

## The Ten Promises: *Rhythm of Wholeness*

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Nov. 8, 2020  
(Based on Rev. Darrell Johnson's sermon series *The Manufacturer's Specifications*)

We're continuing our *Ten Promises* series, based on Rev. Darrell Johnson's book of sermons titled *The Manufacturer's Specifications*. The crucial line of the Ten Commandments is **not** a commandment. The crucial line is the opening sentence. Lose touch with this great affirmation and we miss the whole point of the commandments. Lose touch with this declaration and the good Law, becomes a crushing burden. The Ten Commandments begin not with a commandment but with a declaration, an affirmation: **"I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"** (Exodus 20:2).

**"I am Yahweh."** *I, the Lawgiver, am the God who has a name. My names means "I am the One who is there with you and for you."*

**"I am Yahweh your God."** The phrase, **"your God,"** is the language of covenant - the language of covenant relationship. **"Your God."** The point being, the Lawgiver establishes a relationship with us before speaking the commandments. Which means that keeping the Law is not the basis of the relationship. Keeping the Law is the way we enter into deeper relationship and intimacy with Yahweh, as we will see today. But keeping the Law is not the basis of the relationship. **"I am your God..."** before you hear what I am commanding you to do.

**“I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the house of slavery.”** The Lawgiver is the Liberator. The God who speaks the Law is the God who comes to set us free. The God who speaks the Law sees our situation, hears our cry for release, feels our suffering, and comes down to set us free. Free from and free for: from oppression and addiction, for relationship and wholeness. The God whose name is Yahweh took the Hebrew slaves from captivity in Egypt, in order to bring them into relationship with Himself and with each other.

Why then the commandments? Why the Law? To protect and enhance that freedom! To protect and enhance the full enjoyment of that freedom! Yahweh speaks the Ten Commandments to guard and nurture a new quality of life for which He has set us free. Unless we get this, unless we embrace this fact about the Law, we probably will not do what it takes to obey the commandments.

In the fourth commandment, Yahweh sets us free from one of the biggest obstacles to intimacy: “rat-race-ness.” In the fourth commandment, our Maker and Jealous Lover sets us free from the “rat-race” for the “human-race.” *The fourth commandment frees us from becoming “human doings” instead of being “human beings.”*

Now, according to the prophets, especially the three major ones, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, there is no clearer indication that we are actually living in the new freedom than when we obey the fourth commandment. Or to put it

differently, there is no clearer indication that we are obeying the first commandment, **“You shall have no other gods before Me,”** than that we obey the fourth commandment, **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”** And according to the prophets, especially Isaiah, keeping the fourth commandment is one of the best ways to move toward keeping the first commandment (See Isaiah 30:15-18; 58:13-14).

Why? Because one of the clearest indications of what we value is how we spend our time. We all have the same amount of time allocated to us: sixty minutes in an hour, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. How we spend our time reveals our true allegiances. **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of Yahweh your God”** (Exodus 20:8-10a).

Sabbath keepers are increasingly rare in our time. But, as rare as they are, you can spot them pretty quickly. They stand out from the rat-race; they stand out in the midst of all of the hype and anxiety and frantic weariness.

Why? As is the case in each of the Ten Commandments, in the fourth commandment the Lawgiver, who is our Maker, lets us in on who we are as human beings. Here we have another form of “The Manufacturer’s Specifications.” The fourth commandment is not an imposition on the human species, it is an exposition of how we were made and who we were called to be.

The fourth commandment tells us two things about ourselves:

1) First, the Living God has built into us a particular rhythm of time. It is the so-called “Sabbatical rhythm”: six plus one. Six plus one is built into the very fabric of our bodies, into the very fabric of our souls. Six days of work: not three, not five, but six. We were made to be creative and productive. And made for one day of rest: not two, not four, but one.

Six plus one (six days of work, one day of rest) is the “bio-rhythm” of the human species. We were not created to handle pressure, tension, and stress every day, day in and day out. We will burn out. Nor were we created for constant leisure. We will “bore-out.” We are “sabbatical creatures,” creatures who work, and work hard; but who must stop every seventh day to rest, reflect and worship. To violate this rhythm is to violate our essential nature; it is to do violence to God’s good creation.

Notice, by the way, how much of life is governed by the “sabbatical rhythm of time.” Not only do we human beings need sabbatical rest, the animals need it also. Later on in Exodus we read: **“Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor in order that your ox and your donkey may rest...”** (Exodus 23:12). Even the land needs rest. Every seventh year Israel was to let the fields lie fallow (Exodus 23:10).

God has built into the whole universe the six plus one rhythm. The fourth commandment simply calls us to *“Get with the program.” “Obey the rhythm.” “Obey the Manufacturer’s Specification that says of us, ‘Runs Best on 6 + 1.’”*

2) Second, we learn in the fourth commandment that our ultimate worth as human beings is not found in our work, however worthy our work might be. Our ultimate worth is found in a Person, in relationship with the Living God. Our significance is found in a relationship with the Living God revealed to us in Jesus. So, in order to keep us from ruining our lives by idolizing our work, the Living God calls us to stop every seventh day. God commands us to stop and for one day to shift the focus off of ourselves and our work, onto Yahweh and His work; without which work, our work does not happen (see Psalm 92:4).

It is crucial that we notice how the commandment is structured. The emphasis of the fourth commandment is not, “You shall not work on the Sabbath.” The emphasis is on, **“You shall remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”** Not working on the Sabbath day is the means to a greater end - keeping the day holy. “Holy.” “Holy” is what God is. “Holy” is God’s essential nature. “Holy” means “separate from,” “other than,” “unique,” “different.” To keep the Sabbath holy means to keep it as a separate day, a unique day, a different day - a day set aside for the Holy God. Yes, the commandment calls us to stop working every seventh day. But the Sabbath is not just “a day off.” We

can take a day off and not experience the Sabbath. We are commanded to stop in order to intentionally worship and enjoy God in an undistracted way. For our worth - our significance, our identity - is not found in our work or ministry. Our worth - our significance, our identity - is found in a Person, a relationship with Jesus.

So, out of mercy and grace, the Person, our Maker and Redeemer, commands us to set aside one day out of seven for Him. Every day is, of course, God's. The fourth commandment is not drawing a line between the religious and the secular or the sacred and the profane. All days are God's days. But the Sabbath is a special day - a day set aside solely for the Living God. "A Sabbath of Yahweh your God."

The question then is how? How do we keep the Sabbath holy?

Before answering that question, this is as good a place as any to address the when question. When do we observe the Sabbath? Specifically, why do most Christians celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday, the first day of the week, instead of on Saturday, the seventh day of the week? We need to go back and recall why Israel celebrated the Sabbath on the seventh day. There are two reasons, one found in the Exodus form of the fourth commandment, the other found in the Deuteronomy form of the commandment.

In Exodus 20:11, Israel affirms that Yahweh made the heaven, the earth and the sea in six days; and then rested on the seventh. God resting is God's way of declaring that the work of creating the universe is finished. Now is the time to enjoy it. So, on the Sabbath Israel commemorated what God did as Creator; and on the Sabbath Israel entered into the Creator's own satisfaction with creation.

In Deuteronomy, Israel affirms that Yahweh the Creator is also the One who redeemed Israel, see Deuteronomy 5:15. So, on the Sabbath, Israel also commemorated what God did as Redeemer - how God rescued His people from slavery.

Remember these two ideas: the Sabbath commemorates (1) what God did as Creator, and (2) what God did as Redeemer.

Now, what does this have to do with the shift from Saturday to Sunday? Everything! On the first day of the week, Jesus of Nazareth, *Yeshua* - "*Yahweh to the Rescue*" - rose from the grave. What does this resurrection mean?

1) It means that the final redemption has succeeded. The new exodus has taken place. Jesus has fought the enemies of humanity and won! That hideous alliance - of sin and death and the demonic - which holds humanity in bondage, had unleashed all of its fury on Jesus at the cross, but on the first day of the week, Jesus broke out of

the grave: He had defeated the enemies and rescued His people. Sin had been condemned. The devil had lost his weapon. Death had lost its sting. The Redeemer had won!

2) But the resurrection means even more. Easter morning was the first day not only of a new week, but of a new creation. In Jesus' resurrection, God had begun a new creation which can never be destroyed by sin, death or the demonic. And Jesus Himself is the **"first-born"** (Colossians 1:18) of that new creation.

The first day of the week, therefore, took on greater significance than the seventh. More important than the seventh day of the old creation is the first day of the new creation. So the Church slowly moved the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. On the first day of the week we celebrate what God has done as Redeemer, but now it is God's final act of redemption through the blood of Jesus the Lamb. And we celebrate what God has done as Creator, but now it's God's new act of creation in the resurrected Nazarene.

**"Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy."** Not "remember the Sabbath to make it holy." We can make nothing holy. The Sabbath already is holy. We keep the day holy because it already is. God has made it holy.

Why? Why has God established a special day? On the Sabbath day we see God come near as the God of rest,



joy, and freedom, whose delight it is to give rest, joy, and freedom before Myself. If we only stop our absorption in our work and enjoy our relationship with God, we'll get it.

So how? How do we keep the Sabbath holy? Is it even possible in a world that has long ago reduced the Lord's Day to just another day to keep up the rat race?

One sure way not to keep it is by legislating it. That is what the rabbis of the first century did. By the time Jesus came on the scene, the rabbis had come up with one thousand five hundred and twenty-one things one could not do on Sabbath. With that many prohibitions, you can see why Jesus got in trouble with the religious authorities. But Jesus did not break the fourth commandment, just the human-made rules piled on the fourth commandment. In Jesus' defense of His actions, we see the proper way to keep the Sabbath holy. Jesus says, **"The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath"** (Mark 2:27).

That is, the real needs of men and women are of greater value than endless religious regulations. God has given us the Sabbath as a gift, a gift to enhance life not drain it. Then Jesus goes further and says, **"Consequently, the Son of Man [Jesus' favorite way of referring to Himself] is Lord even of the Sabbath"** (Mark 2:28).

Jesus claims to be the One who instituted the Sabbath in the first place! And He set people free from the one

thousand five hundred and twenty-one rules, to enjoy the day, to respond to human need, to do good, to do mercy and to heal broken lives. The Lord of the Sabbath comes to earth to rescue the Sabbath from legalism.

The rabbis focused on the wrong part of the fourth commandment: “You shall not work.” That is not where God puts the focus. They should have focused on making the Sabbath a day to be with God, the day to enter into deeper communion with God. If they had focused on the Lord of the Sabbath Himself, they would not have needed the one thousand five hundred and twenty-one rules.

So, how do we keep the Sabbath holy in our time?

Five verbs:

- 1) Desire. Desire the Sabbath rest. Desire the rest God desires to give us when we stop. That is, desire the part of God that is only received and experienced when we stop. Desire the Lord of the Sabbath Himself.
- 2) Decide. Decide to obey the commandments. They are not the “Ten Suggestions.” They are commandments. Decide to obey. That is, decide to trust the Lord of the Sabbath. Does He know what He is talking about? Is God right when God tells me my worth and significance and identity are not found in my work? Is God right when God tells me God has more of God’s self to give me on the Sabbath? That is, is God smarter than me? Dallas

Willard says that we will never really live out our affirmation, “Jesus is Lord,” until we can say, “Jesus is smart.”

Decide that the Lord of the Sabbath is smart.

I am not saying that obedience will then be easy. It will not. Given where the world is, it will be very difficult. What helps is realizing that Israel had difficulty all of her history, for none of the people around her observed the Sabbath. The first Christians found even greater difficulty. No one in Rome set aside one day out of seven to be with the Living God. Decide. Decide to “march to the beat of a different drummer.” Decide that the God who comes to us in Jesus is wanting our best in commanding us to keep the Sabbath holy. None of us is so important that we cannot obey the inherent rhythm of time. Indeed, all of us are too important not to obey the rhythm.

Decide to obey.

3) Change. Change the routines. I must restructure my activities and chores so that I can set aside the day with the great Lover of my soul. If I have so many commitments that I cannot change the routine, then I can be sure that at least one of them is not the will of God for my life. For God will not lead us into so many commitments that we can no longer enter into the Holy day. Re-evaluate the commitments. Change the routines to make it possible to obey.

Desire, decide, change.

4) **Seek.** Seek to be with Yahweh. We are to seek God everyday. But on the Sabbath we do more intentionally. David says, **“Seek Yahweh and His strength.” “Seek His face continually”** (1 Chronicles 16:11).

Isaiah says: **“Seek Yahweh while He may be found.” “Call upon Him while He is near”** (Isaiah 55:6).

God makes wonderful promises to seekers: **“And you will seek Me and you will find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart”** (Jeremiah 29:13).

David told his son Solomon: **“If you seek Him, He will let you find Him”** (1 Chronicles 28:9).

Acts of mercy, by the way, do not get in the way of seeking God on the Sabbath. For as Jesus tells us, we meet Him in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger who needs a home, the naked, the sick (Matthew 25:31-46).

The Living God finds great joy in our intentional seeking. For our seeking God is a response to God seeking us! Jesus told the woman at the well: **“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers”** (John 4:23).

Desire, decide, change, seek.

5) Celebrate. Do whatever it takes to celebrate what the Creator has done, to celebrate what the Redeemer has done. Israel called the Sabbath a “feast,” a day of rejoicing. Find creative ways to make the day a festive day. Put flowers on the table. Bring out the brightest tablecloth. Light candles. Sing a song. Make pancakes for dinner. Hang banners. Enjoy meals with family and friends. If your children or neighbors ask, “Why are you acting like it is a holiday?” Say, *“Because our Lord rose from the grave on Sunday, and every Sunday is Christmas, every Sunday is Easter; we are celebrating our salvation and the beginning of the new creation in Jesus.”*

Celebrate. I think it is the key for recapturing the Sabbath. The post-Christian world will not be won by coercion, or by legislation, or by guilt-tripping. People will choose to enter into the gift of the Sabbath when they see believers really enjoying it...enjoying the Lord of the Sabbath.

Now, celebration on the Sabbath does not negate weeping. Keeping the Sabbath holy does not ignore the brokenness of life. But the Sabbath reminds us of Yahweh’s great victory over our brokenness at the cross and through the empty tomb. And the Sabbath points us to the final re-creation of life. As Paul Jewett put it, the Sabbath is *“...a sign that God has taken our lives out of our own hands and put them in his hands.”* (The Lord’s Day, 1971, p. 99).

Let’s celebrate! If Israel rejoiced in the desert over her salvation from Egypt, how much more can we rejoice over

our greater salvation from sin, death and evil in Jesus. If Israel celebrated God's creation of the world, how much more can we celebrate God's re-creation of the world in Jesus. In Jesus' death and resurrection, God has won the victory over powers greater than Pharaoh; God has won the victory over all that threatens to undo us. Let's celebrate God's mighty deeds in Jesus!

Desire the Sabbath, decide to obey the command, change the routine, seek the Lord of the Sabbath, and celebrate God's mighty deeds in Jesus Christ.

Would you pray with me?

*Oh LORD of the Sabbath, we give this day to celebrate You. Let's put a beautiful tablecloth on the supper table. Let's celebrate with songs and food, family and friends. Thank you for this day. We celebrate Your creation, Your new creation, and Your redemption that we get as a free gift in Jesus. We celebrate the relationship with have with You our Savior. In Jesus Name, Amen.*