

4th Commandment: Saved for Sabbath

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[0:00] Well, as you take your seats, please do turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 23. We're going to read from verse 10 through to verse 19. That's on page 64 in the Blue Church Bibles.

We're continuing to work through this kind of section of case law as we work right through the book of Exodus. And we're coming towards the end of that case law section. And we're going to focus this evening, this morning, as we have been throughout the last few weeks on one of the commandments.

And that commandment this week is the fourth commandment. So let us hear God's words and think about how it helps us understand the fourth commandment together. Exodus 23, reading from verse 10.

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield. But the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat. And what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard and with your olive orchards.

For six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may have rest. And the son of your servant woman and the alien may be refreshed.

[1:29] Pay attention to all that I have said to you and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips. Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me.

You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib. For in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall keep the feast of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the feast of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God. You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning. The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk. This is God's Word. Please keep that passage open in front of you. Let us pray, as always, for the Lord's help with it together.

Father, we thank you for your words. We thank you that you have given us ears to listen. Lord, we pray that they would be open now, that our hearts would be soft, that we would come humbly to hear what you have to say to us. Lord, that we might be transformed through it into the likeness of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name and for whose glory we pray. Amen.

It is estimated that there are nearly 50 million people in some kind of slavery today.

[3:25] To put that number into context, the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade involved 12.5 million Africans over the course of three centuries.

four times that many people living in some kind of slavery right now. And many of those people live in the UK.

Again, estimates, but 125,000. More than half of the population of Aberdeen in our country right now are in modern-day slavery.

And the testimonies of some of those who have escaped paint a pretty grim picture. One man I was reading about this week recounted how he was promised, when he was traveling to the UK, a secure, well-paying job.

But upon his arrival at the airport, he was collected by someone who said they were working for the company that he thought he was going to work for. The driver asked to see his passport to confirm his identity.

[4:36] He never saw that passport again. His only form of identification in a new country. He was taken to a cramped six-bedroom house with 25 other men already living in it.

He was forced to work on a production line for 12 hours a day, seven days a week, on extremely little pay, for six months.

Before finally, a police raid on the property that he was living in brought his ordeal to an end. That is life for some people in our country.

It's pretty shocking, isn't it? We might never think such things were happening here, now, in the 21st century. And yet there are at least tens of thousands of people in situations like that.

Now, we are often, aren't we, bound by contracts to complete work in order to be paid? That's not a problem in itself. But when do the obligations of work become a problem?

[5:50] I wonder, in the example of the testimony that I just mentioned, what would need to change for those working conditions to be okay? The wage, that matters, doesn't it?

The number of hours in a day, that matters. The working conditions, the living conditions, they matter. But if all of that was given, and the condition was still seven days a week, every single week, without any holidays, would you take the job?

How would you feel if someone you loved was in that kind of work? If someone is expected to work six days a week, we might say, that's a lot. If someone is expected to work seven days a week, we say, don't we, that's a problem.

Because we need rest. We need Sabbath. Sabbath. That is the word that is at the root of the fourth commandment, Sabbath.

To cease. To rest from work, from labors. There are people in our country today, who I think would give everything, to be able to rest.

[7:19] Because just as stealing is wrong, and murder is wrong, so is the absence of rest. But for those of us who enjoy the kind of the work-life balance that we expect in 21st century Britain, is it perhaps the case that we make little of the fourth commandment because we take rest for granted?

I don't know if you've ever hurt your back or broken your hand. When you have something, we often fail, don't we, to realize how much we need it. But lose it, and we very quickly appreciate just how important it is.

In his goodness, God has given us Sabbath. Rest. The Ten Commandments, they begin with three commandments focused on our love and worship of God.

The final six kind of focus on our love and care for neighbor. The fourth commandment brings both of those things together. To set apart a day. To rest.

For the Lord. And for the sake of our neighbor. We'll see in a little while when we think a little bit about how those laws in Exodus 23 help us understand that.

[8:42] But to get there, we are just going to work through the same three questions that we have asked about most of the commandments so far. What do they preach about God? What do they point out about us?

And what do they promise is to come? So let's start with the first of those. What does it preach about God? The answer is, we have a gracious God who saves his people to enjoy his rest.

Myrda read earlier for us from Genesis 1 and 2 that God rests, doesn't he? There's a rest that he enjoys after the good work that he has done.

And that rest is the foundation of the fourth commandment in Exodus 20. But fast forward through Genesis and we begin the book of Exodus with a people being deprived of rest.

We read in Exodus chapter 1 in their slavery in Egypt that they are afflicted with heavy burdens. And that problem kind of comes to a head in chapter 5.

[9:55] Maybe actually just turn back there with me in this book in your Bibles. It's just a few pages before where we were. Page 48. Exodus chapter 5.

This is the first time that Moses and Pharaoh go in before Egypt. But before Pharaoh, sorry. The first time that Moses and Aaron go in before Pharaoh to demand that God's people are let go that they might worship the Lord.

And look how Pharaoh responds to that request, that command in verse 4. Verse 4 of chapter 5.

But the king of Egypt said to them, Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work?

Get back to your burdens. Verse 5. And Pharaoh said, behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest from their burdens.

And so Pharaoh's response is to afflict them with even greater burdens. Verse 9. Let heavier work be laid on them. It is the absence of rest, the heaviness of the burdens laid on them.

[11:08] That is what leads the enslaved people to utter despair by the end of the chapter. Heavy burdens, rest refused. That is the slavery that God comes to set his people free from.

They are saved from service to Pharaoh to now go and serve the Lord. But although at the foot of Sinai the people of Israel still serve a God king, the king they now serve shows himself to be gracious, generous, one who does not oppress his people but invites, indeed commands them to come and enjoy his rest within.

Do you see how that is so different to their slavery to Pharaoh? Do you see how that is so different to so much of the authority that we see in our world today?

Where those under authority are so often loaded with burdens so that those above them might rest. That's what service in our world looks like, isn't it?

You don't hear about Amazon delivery drivers getting invited on holiday with Jeff Bezos. No, you read about them working in horrendous conditions and him spending \$50 million on a wedding in Venice.

[12:36] but you can scale that down so that even if the difference isn't so vast, the pattern is the same. You work for me so that I can enjoy the kind of rest that you can only dream of.

But we see in these commandments that is not what it is like to serve God because he is a gracious God who commands his people to come and enjoy his rest.

Jesus says in the New Testament that the Sabbath is made for man. Not so that we might do what we want with it. He is the Lord of the Sabbath, not us, but it is made for us so that we might receive it as a gift from a gracious God to people who were made to work and rest.

God commands his image bearers to come and rest in the work that he has done for them. In a way that is so different to what the Israelites knew for centuries and what we still see and many of us will experience today.

God is a gracious God who gives rest not demands rest from the work of others. That is a little bit about what these commandments preach about God but what do they point out about us holding the mirror up now and seeing the dirtiness in our own hearts that these commandments point out.

[14:14] Our second question what do they point out? I think we can begin to answer that question by looking at the first word of the fourth commandment. Most of the ten commandments are kind of prohibitions.

You can turn to Exodus 20 if you want to see this. Most of the ten commandments are prohibitions aren't they? You shall not murder or steal or commit adultery. But that is not how the fourth commandment begins.

Verse 8 of Exodus 20. Remember. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Remember. What does the fourth commandment point out? We forget. We forget to keep the Sabbath holy.

Three reasons we're going to see for that. We forget what we have been saved from. We forget who we have been saved by. And we forget what we have been saved for. Again, start with the first of those.

[15:13] We forget what we've been saved from. We've just reminded ourselves that God saved his people from a land of slavery where they had no rest. That is what they've been saved from.

Exodus 16. We're jumping about a bit here. You don't have to turn there now. Exodus 16 is one month into their freedom. One month, 30 days out of the land of unbearable burdens.

And what did the people say? Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt when we sat by meat pots and ate bread to the full.

That is not what they were saying in Exodus 5, is it? Later on in Deuteronomy, we learn that one of the reasons the Sabbath is given to God's people is so that they would remember their redemption. Because what happens when you forget? When you forget your redemption, you long for the land of slavery, thinking it was far better than it really was.

[16:20] You've been seeing over the course of this series how this redemption from slavery in Egypt is an epic kind of foreshadowing of the far greater redemption we have in Christ from our slavery to sin and the serpent king.

That means we continue to keep the Sabbath in part because we still have a redemption to remember and an equally sinful tendency to forget.

It's one reason why we gather together every Sunday, don't we? That's why we confess our sin together every service, to remind ourselves of the slavery we were once in and hear his assurance of pardon to know the freedom that we now have because otherwise we forget and when we forget what we've been saved from the former life of slavery to sin will become more and more appealing. I've not seen an official survey for this so I have no tangible evidence but I'm confident there will be a very clear correlation between Christians who don't regularly take a Sabbath, take time in the week to worship God together with his people, to remember their redemption, Christians who don't do that, and those who backslide because the life of slavery will become more and more appealing to those who forget what it is that they've been saved from and start thinking it was full of meat pots and bread to the full.

The Sabbath is given to guard us against forgetting our slavery and plotting a return to sin. We're quick to forget what we've been saved from. We're quick to forget who we have been saved by.

[18:05] The command to keep the Sabbath first appears immediately after the people wish they were back in Egypt. God gives them the very thing they were deprived of there.

He commands them to gather twice as much of his graciously provided food on the sixth day so that they need not gather it on the seventh. But what happens?

Some of the people they forget who they've been saved by. The Sabbath is a litmus test of their trust. Do we trust God?

Do we take him at his word when he says take a day away from your labors? Some of the people felt the need to go out and gather to work on the Sabbath because they did not trust their redeemer to be their provider.

If we forget that God not only redeems us but provides for us, that he is our savior and our shepherd as we have just sung, if we forget that we will feel the need to take the day he has set apart as holy and make it ordinary.

[19:21] Another day to continue on with our labors. Do you trust the Lord to provide for all you need if you give him a day?

A day. Or do you feel the need to work six days and 23 hours and give him an hour? What we need and what we want might be different but God knows your needs better than you do and he will provide for them.

The fourth commandment perhaps reveals that we don't trust him to do that. It reveals our tendency doesn't it to think that we know our needs, to give our time to ourselves, to work on this day for our ends, to get an extra few marks in the exam to make Monday a little bit less stressful.

But if we truly trust God to provide and take him at his word to set aside a day for him, we will be ready to sacrifice those things in order to obey his commands.

We need to remember the Sabbath because we're quick to forget what we've been saved from, we're quick to forget who we've been saved by, and we're quick to forget what we've been saved for. Let my people go that they may worship me.

[20:43] Those were God's words to Pharaoh. saved from service to the serpent king in order to serve our gracious God. We are saved for a purpose, to serve, to worship.

And setting aside a day in our week to do that is one of the God-given means to that end. I think those verses we read in Exodus 23 help us see that. We worship God by gathering together as his people to praise him.

The Sabbath command is explicitly restated actually at the end of chapter 31, a little later but a only significant moment in Exodus. We'll get there in a few weeks, but here we see the significance just of sacred time, don't we?

Time dedicated to God. Not just on the Sabbath but around a year. Three times the Israelites were to gather in order to worship. We see them there in verse 14 to 19.

The point being in verse 13 that God alone is to be worshipped. And those seasons are specifically for that. Points in the year where God's people would come to worship him for a particular provision.

[21:56] This is case law, isn't it? This is the application of the fourth commandment to them, then. We are not bound to these, but we do, don't we?

We have seasons in the year. Easter and Christmas, most obviously, where we consciously concentrate on a certain provision of God for his people, the incarnation, the resurrection.

Set apart times in the year where we come to worship God and give thanks for his care and love towards us. That is not binding on us, is it?

But we recognize that as a good outworking of the fourth commandment to intentionally set apart days and weeks and seasons to do just what we have been saved to do. So we should not just be thinking about keeping Sabbath, but about how we organize our whole calendar, all of our time, from days to weeks to years, in a way that ensures we dedicate specific time to worshiping God. There is much time for work, for labor, that is not a bad thing. But it must be accompanied by a rest, a Sabbath for the Lord. Because otherwise we will forget what we have been saved to do, to come and worship him.

[23:15] A day of rest, can't it? If we do not remember that it is for the Lord, it could very quickly become a day about me.

The setting aside of time for worship does not only fulfill the first great commandment to love God, but the second as well, to love our neighbor. Just look there at verses 10 to 12 of Exodus 23 if you have that in front of you.

We have been saved to worship God and to love others. You see it clear as day in verse 12, one purpose of the Sabbath is to ensure those under our care and authority receive rest too.

what does that point out? We are quick, aren't we, to make things about ourselves and a day of rest becomes a day of me time, not others time, to the point that we might get frustrated or annoyed should other people dare to interfere with my plans for my rest.

but that is not what we have been saved for. We have been saved from our slavery to sin that we may take our eyes off ourselves, away from the selfishness of sin and towards the graciousness, the givingness of God.

[24:42] So that Sabbath is to be a day not for gaining something ourselves but giving to others, to live as Christ lived, the image of the invisible God who came not to be served but to serve.

So what does the fourth commandment point out? It points out that we are quick to think slavery is better than it was. We're quick to doubt God's provision for us. We're quick to make things about ourselves.

So God commands that we remember the Sabbath. Remember the Sabbath in order to remember our redemption, trust his provision, worship him and love our neighbor.

Third and final point then this morning, what do these commands promise? What do they promise? What do they point us to? And so there's rest for our souls and a Sabbath still to come.

the call to worship we began with this morning was the wonderful words of Jesus, wasn't it? Come to me. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

[26:03] Rest for your souls. We've seen it time and again, haven't we? The Exodus from Egypt was a prototype of a greater Exodus from a worse slavery. In Jesus' first coming, he relieved his people from the great burden of sin.

But the fourth commandment does not only promise the rest from our souls that came then that we have now if we have come to Jesus, it also promises the eternal rest for body and soul that is yet to come.

Hebrews 4 reminds us that the promise to enter God's rest still stands, that there is a rest still to come. That is good news, isn't it, for those of us who trust in the Lord Jesus but still feel burdened day by day, weary in our bodies.

There is a true eternal rest for body and soul that the fourth commandment promises is coming and will one day come.

the fullness of what is promised here has yet to come and that is why we still are to keep the Sabbath. And it is why we keep the Sabbath on a Sunday.

[27:21] The New Testament makes that kind of transition from the last day of the week in the Old Covenant to the first day with remarkably little fuss. Because while in the Old Covenant the Sabbath primarily kind of looks back to the redemption, their freedom from Egypt, the foremost focus in the New Covenant is now the anticipation of the rest that is to come.

Something new is on its way. Because Jesus was raised on the first day of the week, we now gather on the first day of the week to look forward to our resurrection in him when we will enter that once and for all rest and rest in God forever.

still remembering our redemption as we do Sunday by Sunday, but doing so now with eyes fixed forward to that glorious day that is to come when all burdens will be forever removed.

So what does all that mean for us today? How do we keep Sabbath here now in Aberdeen in 2026 in a way that remembers our redemption, in a way that anticipates our rest, in a way that trusts in

God's provision, in a way that focuses on worship and cares for our neighbor?

It's a rich commandment, isn't it? There's a lot to it, and we obviously don't have time to think through it all in great detail, but here's maybe just a couple of things to get the ball rolling.

[28 : 59] I'll start a few conversations perhaps. First, we do need to guard against legalism. In the passage immediately after the call to worship we read, Jesus finds himself engaging with Pharisees who had made the Sabbath burdensome, who had applied a million different rules and regulations that people had to ensure they were keeping, crossing every T and dotting every I.

The irony wasn't it, was that the day that was given to remind them that had been freed from their burdens had become a day of burdens, so that Jesus had to come and relieve his people of burdens on the day of rest.

So we'd be making a great error to turn the Sabbath back into a day of burdens, of a long list of rules and regulations. things. And the New Testament warns us against that on numerous occasions.

We must guard against that kind of legalism, and perhaps more so for many of us today, we must also guard against what we'd call the other side of the antinomianism.

It is not a day to earn righteousness, as legalism would have us do, but nor is it a day to ignore righteousness. righteousness. Rather, it is a day to live out the righteousness that God has imputed to us in Christ.

[30 : 30] As we are remade into the image of the one who came to fulfill the law, to keep the commandments, we ought to keep Sabbath. What might that look like for us?

Let me just ask three questions to help us think about our Sundays. First question, is it holy or is it ordinary?

If someone were to watch you from the moment you left this building until you went to bed tonight, would they see a day that is different from your Saturday?

Or would it look very much the same? the fourth commandment says we must remember to keep the day holy. Set apart, and specifically, set apart for God.

Second question, is it a day for the Lord, or is it a day for you? Do you remember what you have been saved for?

[31 : 41] to worship God. We are not set free from slavery so that we can now go and live for ourselves. That is actually in part the slavery we've been saved from.

No longer turned in on ourselves, but turned outwards, to love God and to love others. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy to the Lord.

Lord. I think too often, Sundays are just another opportunity for more me time. But it is a day, it is a time to be given to the Lord.

Most obviously that means gathering with his people to worship. I'm very glad you're all here this morning. It can also mean spending time in fellowship with other believers. It can mean private worship with the family or alone, inside or in God's creation.

It can look like any number of different things. The Sabbath does not demand that we have a rigid routine to our Sunday. But it does mean our hearts ought to be set on him above all else and worshiping him.

[32 : 48] And the primary means he has ordained for that is, isn't it, the public gathering of his people. Coming to church shouldn't be the only part of your Sabbath rest, but it is the most important. In the Gospels, when Jesus is plucking heads of grain and healing the man with a withered hand, getting under the Pharisee's skin about what they think should be happening on the Sabbath, he is traveling to or in the synagogue.

He is spending that day with God's people to worship the Lord. Because where else would you be on the Lord's day? But Jesus shows us too, doesn't he, in those passages, that being amongst God's people to worship him provides perhaps the most obvious opportunity to do good to others. love God and to love our neighbor. Third question, does your Sabbath ensure others rest or does it demand that they carry their burdens?

We don't have oxen that need a rest, do we? But we do have plenty of people carrying plenty of burdens. perhaps it's already been a little too far into the skin.

Let me dig just a little bit deeper. The commandments are given specifically to God's people, that they might know him, that we might see our sin, that we might hear his promise, we've seen that, but they are also a revelation of God's moral law which all his image bearers should keep.

[34:25] So should we really live out our day of rest in the way that demands other people work? Now there is necessary work, isn't there, and works of mercy.

We need nurses on shift at the hospital. We need police officers ready to respond to an emergency. If you're an off-duty paramedic and you see someone collapse, you should start working. We need those works of necessity and mercy.

We don't need baristas frothing oat milk for a latte. Does your day of rest expect that other people serve you?

I'll pay you, you work for me. Should we be doing that or should we use our Sabbath to invite other people into our rest with us, just as God does?

That's why hospitality on a Sunday is such a wonderful thing. If you regularly host people, as I know many of you do, let me just encourage you. That is a great thing.

[35:37] It is a wonderful thing. And something we want to see more and more of, because it is a reflection of God's goodness to his people, where we say to others, not serve me, but come and enjoy rest with me.

Come into our home, enjoy fellowship with us, be refreshed. That is what the Sabbath is for. That is what God says to us on a Sunday.

Come and rest in the work I have done for you. Come and rest. There's a few questions to think about.

Maybe you've got questions. Please do come and chat to me afterwards. I'd be really glad to speak about that with you. But here's where we want to land. On who God is and what he has promised. The Sabbath was made for us. It is a good thing from a gracious God who wants to see his people rest and enjoy his rest with him.

[36:47] And we have the privilege of taking the first day of the week to do just that. Right back to where we began. Do not take Sabbath for granted.

Do not take it for granted, but give thanks for it. And take the day to remember your redemption, to trust your provider, to look forward to an eternal rest, to worship your Savior, and to love your neighbor.

It is a precious thing given by a gracious God who is worthy of all our worship. And that is what this day is for. So let us continue to do that as we pray to him before we sing again.

Father, we come to praise you as the God who works and rests.

Lord, we praise you above all else that you have worked redemption for us, that through the work of your Son, Jesus Christ, we have been set free from slavery to sin.

[38:06] And you do not demand, Lord, that we work to repay you for that. Lord, you command us to come and rest in that work. Lord, we thank you for the gift of Sabbath.

Lord, we pray that you would, through this command, point out the sin that lingers in our own hearts, our forgetfulness, how quick we are to forget what you have saved us from, what you have saved us for, who you are.

Lord, help us to trust you, to remember our redemption, to want to praise and worship you and love our neighbor as you have saved us to do. And Lord, we thank you for the glorious promise, not only that we have rest for our souls now in the Lord Jesus Christ, but there is a day coming when we will rest forevermore in you and your perfect creation, where there will be no more heavy burdens, but only the easy yoke of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, until that day, help us to look forward to it by gathering together each Lord's Day, thanking you for what you have done and looking forward to what is to come. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.