yourself, then just know this: If you want eternal life, if you want to escape the judgment, then you must keep all the commandments. But here's the crisis my friend: even if you were to keep all the commandments perfectly from here on, you still have all your past sins that condemn you. What will you do with those? But even if your past life was faultless, your own heart tells you that there is enough sin even in your best works now to condemn you. What will you do? Flee to Jesus Christ. Hide in the cleft of the rock from the storm. He promises that if you will come to Him, you will suffer no harm. The Savior is a friend of sinners. Jesus is a rescuer of rebels. He can take even the foulest and make them clean. That's the promise of Scripture that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Trust Him this morning.

Application

Are we required to keep the Sabbath in the exact same way as the OT saints? Clearly not. God-willing we'll see that starting next week. But what's vital in this message is for you to ask yourself: How do I think about God's Law—including the Sabbath? The Israelites didn't believe that God really loved them, which is why they acted the way they did. They offered God mercenary obedience. Is that what you offer God regarding His holy day? Beloved that is a miserable way to live. That is to come to the fiery mountain. But Hebrews tells us "You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm...But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant" (**Hebrews 12:18; 22; 24**). Don't you know what it means to have Jesus as your Mediator? It means He's responsible for you. It means that even though you are bound to God's law—that He requires your obedience to it; Jesus your Mediator is bound to God's law for all your disobedience to it. Everywhere you fail, He succeeds. And His obedience is counted for yours.

You see a right understanding of Exodus 20 doesn't encourage legalism, it destroys it. God didn't want legalistic obedience from Israel, and He doesn't want it from you. He first wants you to see that you could never obey what He requires. God has first given you the law to drive you out of yourself, and to see your need for Christ. That's what Exodus 20 does. It puts you in the cleft of the Rock. Then God gives the second reading of the Law where you can see God's goodness pass before your eyes. You can see that God really does love you. That He wants to be with you every Sabbath, to commune with you, to delight over you. That's who God is. He is merciful and gracious. He is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. He forgives iniquity and transgression and sin. And He wants to declare that you to every Sabbath day.