

February 9, 2020

—The Gospel Changes Everything—

The Sabbath and Christian Hedonism

Isaiah 58:13-14

The ultimate goal of creation

If you are new to us this morning, we are in the middle of a mini-series on the Sabbath or the Lord's Day. Our basic claim throughout this series is that the Sabbath is the chief end of man. "The ultimate goal of creation [is] for humanity to dwell with God."¹ That's sabbath.

The Sabbath in Redemption

Last week we saw that there were two fundamental changes that occurred to the Sabbath—the 4th commandment—when Jesus Christ accomplished His work of redemption. **First**, the ceremonial parts of the Sabbath law have all given way to Christ who is the substance. **Hebrews 10:9** "He [Christ] does away with the first [the ceremonial law—the shadow] in order to establish the second [the Substance—Christ Himself]." Which means the requirement to observe it from evening to evening; or the requirement to abstain from all servile work—"...to kindle a fire, prepare and cook food or walk and go on a journey;"² or the requirement to offer lambs and flour and wine for burnt offerings³ or to place the shewbread on the altar⁴ *and all the like* have all passed away with the entire ceremonial law when Jesus came. None of these were bad laws. None of them reflected the heart of a stingy harsh God. Rather all of them, as **Galatians**

¹ L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: InterVarsity Press, 2015), pg. 40

² Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Vol. 2*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 88

³ Numbers 28:9-10

⁴ Leviticus 24:7-8

3:24 says, served as "...our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."⁵ So we have been set free from all the shadowy parts of the ceremonial law regarding the Sabbath, because Christ—the Substance—our true Sabbath has come. However, the moral part of the Sabbath remains. That we ought to have one day each week where we rest from our ordinary callings *in order* to worship the Lord publicly and to work works of mercy remains our moral obligation as men and women redeemed by grace.

The **second** change that occurred to the Sabbath when Jesus came is that not only has it moved from the 7th day to the 1st day, but now it is called the Lord's Day. The greatest work that ever has been done, or ever will be done, or that could be conceived of being done was accomplished on this day: the Resurrection of Christ. This event has undisputedly controlled the calendar of the world for 2,000 years. No longer is the Sabbath *merely* a celebration of God's creating the world, but the Lord's Day is a celebration of God's bringing redemption into the world. That's what we saw last week.

The Sabbath and Christian Hedonism

This morning we are looking at the Sabbath and Christian Hedonism. Dear congregation, we have shared with you our plans to start a Sunday evening service. The main reason why I want this is not because Scripture commands us to do it. It doesn't. It's not because by doing it I think that we will become more justified in the sight of God. That's impossible. No, I want a Sunday evening service *because* I am Christian Hedonist. God is pleasure itself. He is the essence of it. I want a Sunday night service because I want to be as happy as I can be. And if you think that sounds carnal or fleshly, I would suggest it is because you have let Satan or the world steal something from you. Why did God make you? Is it not, as the Heidelberg catechism says that you would truly know and love Him and to live with Him in everlasting happiness,

⁵ The law's first function is to drive us outside of ourselves so that we might despair of our sin and the inadequacy of our good works to save us, *in order* that we would turn us to Jesus Christ.

all to His praise and glory?⁶ God made you for His glory and your joy. And those are two invincibly inseparable things. For God to be pursuing His own glory *is* the same thing as God pursuing your highest and best joy.

That is *the essence* of Christian Hedonism.

As John Piper has aptly put it “God is most glorified in us *when* we are most satisfied in Him.”⁷

The reward of this day

Now we can be Christian Hedonists seven days a week, but we especially get to experience this most deeply on the Lord’s day. And I would argue that if you neglect the Lord’s day for common pleasures, for ordinary things, then you cannot enjoy Him as He intended. God promises in our text that if you order your affairs to honor this day, then “you shall take delight in the LORD, and [He] will make you ride on the heights of the earth; [and that He] will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.” (**Isaiah 58:14**).

The Big Idea...

God promises the highest joy for those who honor Him on His day

☆ What Is Christian Hedonism?

☆ The Day of Christian Hedonism

☆ The God of Christian Hedonism

⁶ Heidelberg Q.6

⁷ Dear believer, do you want to bring maximal glory to Christ your Lord? Here’s how: find your greatest satisfaction in Him. Or I could say it the other way around: do you want to find the greatest satisfaction possible in this world? Then look to the glory of Christ.

I. What Is Christian Hedonism?

Satan's greatest lie

The greatest lie that Satan has smuggled into the church over the last 2,000 years is this: “God doesn’t want you to be happy, God wants you to be holy.” That sounds so pious. That sounds so admirable. That sounds so brave. But that is simply *not* Christian. God wants us to be happy as much as He wants us to be holy. In fact, happiness and holiness are *inseparable* in the Bible.

Please turn with me to **Psalm 16:11**. “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Fullness of joy! Pleasures forevermore—unending, overflowing, ever-increasing. What is the Psalmist communicating? Infinite happiness in the presence of God. But ask yourself, who will be in the presence of God? Only holy people—only those who have “...been *sanctified* through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (**Hebrews 10:10**). So again we see that happiness—this fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore—is perfectly joined together with holiness. So the first question we must ask is *why*? Why are happiness and holiness necessarily and invincibly joined together?

God is holy and happy

Because God is both infinitely holy and infinitely happy. **Revelations 4:8** says that in Heaven “...day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” As Evangelicals we are quick to admit that God is holy. But we are slow to admit that God is happy. But consider **Psalm 16:11** again. The Psalmist says “...in your presence there is fullness of joy...” No doubt the Psalmist is talking about the joy that believers will experience in God’s presence. However, what does this assume? That God is the source of this joy! We will rejoice in His presence, *because* He is the very essence of joy. How could He not be? He is, as the Larger Catechism says “... in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present,

almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”⁸ How could *that* God *not be* the happiest, most joyful, being that exists? That’s why Scripture refers to Him as the *blessed* God. **2 Corinthians 11:31** “The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is *blessed* forever...” Or we could say ‘he who is happy forever.’ That’s what blessed means. Blessedness is the convergence of every good.⁹ It is the highest and best good. It is perfect happiness. God’s happiness is perfect because it can never be lost since it is eternal. God’s happiness is perfect because it can never be increased since it is infinite. God’s happiness is perfect because it depends on *nothing* outside of Him.¹⁰ If all that existed was God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—He would still perfectly rejoice in the perfect enjoyment of Himself.

The origins of ‘Christian Hedonism’

I start there because if you don’t believe that God is happy, it will be impossible to believe that He can make you happy. So what is Christian Hedonism? Well the phrase was coined by John Piper from his book *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. I would say that book is probably the most impactful book I’ve read outside of the Bible. Even though the term Christian Hedonism is a fairly recent phenomenon, the idea behind it is not.

All men seek happiness

The first principle of Christian Hedonism is that all men seek happiness as their highest, best, and final goal in life. Blaise Pascal once wrote:

⁸ Larger Catechism Q.7

⁹ Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Faith in the Triune God, Vol. 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 488

¹⁰ Job 41:11 “Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.” And all human happiness is the result of this happy God overflowing and pouring out Himself on creation. Acts 14:17 “...he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by...satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.”¹¹

Jesus makes His most startling appeals to man’s innate desire for happiness. **Matthew 16:26** “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” Jesus is asking “what good is the whole world if you end up in utter misery in the end. Do you see? In making His appeal, Jesus is demonstrating that personal happiness is the deepest motive of a human being.¹² That’s the first principle of Christian Hedonism: happiness *just is* the deepest motive for everything we do.

God commands our happiness in Him

The second principle of Christian Hedonism is that God commands that we find all our happiness in Him. There is a myriad of verses in the Psalms that would demonstrate this, but just consider one. **Psalm 37:4** “Delight yourself in

¹¹ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 19. Also cf. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-want-you-to-be-a-christian-hedonist>

Or as Augustine said in the 4th century “For who wishes anything for any other reason than that he may become happy? There is no man who does not desire this...with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things.” [Randy Alcorn, *Happiness*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), pg. 5] Or the Dutch Theologian Petrus Van Mastricht said “...nothing is desirable apart from [happiness]...for why do people desire wealth, honors, pleasures, and so forth, except for the sake of [happiness]? And likewise, why do we turn away from and avoid every adversity, except that they impede and disturbed our [happiness].” [Mastricht, pg. 493-494] Likewise in Jonathan Edward’s *Freedom of the Will*, his basic premise is that the will always chooses it’s highest desire. Which is another way of saying, we always choose what we think will make us most happy.

¹² He’s saying You will lose all happiness if you reject Me. That’s why the Bible calls *the gospel* —the good news of happiness. **Isaiah 52:7** How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” God commands ‘Delight yourself *in Me.*’ He is jealous that you would find your delight and enjoyment and pleasure *in Him.* He is to be our happiness. That’s what He wants to be. The end of the verse says “...and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Meaning, that in God you will find everything that you could ever want. Why is it vital that we delight in the Lord? Because, as John Piper notes “God is not worshipped where He is not treasured and enjoyed...Not to enjoy God *is* to dishonor him. To say to Him that something else satisfies you more is the opposite of worship. It is sacrilege.”¹³ That’s the second principle of Christian Hedonism: God commands us to find our happiness in Him.

God’s glory and our joy is one end

The third principle of Christian Hedonism is that God’s pursuit of His glory *and* our insatiable desire for joy are not two separate ends, but are one and the same. It is clear that God’s main aim in all things is to display the greatness of His name. He fashioned the heavens to show off His glory (**Psalm 19:1**). He predestined us so that His grace would be glorified (**Ephesians 1:6**). He tells us to do good works so that others would give glory to the Father (**Matthew 5:16**). Jesus is one day going to return so that His glory would be marveled at by all believers (**2 Thessalonians 1:10**). Christian Hedonism says that we find our greatest joy in seeing and savoring that glory. Because that is what the Bible says: **Psalm 43:4** “Then I will go to the altar of God, *to God my exceeding joy,* and **I will praise you...O God, my God.**” **Psalm 34:8** “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!” In other words, revel in the glory of God’s goodness. Why? What will happen? The rest of the verse tells us: “Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” Did you hear? If you revel in God’s glory—tasting and seeing—then you will find all blessing, all happiness, all joy! That’s why the Puritans penned that first catechism question. “What is the chief end of man? Man’s

¹³ Piper, pg. 22

chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”¹⁴ That’s the third principle of Christian Hedonism: God’s pursuit of His glory and our pursuit for happiness is the same pursuit.

Garbage man or pastor?

I remember when this truth hit me for the first time. Ten years ago, we were reading *Desiring God* in our small group. And I was in the middle of being tested to be a pastor here at this church. I wanted to be a pastor. I felt called to be a pastor. And I anticipated disappointment if I didn’t make it. But then this truth hit me with the force of electricity. I was instantaneously filled with all joy regardless if I were to become a pastor or not. I realized that what God’s main goal in my life was to glorify Himself. And since He is all-wise and all-powerful nothing could frustrate His goal. Therefore whether I would be a garbage man or a pastor I would have the joy, because I discovered that God is my exceedingly great joy and nothing else. If He were to be glorified, then it would be impossible for me to not be satisfied. God’s glory *meant* my joy no matter what circumstances I would find myself in.

Summing up

That is our **first point**. What we saw is that Christian Hedonism has three basic principles to it. 1) All men seek happiness as their highest, best, and final goal in life. 2) God commands that we find all our happiness in Him. 3) God’s pursuit of His glory and our pursuit for happiness is the same pursuit.¹⁵

¹⁴ The way to glorify God *in your life* is to enjoy Him in all things. And the way to find happiness and joy *in your life* is to glorify Him in all things.

¹⁵ Christian Hedonism in History: Charles Spurgeon: “The chief end of man, we believe, in this life and in the next, is to please God his Maker. If any man pleases God, he does that which conduces most to his own temporal and eternal welfare. Man cannot please God without bringing to himself a great amount of happiness” (from his sermon “Faith” delivered December 14, 1856). George Whitefield: “Is it the end of religion to make men happy, and is it not every one’s privilege to be as happy as he can...Does [Jesus] want your heart only for the same end as the devil does, to make you miserable? No, he only want you to believe on him, that you might be saved. This, this, is all the dear Savior desires, to make you happy, that you may leave your sins, to sit down eternally with him.” (Alcorn, *Happiness*, pg. 6)

II. The Day of Christian Hedonism

The text

So now the question is, *how* does Christian Hedonism apply to the Sabbath? Let's look to our text in **Isaiah 58:13-14**. But first a couple of preliminary remarks. **First** these words were spoken to the God's people under the Old Covenant, which means the Sabbath command for them was still a mixture of ceremonial and moral law. Under the liberty of the gospel, we have been freed from all the ceremonial elements. **Secondly**, that doesn't mean that we can dismiss what is being said here. In these two verses we find the very heart of the Sabbath, namely, that we would delight in the Lord.

“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;
 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.”

Now this passage divides nicely into two parts 1) the requirement of the Sabbath and 2) the reward of the Sabbath.

1. The requirement of the Sabbath

Notice the the if/then statements. **v.13** “...*if* you turn back your foot from the Sabbath...” and then again at the end of the verse “...*if* you honor it...” And then we see what follows if these conditions are met **v.14** “...then you shall take delight in the Lord...” So what are the requirements? He gives three at the

end of v.13 1) You are not to go your own ways. 2) You are not to seek your own pleasure. 3) You are not to speak your own words.

The first thing I want to bring to your attention is that Isaiah is not addressing evil actions being done in this verse. He's talking about ordinary actions. We are always forbidden to do evil. That's obvious. Isaiah is saying something different. The actions he's referring to—considered in themselves—are *not sinful* on any other day of the week.

What the Puritans and the Continental Reformers had in common...

The question is what are these things he's talking about? Are these things just particular to the Old Covenant ceremonial laws *or* does it apply today? Well there are two main views that I want to bring to your attention within the Reformed Stream.¹⁶ The first is the view of the Puritans and the WCF. The second view is the view of the Continental Reformers—meaning those that originated from the European continent and not from the British Isles. What these two views have in common is that they both believed that the Lord's Day should be a day of rest from our ordinary callings so that we can be engaged in worship to the glory of God and in works of mercy and necessity. What they disagreed upon was whether recreation could be done on this day.

What the Puritans and the Continental Reformers disagreed on...

The Puritans¹⁷ believed that recreation that was perfectly fine on other days should be abstained from the Lord's Day. So things like "...going to picnics, playing badminton, swimming, or any of the recreational activities that are commonplace on the Sabbath day in our culture..."¹⁸ would be forbidden.

¹⁶ Though I recognize there are other Reformed-ish streams that hold different views, these would be the ones that have primarily adopted the WCF. See my chart on "Views of the Sabbath in Reformed Theology" —adapted from John Frame's "The Doctrine of the Christian Life" Ch. 28 in my "Christ in the Commandments" class, on the 4th commandment.

¹⁷ You can see this in Matthew Henry's Commentary and Thomas Watson's book on the Ten Commandments and the WCF 21.8 and the L.C. Q.117, Q.119, S.C. Q.60, Q.61

¹⁸ R.C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust, 2019), pg. 487

The Continental Reformers¹⁹ on the other hand believed differently. They believed that there was liberty for restful recreation. “The whole idea of recreation was that the body was re-created by having rest and fellowship on the Sabbath day.”²⁰ R.C. Sproul tells the story of when these two views collided. He said: “...imagine the consternation of John Knox, who was expelled from England during the reign of Bloody Mary and first sought refuge in Germany and finally went to Calvin’s Geneva. Know was shocked when he arrived in Geneva and found Calvin, with his family, lawn bowling on the Sabbath day. Calvin took the Continental view, while Knox took the Puritan view.”²¹

Two reasons I disagree with the Puritans

The reason for the two differing views is because of this very text that we are looking at. The Puritans believed that the word “*pleasure*” that Isaiah mentions twice in **v.13** refers to *any kind* of recreation “because recreation is an indulgence in pleasure.”²² Now this is one of those rare times that I disagree with the Puritans. For two main reasons: **First**, because the rule for interpretation is that the Scripture must interpret Scripture. The places that are less clear in Scripture must always be interpreted by those places that are clear. If Isaiah is forbidding innocent recreation (so long as it doesn’t interfere with the worship of God²³), then it would seem to me that there should be other places in the Bible where God forbids the same thing. But from what I can gather this is

¹⁹ This would include John Calvin, Francis Turretin and others.

²⁰ *ibid*, pg. 487-488

²¹ *ibid*, pg. 488

²² *ibid*

²³ “The sabbath (as Christ testifies in Mark 2:27) was made for man and not man for sabbath. Therefore we do not think that in this cessation believers are bound to Judaical precision which some (more scrupulous than is just) maintain was not revoked, so that it is [not] lawful to... refresh themselves with innocent relaxation of the mind and body, provided they are done out of the hours appointed for divine worship, nor to have any diversion, however slight, to any things belonging to the advantages or emoluments of this life.” Turretin, pg. 98

not the case.²⁴ It is very clear in several places that when God rebukes the Israel for breaking the Sabbath, it is because they refuse to stop working. That's the case in **Nehemiah 13:15-18** when Nehemiah confronted the nobles for allowing the city to sell goods and trade and do commerce on the Sabbath. And that's the case in Amos 8:4-5 where the people weren't actually doing commerce on the Sabbath but their hearts pined for it. They complained in their hearts 'When will ...the Sabbath [be over], that we may offer wheat for sale?...' So that's the first reason I don't think "pleasure" in Isaiah means innocent recreation because I don't find other places in Scripture where the same thing is condemned.

The **second** reason I don't think Isaiah is forbidding innocent recreation is because the 4th commandment itself doesn't *explicitly* condemn it. The requirement is that we would rest from our work *so that* the day would be set apart in worship to the Lord. I don't see where the command forbids us to refresh ourselves with innocent recreation provided it doesn't interfere with public worship.

The pleasure Isaiah forbids

Therefore I believe that the *pleasure* that Isaiah forbids is the pleasure of continuing in our business and in our commerce and in our ordinary callings *as if* the Lord's Day was no different than the other 6 days of the week. R.C. says here "The Israelites knew God's law, but they were violating it commercially. They didn't want to lose their profits by closing their business on the seventh day...Their 'pleasure' was what pleased them: to continue doing business on the Sabbath day."²⁵

²⁴ See "Passages having reference to the exposition of the fourth commandment" and "Supplements to the fourth commandment" in John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. II* (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 440ff

²⁵ Sproul, pg. 489

The work under the work²⁶

Dear congregation, this is where we the Sabbath is such a valuable test of where our heart is at. What would prevent you from stopping one day a week from our work, in order to rest our bodies, and worship God?²⁷ Is it because you have bought the culture's lie of materialism—that more stuff will make you happy—so you have to work all the time in order to keep up the lifestyle? Or maybe it's not money for you, perhaps you feel you need to prove yourself in the workplace in order to gain a sense of worth and identity.²⁸ Beloved don't you realize that God gave us the Sabbath to remind us that we have been set free from such slavery? As Tim Keller has said "Anyone who cannot obey God's command to observe the Sabbath is a slave, even if a self-imposed one. Your own heart, or our materialistic culture, or an exploitative organization, or all of the above, will be abusing you if you don't have the ability to be disciplined in your practice of the Sabbath. Sabbath is therefore a declaration of our freedom. It means you are not a slave..."²⁹

2. The rewards of the Sabbath

So let's look at the rewards that God holds for those who keep the Sabbath. There are three of them in v.14.

You will delight in the Lord!

The first reward God holds out, is that if you keep the Sabbath "...then you shall take delight in the Lord." Notice that this is not an imperative it's an indicative. Meaning this place is *not* a commanding us delight in the Lord. It's telling us that we will find our delight in the Lord *if we keep the Sabbath*. This is an absolutely vital principle that so many Christians don't see. Many who are

²⁶ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work With God's Work*, (New York, NY.: Penguin Group, 2012), pg.226

²⁷ I'm not talking about not doing works of mercy and works of necessity.

²⁸ Keller, pg 234

²⁹ Keller, pg. 236

truly born again—who possess an inheritance in Heaven that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading—*simply don't enjoy it*. They are starving. “They feel [a] spiritual hunger and thirst.”³⁰ Why?

Because in order to truly delight in something *you must not only possess it, but you must come into the enjoyment of it.*³¹

Think of the man who is away in a foreign land, away from his wife. Though he possesses her, and she him, they are unable to enjoy each other. Or consider coming into the possession of a treasure chest—yet you don't have the key—you possess it but cannot enjoy it. Or think of the fact that you possess your body, but if your health is poor, you are unable to enjoy your body.

Many Christians truly possess the Lord Jesus Christ, but they don't enjoy Him *because* they don't Sabbath. The promise is so clear here. If you keep the Sabbath, *then* you will delight in the LORD. Why? Because the Sabbath is the day God has given you in order to draw near to Him. As the Psalmist says “... the nearness of God *is my good*” (Psalm 73:28). Or as James says “Draw near to God, and *he will draw near to you.*” (James 4:8). Your enjoyment of God just is dependent upon your drawing near to Him on the Lord's Day. He promises that in giving Him this day you will find delight and joy and happiness.

You will have victory!

Isaiah continues with the second reward in v.14 “...and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth...” This promise was first mentioned in **Deuteronomy 32:13** where Moses told Israel that *when* they entered the promised land, God would give them victory over their enemies. In other words, to ride on the heights of the earth is a picture of complete triumph over ever enemy. Don't you see? God has given us the Sabbath in order to give us

³⁰ Walter Chantry, *Call The Sabbath A Delight*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2017), pg. 35

³¹ Van Mastricht, pg. 488

complete assurance that just as God gave Israel victory over all of her enemies in Canaan, so He has given us complete victory over all our enemies— “over sin, death, hell, the devil, the world and the flesh.”³² That through Christ “...we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (**Romans 8:37**). But if you don't Sabbath, you will not experience this victory. You will forget. You possess it but you will not enjoy it.

You will feast on all your heart desires!

The last reward God promises is that of a feast for your soul. He concludes “I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” What is this heritage of Jacob that God feeds us? Well a heritage is simply an inheritance. What was Jacob's inheritance? You have to look past the physical. Yes it's true that Jacob (or Israel as God named him) inherited the promised land. That to Israel belongs, as **Romans 9:5** says “...the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.” But ask yourself what was the *ultimate* heritage of Jacob? That God would be His God and He would be His people. That promise is what God feeds us every Sabbath. Every Sabbath, the Lord declares “I am your God and you are My people.” That promise contains everything that your heart could ever want. What greater happiness could you desire? That you are a people for God's own possession!³³ But you will not feed on that promise, you will not be nourished by it or strengthened by it if you don't Sabbath.

Experimental enjoyment

Dear congregation, to possess God and to enjoy Him are two separate things. Are you satisfied with *merely* possessing Him? How could you be satisfied with *merely* possessing a child if you never got to enjoy her? God is holding out the highest pleasure conceivable to us on this day? Will we take Him up on His offer?

³² Chantry, pg. 33

³³ 1 Peter 2:9

III. The God of Christian Hedonism

The battle of pleasure

Sabbath keeping is a battle over pleasure. That's very clear from our passage. God is saying '*if* you lay down these pleasures *then* I will freely give you this greater pleasure.' What prevents us from keeping the Sabbath is that other pleasures become more powerful, more controlling, more ultimate than the Lord. We just will always choose what our hearts think will make us most happy. The difficulty is that sometimes we are blind to those pleasures because they have gone so deep, that they are unquestioned. For instance, in American culture *the pleasure of the self*—individualism—is so deeply entrenched in our culture, that we don't even think twice about how we've individualized the Christian Church. Singing is about *my pleasure, my individual expression and preferences*—I'm not singing for the sake of the suffering saint next to me. The Lord's Supper is about *my private experience with God*—I'm not even mindful about whether I'm in true unity with my brothers and sisters next to me. Why is the American church blind to those things? Because the pleasure of self—individualism—is so deep that we are blind to it. It's simply an unquestioned given.³⁴

Counterfeit pleasures

So how do we locate our true pleasures? The Sabbath locates them every week. If you are the kind of person that thinks "I've had a really busy week and I've made it the last three Lord's Days in a row, so I can take this week off." "Are you sick? Are you not feeling well?" "No I'm fine...I just need a break." What is the person saying about how they view the Lord's Day? **First** of all, that Sabbath is a burden, they characterized missing it as *taking the week off*. **Second**, they believe there are better pleasures that will refresh them, because

³⁴ It's like the story of the two young fish. They are swimming along and an older fish meets them and asks "How's the water boys?" Very puzzled, they ask "what's water?" They never knew anything other than water. It was their cultural atmosphere as it were.

they believe *they need a break*, in other words, they need real refreshment, not what the Sabbath can offer them. Sleep and rest have become god, and they have decided to Sabbath to them instead of the Lord.

Or perhaps you're the kind of person who thinks "I just need to spend time with my family today. So I'll skip church today." This is especially indicative of our culture. Idaho has made an idol out of the family, it is the center of all life. Perhaps it's from the Mormon influence, I don't know. But it has become a sacrament of our culture. So skipping church in order to partake in family life is an acceptable and even noble endeavor in our culture. But what does this attitude reveal? That family has become the ultimate pleasure, and Sabbathing to them is more important than Sabbathing to the Lord.

There's many reasons that we could give for why we avoid the Lord's Day, but whatever reason we have, they always reveal a deeper pleasure—something that we think will make us more happy. I'm not talking about those times when we are Providentially prevented from coming. I'm talking about the times when we are perfectly able to come and we don't. In every case, it is because a superior pleasure has taken hold.

The God of all pleasure

That's why our passage is so relevant today, because what the LORD is urging us to see, is that there is no superior pleasure to Him. God is the fountainhead and source and wellspring of all pleasure.

Dear congregation, **consider** this holy and happy God who has existed from everlasting to everlasting. He had no need of you. Especially since you were born in the misery of sin. And yet He offered *all* His pleasures to you. He has given you a peace that passes all understanding (**Phil. 4:7**). He has adopted you into His family so that you can call Him "Abba Father" (**Rom. 8:15**). He has loved you with a love that surpasses all knowledge, and He offers to do for you far more abundantly than all you can ask or think (**Eph. 4:19-20**). He has given you His Holy Spirit—your constant comforter who will be with you all the days of your life (**John 14:16**). He has given you everlasting life, and has sworn an

oath that you will never perish and no one will be able to snatch you out of His hand (**John 10:28-29**). No one else in the universe can offer you *these* pleasures save God alone.

But further **consider** that this infinitely happy God has freely given you all these pleasures, *not* for a price. These things do not require a repayment from you. What could you possibly give in order to pay God for these unspeakable pleasures? No, beloved, God has given all these things to you because He has already received a payment. “Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation [the ultimate payment] for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 **John 2:1-2**). All the pleasures of this world cost you something. You have to pay for them and every single one of them is fleeting. But the pleasures that God has given you cost you nothing. Jesus paid for all of them, and you can never lose any of them. “For God has done what the law...could not do. By sending his own Son...he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us” (**Romans 8:3-4**).

Consider further that God has given us a greater happiness than if Adam and Eve had never fallen. Yes they experienced happiness of a sinless fellowship with God. But we have been given the infinitely greater advantage of a Mediator who put on flesh and dwelt among us. They experienced God from afar, but we have come into union with Christ *Himself*. So much so that Jesus was able to pray those unspeakable words to the Father “The glory that you have given me I have given them...so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (**John 17:22-23**).

The God who sings over us

Dear congregation, can you not see that the Sabbath convinces us of the most unbelievable thing—that God actually wants to spend time with us. And He has proven it by giving us everything, including His own Son. He doesn’t just love you, He delights in you. **Zephaniah 3:17** “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness;

he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” That’s what God delights do over us every Sabbath. To remind us with the music of Heaven, that He is our God and we are His people.

Will you be raised?

If you are here this morning and God has not become your God, then just realize what this day represents. This is the Lord’s Day. It is the day when Jesus Christ the Son of God rose from the dead. He is the only one in the history of all the world that rose from the dead by His own power. Every Lord’s day we celebrate His resurrection from the dead, because His resurrection means that everyone who places their trust in Him alone will also be raised from the dead. Jesus said “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (**John 11:25**). Do you want to live and never die? Then glorify the Son by trusting Him alone. Come to Him with all your sins, ask Him to wash you and cleanse you of all your sins. God cannot accept you the way that you are. But Jesus has promised that if you trust Him alone that He will make you as white as snow. “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (**1 Timothy 1:15**).

Application

Why do we want to launch a Sunday Night Service?

Not because the Scripture requires us to. But rather for two reasons.

1. Because of the witness of history.

If you just consider the history of the church regarding Sunday morning and Evening services, what you’ll find is that many of those ministries that have most blessed the church over the last century have had morning and evening

services: Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Piper, John MacArthur, Mark Dever, Alister Begg, etc. all had morning and evening services. If you look at the larger history of the church you'll find the same thing to be true. In fact during the Reformation in Geneva, it wasn't just morning and evening services that John Calvin had at his church, but there were multiple services throughout the week? People were flocking to come to these services. Why. Because they had tasted a superior pleasure. Is there a connection between having more than just one service a week *and* all these ministries that have been such a blessing. Yes I believe so. Jesus said in **Matthew 13:12** "For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance..." In other words, in the Christian life, the more we drink of Jesus, the greater blessing we receive not only for ourselves but for others. Having a morning and an evening service is 52 more opportunities to hear the Word of Christ, 52 more times to pray with the saints, 52 more times to sing the songs of Heaven. What do you think that does to a people? What do you think that does to a soul? This is why I've said that reformation in this area can lead to Revival.

2. Because we are Christian Hedonists

The second reason why we want to launch a Sunday night service is because we are Christian Hedonists. We don't want to *merely* possess the Lord, we want to enjoy Him. We believe that God is telling us the truth when He said that He will feed us the very heritage of Jacob on this day—that we would come to a deeper and deeper realization that He is our God and we are His people. We believe the God is telling us the truth when He says that He visits His people in a special way on this day unlike any other day (**Psalm 87:2**). We believe that if we delight ourselves in the LORD, He will give us all the desires of our heart, namely, more of Him. We believe that a day in the courts of the LORD is better than thousands elsewhere.