

The Shema

Reading: Deuteronomy 6:1 - 12

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.^[a] ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.

¹⁰ When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you – a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, ¹¹ houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant – then when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

The Ten Commandments – Children’s Talk 30th April 2017

Opening Question: Can you remember the Ten Commandments?

Call them out and put them on the flip chart

The Ten Commandments

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You must not make anything to replace God, only worship him
3. Don’t say or do anything that will cause God’s name to be disrespected
4. Keep God’s day, once a week, especially for Him
5. Always be respectful of your parents
6. Don’t commit murder
7. Stay faithful to your wife or husband
8. Don’t take anything that does not belong to you.
9. Don’t tell lies about anyone
10. Don’t allow yourself to become jealous of anything that someone else has.

Rules of Freedom

Did you now the 10 commandments start with God saying

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery”

Three weeks ago, we learnt about the Passover

- How God rescued His people from slavery

- So now they are free
- They are setting off on a journey to find the home God has promised them
- And God says to them
- “I’ve rescued you so now you are free, this is how free people should live”
- “These rules are to enable you to stay free and happy”
- We call them ‘The 10 Commandments’
- but maybe we should call them ‘Rules for living as free people’

Then we celebrated Easter

- Jesus dying and then rising from the dead.
- We remembered he is the Passover lamb
- And his death has set us free
- Free from all those things that make us feel bad and separate us from God

Now Jesus has risen and he wants us to live as free people too!

- He summarised the 10 commandments into 2
- Do you know what they are?
- We read about them in Matthews Gospel Chapter 22 (37-39)
- He was asked which was the greatest commandment.
- And He replied:
 1. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”
This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it:
 2. “Love your neighbour as yourself.”
All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’

He was in fact quoting something the Jews recite

- It is called the Shema.
- And it follows the 10 commandments in Deuteronomy 6: 4-5
- And it goes something like this

Hear me all at Rainham Christian Fellowship,

The Lord is our God is one God, the one and only God Love him with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength Don’t just memorise these rules, Keep them in your hearts! Make sure your children understand them, talk about them when you are at home and when you are out. Share them as they go to bed and when they get up in the morning. Put them on your smart phones and on your screen savers. Put them on the walls of your house so you are reminded when you go out and when you come home

Why?

- *Because when God blesses you and everything is going well*
- *You are comfortable and have lots of good things*
- *You must be careful to remember God*
- *Don’t forget He is the one who has set you free*
- *And you must not return to being slaves again.*

The Sabbath - Sermon 30th April 2017

Reading: Deuteronomy 5:1-22 & 32

Moses summoned all Israel and said:

Hear, Israel, the decrees and the laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. ² The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. ³ It was not with our ancestors that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. ⁴ The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. ⁵ (At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:

⁶ 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

⁷ 'You shall have no other gods before me.

⁸ 'You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁹ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ¹⁰ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

¹¹ 'You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

¹² 'Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labour and do all your work, ¹⁴ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

¹⁶ 'Honour your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

¹⁷ 'You shall not murder.

¹⁸ 'You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁹ 'You shall not steal.

²⁰ 'You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

²¹ 'You shall not covet your neighbour's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbour's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.'

²² These are the commandments the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.

³² So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. ³³ Walk in obedience to all that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

Introduction

I wanted to talk about the sabbath this morning

- As we were discussing the extension project
- Looking at why we seemed to be getting nowhere
- I felt there was a spiritual cause
- We seemed to be working hard with little result
- So, I believe we were called for a sabbath
- A break from striving to make things happen
- And a time of resting in God

So, it seemed appropriate to think about the idea of the Sabbath

- The idea of giving a period time to God
- In the commandments God claims one day in seven as belonging to Him
- We've already noted that the 10 commandments are about freedom
- They exist to help us live free and happy lives.

I think there is no doubt that many people would agree the world would be a better place if we kept at least the last 6 commandments

- The first four are less obviously beneficial
- Probably because they are directed towards God
- They are all about acknowledging Him
- Honouring Him
- Worshipping Him.

Jesus, understood their importance

- He summarised these commandments in terms of loving God
- And loving to the extremes of our being
- This is the greatest commandment!
- *"To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."*

This is really where I am coming from this morning

- It is not about following a set of rules
- It is not about do's and don'ts
- It is about loving God

So, this morning I want to look at three things

1. What was the sabbath
2. Why is it important
3. How can or should we observe it today

What was the Sabbath?

The sabbath begins right at the start

- At creation, we read in Genesis 2, verses 1-3
*“Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.
² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so, on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”*

The Sabbath was God’s idea

- He kept it himself
- A day of rest at the end of six days’ labour.

This is something God created along with creation

- When we read the commandments earlier
- It didn’t say make the seventh day Holy
- It said ‘observe’ or ‘keep’ the seventh day holy.
- We cannot make it holy or otherwise - God has already made it holy.
- We can, however, choose to keep it Holy or not
- That is up to us

It is worth reminding ourselves what we mean by Holy at this point.

- Holy literally means set aside
- Something special only used for a specific purpose
- In this case set aside for God
- One day in seven belongs to him

This is important

- The day belongs to Him, we do not earn ‘brownie points’ by keeping it
- We are just giving what he deserves.
- Fulfilling our obligation
- Just as paying my mortgage is not generous of me – I’m just paying what I owe.

This leads on to Jesus and his teaching

- He had quite a lot to say about the sabbath
- Because by that time the day had become ensnared in a myriad of petty regulations
- It had become a burden rather than a rest
- And Jesus cut across all the petty regulation to get to the heart of it
- We read in Matthews account of Jesus’ life (Matt 12: 1-13)

At that time, Jesus went through the cornfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some ears of corn and eat them. ² When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, ‘Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.’

³ He answered, ‘Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread – which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. ⁵ Or haven’t you read in

the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? ⁶ I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ If you had known what these words mean, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'

⁹ Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, ¹⁰ and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'

¹¹ He said to them, 'If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? ¹² How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.'

¹³ Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. ¹⁴ But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Jesus knew the commandments were essentially about freedom

- And he wanted to free them from the man-made restrictions that made it an end to itself
- The point of the sabbath was to benefit us.
- As Mark puts it in his account of the same situation
- *'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27)*

So, to sum up,

- The sabbath was instituted by God
- It belongs to him
- But it is for our benefit
- Not to burden us with lots of rules

Paul says this the Colossian Church

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. (Colossians 16-17)

The Sabbath along with the rest of the 'Law' finds its reality in Christ

- This does not mean we can ignore it
- Or that it no longer matters.
- We are free, but, we need to use the freedom wisely
- The point of the sabbath is that in keeping it we are set free from having to achieve through our own efforts.
- And this brings me to why it is important

Why is the Sabbath Important?

We read in Exodus chapter 31 (12-13)

Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹³ 'Say to the Israelites, "You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so that you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.

This is a significant verse

- Throughout the Old Testament God reveals himself by different names
- Each name describing something of His character, his nature.
- You see, the Bible is not a rule book
- It is the story of a love-relationship
- A relationship between God and His people.

And just like any relationship

- As time goes by you share experiences together
- And you learn more about the other person in the relationship
- We see him revealing himself as 'I am' to Moses in the burning bush
- Jehovah El-Shaddai – God the all sufficient to Abram when he promises him to be father of a nation (Gen. 17)
- And later, as Jehovah-Jireh – God who provides - on mount Moriah
- Producing a ram to sacrifice in Isaacs place (Gen 22)

And this is another such occasion

- God is teaching his people about keeping the Sabbath
- And His reason why is stated
- Because I am Jehovah-mekoddishkem
- I am God who makes you Holy

So, the purpose of the Sabbath

- Is to enable us to know God better
- To Know him as the sanctifier
- God who makes us holy.

We can run around for six days

- Work as hard as we can
- Serving God, at home, at work at church
- None of it will make us holy

Why?

- Because making us holy is not our job
- It is God's job
- It's his nature – it's in his very name

So, the Sabbath is important because it is when we 'rest' God makes us like him

- The importance of the Sabbath is not to please God by doing what he says
- Or even to honour him by giving our time to Him
- We hopefully do that all the time
- It wouldn't mean much if we only do it Sundays anyway.

Its importance is that it takes the focus off us.

- And allows God to in us.
- He takes the responsibility
- And we rest in Him.
- We find our well-being, our peace
- Our Shalom in him.

This brings us to my final point.

How can or should we observe the Sabbath today?

As I've already said this is not about rules, or measuring how much we do

- It's not about looking at others
- But it is about attitude
- An attitude focussed on God, not ourselves.

I have three suggestions

1. Take it seriously
2. Don't get het up on rules
3. Work for six days

1. Take it seriously

Remember, the Sabbath belongs to God

- It is not a day to please ourselves
- It should be offered to God,
- Not resentfully but freely and gratefully

We should not reduce it to a family day

- Or a day off work to catch up
- It is the Lord's day and belongs to him

God takes the Sabbath seriously

- That is clear from scripture
- And He provides for those that obey
- We will not lose out by keeping it Holy

In Exodus 16:21-30 we read that God provided Manna to eat in the wilderness

- Each day they must gather only enough for one day
- If they had too much it went off by the next day and had to be thrown away.
- However, on the sixth day they gathered for 2 days and it stayed fresh for the seventh day.
- There was no manna provided for that day so the people had to rest

2. Don't get het up on rules

The Sabbath is not about keeping rules

- It is about relationship
- Delighting in God.
- Paul tells the Galatians

'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery'. (Gal. 5:1)

The sabbath should not be kept slavishly

- But equally, not observing it can also show a lack of freedom
- Because the Sabbath acknowledges our dependence on God to make us Holy
- We are set free from having to do it ourselves.

In the Old Testament God calls someone called Zerubbabel to build his temple

- This was a daunting task
- But Zechariah prophesies saying

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty.
(Zechariah 4:6)

This seems to me to sum up the idea of the sabbath

- It allows us to acknowledge
- To be set free to know
- That it is not by our efforts but by God's Holy Spirit that His work is done.

3. Work for six days

Finally, the sabbath, does not just require us to rest one day in seven

- The instruction is to work for six days
- Sometimes, the reason we can't stop on Sundays is that we haven't worked earlier in the week.
- I've certainly been guilty of that at times

I guess that comes to attitude again

- Being serious about the sabbath
- Trying to Love God with all our heart
- Is something we do everyday
- One day resting in Him
- And six days through our work

As Paul tells the Colossians

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Col. 3:23-24)

Conclusion

I want to finish with a promise from Isaiah

- *We read in Isaiah 58: 13-14*

*'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the LORD's holy day honourable,
and if you honour it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,
then you will find your joy in the LORD,*