

October 4, 2009 Matthew 11:28 “The Third Commandment”

Have you ever gone several nights in a row without proper rest? Perhaps it was a child’s crying, a dog’s barking, or a knotty problem keeping you awake. Without rest what happens? Your mood grows dark and discouraged. Without proper rest you literally wear yourself out.

Can you imagine going through life without spiritual rest? At first you might think, “I’ll do OK. I know all I need to know about the Bible. Working my job, taking time off on the weekend, sports and leisure, travelling to visit the grand kids, why there’s just no time for worship. I can *always* turn back to God later in life.” Oh? Our sinful nature is so strong, the unbelieving world’s influences are so pervasive, and Satan’s lies are so powerful that without the gospel in Word and Sacrament we are in grave danger of reverting to the unbelief in which we were born. So many things happen even within the span of a week and so many thoughts arise even within the span of a week that would loosen our grip on the forgiveness of sins we have by faith in Jesus alone, and we could be cut off from God forever!

As we continue our study of God’s Ten Commandments with the theme, “You are the light of the world, let your light shine!” we look at the Third Commandment: **“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.”** Sabbath means, “rest.” **Receive rest for your weary soul from Jesus!**

When God made the Sabbath a requirement for His people, it was to be a day of rest, not only to enable them to recover from the burdens of work, but as a day of worship. On the Sabbath the entire nation ceased its activity so it might remember God’s activity. Human sin had brought sorrow and death to the world, but God promised a Savior. Every prophecy the Israelites would hear in worship, every Psalm they would sing, every sacrifice they would offer directed them to the work God would do to give them eternal rest in heaven after the struggles of this life are over.

By Jesus’ day many had turned the Sabbath into a self-righteous ritual! When the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day tried to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath, He objected, **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”** (Mark 2:27). As Lawgiver who instituted the Sabbath, He had the authority to set it aside, and indeed, He has. **“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. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ”** (Colossians 2:16-17). A shadow indicates that someone is approaching. The Old Testament Sabbath assured the faithful the Savior would come. Now that He is here, the shadow is no longer needed. Jesus, the real Sabbath, the real Rest-giver invites, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest!”**

Where would you and I be without this rest? We would burden ourselves with the stuff of this world, its false loves and false promises. Then at the end of our lives we would burden ourselves with the fear, “Have I done enough? Is my life worthwhile? Will God accept me into heaven?” And of course without faith in Jesus the answer is, “No – you haven’t done enough. No, your life is not worthwhile for you have not loved God perfectly, and no, God will not accept you into heaven.” But God loves you still! Christ, His eternal Son became man to fulfill God’s law perfectly for us. He suffered the ultimate sacrifice, experiencing hell’s torture for our sin when He was crucified. He rose from the dead – yes He did! Now all who believe in Him have rest for their souls, for they receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life He won. Through the news of Christ in Word and Sacrament the Spirit of God makes us alive by creating a new self within us, the new self who repents of all sin and trusts in Jesus to receive God’s gift of eternal life. Through the same powerful Word and Sacrament the Spirit of God keeps us alive by faith in Christ – despite any temptation to doubt or despair, despite any lie of the devil, and by that faith we receive rest for our weary souls from Jesus.

Oh, dear child of God, do not become guilty of despising God’s Word by refusing to hear it, by refusing to believe it, by refusing to do what it says, or by or letting anything in the world crowd it out of

your life. God tells us, **“Remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you...Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you”** (Hebrews 13:7, 17). What a tremendous responsibility God gives our pastors and other spiritual leaders, to watch for your soul and give an account to Christ! Therefore obey them in all things in which Christ has placed them over you..

When you love someone, you want to be with that person. Can you imagine a husband telling His wife, “Honey, I love you, but I don’t have time to ever be with you.”? How long will that love last? How long can faith last when people don’t want to be with God to hear His Word and receive Christ’s body and blood? God’s preachers are Jesus’ ambassadors. When we hear them, we hear Him. When we despise them, we despise Him. Refusing to hear or accept the Word of God is a damning sin. Going to church will not save someone, but not going to church will damn him if the person loses faith by despising and neglecting the Word.

Perhaps you’ve heard this story. A minister visited a member who failed to attend worship and found him sitting before the fireplace. The minister took the tongs, lifted a glowing coal from the fire, and laid it aside on the hearth. In silence they watched it slowly die out. “You don’t have to say a thing, Pastor,” the member remarked. “I’ll be there next Sunday!” Faith comes from hearing the message – for you and for those you encourage and support by your worship, Bible study, and offerings!

“Oh,” some would say, “you only want me in church because the church needs my money.” Whose money is it? The Bible does say, **“Anyone who receives instruction in the Word must share all good things with His instructor”** (Galatians 6:6). Every Christian does have the duty to contribute to the support of the ministry, according to his means. The Lord has also told us to take the good news to all creation, and we do that when we support the work of the Church at home and abroad by our prayers, our godly lives, our personal testimony, and our contributions. So we say again, “Faith comes from hearing the message” – for you and for those you encourage and support by your worship, Bible study, and offerings!”

God wants us to hear and learn His Word gladly every day. So receive Christ’s rest in your home devotions and personal Bible study. God wants us to regularly come together in worship and Bible study to be fed with the Word by our God-given pastors and teachers, to pray to Him, to praise Him for His wonderful works, and to encourage others in their life of faith. **“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another –and all the more as you see the Day approaching”** (Hebrews 10:25). God wants us to believe *and obey* His Word, for Jesus promises, **“Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it.”** God wants us to share His Word with all people, for Christ commanded, **“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”** What an example the first Christians in Jerusalem set for us, for **“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer”** (Acts 2:42).

The Psalmist David wrote, **“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’”** (Psalm 26:8). We rejoice to come to our church for the church is our Father’s house, the place where God speaks to us and shows the glory of His love. When you come to worship, say a prayer for the ministers, the other service participants, and for yourself. Don’t hinder your devotion or that of others by needless whispering or other distracting behavior, before or during worship. Participate wholeheartedly in the service. And when you leave, take the Lord’s Word with you as you live throughout the week what you have learned on Sunday. And next week when you prepare for worship – think of someone else who is burdened by sin and invite them, “Come to Jesus to receive rest for your weary soul! Amen.