

"Living the Word: Remember the Day of Worship"

"What are we celebrating on the 4th of July?" That was the question media analyst, Mark Dice, asked beachgoers in San Diego on July 1st of this year. You would think this is an easy question to answer, right? It's our nation's most celebrated holiday! But the answers that Mr. Dice recorded proved that even though most people said they were going to be celebrating on the 4th of July, many of them weren't exactly sure what it was they were going to be celebrating. In one example, he asked a lady on the pier, "What are we celebrating on the 4th of July?" "Our independence," she said. "It's the day we overtook the South." "No, that's the civil war," Mr. Dice responded.

In a strange way, this answer and the many others this guy heard that were wrong reminded me of our Christian faith and the Third Commandment, which is our focus today as we continue our sermon series on applying the 10 Commandments in the everyday life of our Christian homes.

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." What should this commandment mean in our Christian lives today? What does this commandment mean in our homes? I'll bet if I ask 10 of you what this commandment means and what God expects from us, I might get 10 different answers. Now of course, I have faith that none of your answers would be completely wrong. But I would guess that they would be all over the place. Why? Because the wording of this commandment is not that easy to understand much less apply in our lives. "Do not murder," we get. But remember the Sabbath, which in the Old Testament began at sundown on Friday night and lasted all the way through the next day at sundown, we as those saved by grace through our faith in Jesus Christ, struggle to understand what to do with this. I mean if we Christians are to be observing the Sabbath beginning at sundown on Friday and keeping it holy, I think we're all in trouble. Friday night is party time, right? It's football games, concerts, movies, and going out to dinner. It's the end of the work week for a lot of us. It's a time to relax and get some stuff done. And this "time off" extends to Saturday as well. So, in this context, we've all failed to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy!

So then maybe it means that we should all just rest on a certain day. The word Sabbath literally means to rest; to cease from work. We know from the creation story in Genesis that, "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, and on that day he rested from all his work that he had done in creation" (Gen. 2:3). That sounds pretty good until we read in Numbers Chapter 15 the story of the man who was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath. The Lord ordered Moses to have the congregation stone that man to death because he broke the law of not resting (Num. 15: 32-36). This is serious stuff! The wages of this man's sin was death... literally!

So, what are we Christians supposed to do with this commandment? We can't just ignore it. As Pastor Wagner reminded us last week, it's not a suggestion; it's a Commandment from God. Well, before I try and help answer that question, let me tell what the commandment doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that for Christians, the traditional Sabbath day has been moved to Sunday. Nope. Believe it or not, there is no divinely appointed day of rest in the New Testament. Everyone can breathe a sigh of relief. We are not condemned to death like the man in Numbers chapter 15 for working. Sunday naturally evolved as the day believers in Jesus assembled because it was the day of his resurrection! And by the end of the first century, Sunday for Christians was referred to as the Lord's Day but not the Sabbath Day.

Confused yet? So far we have a commandment that appears to be specifically directed at God's Old Testament people. We also have a commandment that kind of sounds like we should rest on a certain day. We have a day for Christians that has emerged as the Lord's Day but that day is not even on the same day as the Old Testament Sabbath yet, we are to keep this day holy in our homes no matter if we are married, single, have 7 kids or no kids because it is what God tells us to do. See what I mean about the interview on the beach reminding me of this commandment? The answers seem to be all over the place.

Well, let's get this straight shall we? We do have the answer concerning this commandment and that answer begins with Jesus Christ.

When talking about the third commandment, we must always remember that it is our Lord Jesus Christ who fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies. He is the one who kept all the laws. I'm not talking about the ceremonial laws like not bathing or not doing any work on the Sabbath- Jesus was and continues to be the fulfillment of all of those laws- we're all good there. I'm talking about the moral laws, in which God expects from all of us no matter who we are, perfection. God sent his Son to be our perfection and

then allowed his perfect life to end in a painful and tragic way. Perfection turned ugly as Jesus bore our sins on the cross until he died. But God didn't allow him to stay in the grave. He accepted this final sacrifice for the forgiveness of every single sin and proved it by raising Christ from the grave on Easter morning. Now through our faith in the risen Christ, God sees the perfect Christ in all of us! There are no more sacrifices in the temple for sins; there are no more laws that prohibit us from picking up sticks or eating certain foods, or bathing on certain days. How amazing is this? God, in Christ did the work that none of us could ever do.

So regarding the Third Commandment what now is God's expectation from us? Well, first of all he expects all of this to actually mean something in our lives and in our families. Not just a little something like a passing afterthought but enough of a something that we intentionally set aside a day to focus on this amazing story of salvation found only in God's Word. Because now, the focus is all on Christ and what he has done for us.

Listen to his own words once again from Matthew's Gospel. Jesus says "he is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt.12:8). That's what he said to the Pharisees questioning the actions of his disciples picking and eating grain in the fields on the Sabbath and that's what he is saying to you and me. The ceremonial laws are over for us. Now, it's God's expectation that we regularly gather together to celebrate the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ to receive his forgiveness. And God expects us to view this time of worship not as a burden or an inconvenience but as a place where he comes to us and gives us his blessings, which is better than anything we can do for ourselves. In fact, worship is the place where we actually find true rest. We aren't pursuing anything; we are only being pursued by our Father who wants us only to receive His gifts through his word and sacraments. This is how we keep this commandment holy- we remember the day of worship.

And remembering the day of worship means that we are consistent with this because we truly believe, as the author Michael Horton writes, that "God was not just the savior once upon a time but that he is here in this place each time we gather and he delivers Christ and all his benefits to us week after week." <sup>1</sup> But we have to be here or in another church that believes, teaches, and confesses Christ to get those benefits! Living the Word and applying this commandment in our homes means that we intentionally make time for worship! It means we don't allow the kid's sporting events to overtake our weekends. It means we don't just show up when everyone feels like it as if we are the

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), pg.196.

judge of how much Jesus we apparently need. Yes, there are legitimate reasons for not attending worship. Things come up but God's commandments aren't just for those times our schedules are free.

But wait..there's more. Remembering the day of worship and showing up is one thing but actually participating is another. I know the service, at times, seems routine and your mind might drift in and out between what's for lunch and all the stuff you have to do when you get home. But one of the great things about being in worship, especially a Lutheran service, is that so much of it is based on the Word of God. We don't just make all this stuff up. Even if you get nothing from the sermon, there are numerous opportunities for God's Word to work in you. The readings of the day, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the words of the songs and hymns, the Words of Institution, the Benediction, and of course the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper are just a few of those places where God comes to us. I encourage you to actually try and shut out all of the distractions we all have for the hour or so and really concentrate on what our loving God is saying to us and most importantly giving to us through his Word and Sacraments. Isn't his eternal gift of life to sinners like you and me worth remembering and celebrating each week? That's the way God sees it. What about you and your family?

I leave you with this quote from theologian Michael Horton. I think he nails what it means to follow God's Third Commandment. He writes that,"Christian worship is where everyone gets what is needed. God is served by Christ's perfect salvation. We are served by his gospel and our neighbor is served by our witness and love when we walk outside those doors."<sup>2</sup> That my friends sounds like what remembering the day of worship is all about. Everyone gets what is needed. May God grant it so. **Amen.**

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), pg.199.