

The Abolition of Man.¹ (slide.1)

As Mark shared at the start of this series, we are spending these summer months looking at the Ten Commandments—but in particular at how these commandments find their fulfillment in the gospel of grace through the work of Christ. Today's focus is on the Fourth Commandment, the one that concerns itself with Sabbath rest. This is the longest commandment of the ten, yet it's also the one that is often most difficult for us to wrap our heads around—especially in this day and age. But it's my hope to encourage us, and to help us all see the idea of rest as a gracious gift that is meant to bless us, and most importantly, as a gift fueled by the redeeming work of this Jesus we sang of today. Helen already read our text, so let's begin by looking to our Lord in prayer (slide/black.2).

There's a guy (slide.3); his name is C. S. Lewis. In his lifetime, Lewis wrote (slide.4) a ton of books. Some of his books, like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, were works of fiction. Other books, like *Mere Christianity* were works of nonfiction. Now, of his nonfiction books, there was one particular book that Lewis spoke of as a favorite.² The name of that book was (slide.5) *The Abolition of Man*; it was published in 1943.

Among other things (slide.6), the book examines this thing called "natural law"—the idea that each of us possesses an innate understanding of right and wrong—almost as if it's *hardwired* into our very being. Advocates of this concept of natural law often point to the (slide.7) second chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. In this chapter, the Apostle Paul makes the case that "you don't have to be Jewish" to have an inborn sense of God's commandments. He writes that:

Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know His law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts.

So Lewis (in his own way), makes the (slide.8) same point as Paul. And in order to prove his point, he uses the appendix of his book to list laws from other ancient traditions that, in one way or another, line up with the laws we see in the Bible. He's not saying that all roads lead to the same place (nothing like that), but he is saying that there is continuity. So, Lewis makes a list of these laws—laws from ancient Egypt and Assyria, Greece and Rome, China and Babylon, Norsemen and Native Americans—and he shows that *many* of their laws (not *all*, but *many*) were not unlike the laws we see in the Ten Commandments that were given on Mount Sinai. You look at these varied laws and you see that (by in large) they all have a *low* view of murder;

they all have a *high* view of honoring one's mother and father. Almost all frown on adultery. Almost all encourage the giving of alms to the poor. Not one of them says that it's a virtue to lie. Not one of them says that stealing is a good thing.³

And yet there was one law of the Ten that did not appear on any of these other lists. One law that was unprecedented and was unlike any other law any other nation ever saw. And that law was the (slide.9) *fourth* commandment, the one concerning rest. And in truth it is a pretty remarkable law. **One thing is its universal application.** It was not just the wealthy who were given the opportunity to rest (that sort of thing happened all the time). No, it's the inclusion of others who were told they could rest (slide.10): sons and daughters, servants and sojourners, even (slide.11) livestock. Under this law, even farm animals (horses/oxen/mules/border collies) got the day off.

No other culture of the ancient world ever had such a day of rest. No other culture ever even felt it could rest; such an idea was unheard of. The idea that *you* could rest *one day* out of seven. And rest the land *one year* out of seven, and forgive every debt, and free every indentured servant, and rest the entire nation. And then, every fiftieth year (on the year of Jubilee), reboot the entire country, and not only cancel every debt, but return every bit of property to its original owners.⁴ The idea that a nation could do those things and still survive, and still thrive, and not fall apart, and not collapse economically, was (and to this day is still) without precedent. And the reason why this could happen is found here in (slide.12) verse 11 of our text. It's because of (slide.13) the Lord/God. Six days you shall labor, *as your Creator did*. But on the seventh day you shall rest, again, *as your Creator did* (in whose image you are made). The model for rest is the sheer joy of a God who created the things we sang of earlier in our service. This God who created the sun/moon/stars, skies/oceans, insects/birds/beasts and everything else. A world teeming with life, and He does so for His pleasure and for His glory as He calls us to enter into that same joy.

Our Condition.

So even though this is an **ancient** truth, *the idea* of such a rest and *the need* for such a rest is as much a reality today as it was when those tablets of stone were first carved. The reason why is because we are *not* a restful culture and (for the most part) we're not a very restful people. In fact, just the opposite is the case (slide/black.14).

It's funny, in 1967 a testimony before a Senate subcommittee declared that—due to advancements in technology, by 1985 the average American would be working only twenty-two hours a week.⁵ We've become a society of workaholics (especially here in the West). Because of technology,

we can work *anywhere*, and because we can work *anywhere*, we work *everywhere*. We're always on; we're always plugged in. The smartphone is always there; we're constantly checking—on the drive home, at the dinner table, over the weekend, even while on vacation. It's become part of our culture, and we don't seem to mind. I like how Dan Allender puts it; he writes that the call to sabbath is *literally* one of the Ten Commandments, yet it is the one commandment we actually brag about breaking.⁶ We're always talking about being so busy. We're always fighting time; we're always wrestling minutes.

Now when the commandment is (slide.15) repeated in Deuteronomy 5, we notice a change in the language. The focus is not on rest through the lens of God's work of creation, but it is instead on rest as it relates to the redemption of the people of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. The emphasis is different. In Deuteronomy, God ties Sabbath rest to Israel's freedom from slavery. God, in effect, is saying, "*The reason why you can rest is because you have been delivered; you've been set free.*" The commandment is being tied to redemption and to freedom itself. To be unable to rest, to be unable to put our work down is (in a sense) to be a slave.

How Should We Sabbath?

So exactly (slide/black.16) how should we Sabbath? Let me say a couple of things. First off, the Sabbath is not calling for a twenty-two-hour workweek (or for that matter a forty-hour workweek). No, we're called work and to do so diligently. Some careers by nature are time consuming. Few people advance without putting in long hours and absolutely no one starts a business without sacrificing time. But the question is this: Can we rest in the midst of the workweek? Can we (literally) take a day, a 24-hour period and "stop"? And if so, how might we do that—and see that, not as a burden or as a waste of time, but as a gift from God?

Now because of our vocations and because of our work schedules, that day/24-hour period will vary. For some of you, it may be on Friday at sundown. For others (maybe most of you), it may be today. For still others (like me/Mark/James), it's probably some other time during the week.⁷ Even for those who are retired, there should still be a day that is different from the rest. So let me share five things that, over the years, I have found helpful in my own life. Four kinds of rest, and a fifth one that is the key to everything. Number one (slide.17), **celebratory rest**.

I have two quotes: The first comes from a Russian Orthodox theologian; his name is Alexander Schmemmann. Schmemmann writes (slide.18): "*Tell me what you celebrate, and I will tell you who you are.*"⁸ That's very true. The second quote fits in with this; it comes from Albert Schweitzer; Schweitzer writes (slide.19): "*If your soul has no Sunday, it becomes an orphan.*"

You see, there is something about our weekly gathering that is formative (slide/black.20). They adjust us; they recalibrate/reorient us. They remind us of who we are and to whom we belong. And this is something that, from the very beginning, was understood by the Early Church. And it's true for us, even if we're celebrating our day of rest on a different day.

Unfortunately, we live in a religious culture that often thinks of the gathering of God's people as an "optional extra" for the super-spiritual or for those who have nothing better to do. I suppose that's especially true in a place like Florida. It's tempting to see corporate worship as a good thing to do, providing the weather is nice, *but not too nice!*⁹ But, in truth, our souls need, not only the sermons we hear, but also the songs we sing. We need the readings, and our prayers of repentance, and our creeds, and the prayers of the people, and our Lord's Supper, and our benediction, and the fellowship time in our courtyard. Every part of the service is to be food for us.

Number one (slide.21), we need **celebratory rest**. Number two, I think we need some form of (slide.22) **recreational rest**. This one is a little tricky and not without controversy. The English Puritans were especially suspicious of recreational rest and spoke against it in their writings, choosing instead to see the entire day as a day where one would go to church, hear a sermon, go home in order to read devotionals, and then return to church for another sermon.¹⁰ In contrast, the Continental Reformers (those in France, Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands) felt differently. The believers in these countries agreed that believers should gather together, but also head that, afterwards, recreation was permissible.

So here's (slide.23) John Calvin. Calvin was a French theologian who spent many years serving in Switzerland. Looking at his picture, this might be hard to believe, but Calvin apparently knew how to have fun. It's said that, as an expression of his freedom in Christ, he deliberately made it his practice (slide.24) to go lawn bowling (slide.25), and to do so on Sundays after (slide.26) church.¹¹ Some believe this story to be apocryphal.¹² But even if it is just a story, it still lines up with the attitude of the Continental Reformers who, even in their civil laws, made clear provision for (slide.27) recreation on the Lord's Day, so long as those activities took place after the church service came to an end.¹³

Related to this, I think we also (at least occasionally) need some form of (slide.28) **aesthetic rest**.¹⁴ Now, by that I'm not talking about going to an art museum or an opera house (though you can certainly do that). What I mean by that is that we need to regularly expose ourselves to the beauty of God's creation and the creativity of those made in His image. And there's a piece of our humanity that naturally gets this. I don't know if this ever happened to you. You're (slide.29) at the beach,

the sun sets, and what does everyone do? *They applaud!* Why do they do that? There's something intuitive. If asked, those applauding may see the setting of the sun as little more than the automatic mechanism of cosmic forces, but they don't act that way. And nor should we. The world around us (slide.30) is a world God created. A world of beauty, complexity, and design; a world of purpose, transcendence, and joy. So, whether watching the sun set, or eating a great meal, or listening to great music, or reading a great book—part of our call on the Sabbath is to slow down, and to savor, and maybe get our heads out of our phones, and enjoy the world around us. After all, God on the seventh day of creation took the time to look with pleasure at the resplendent (slide.31) beauty that was around Him. And we should do the same.

And then, there's (slide.32) **idle rest**. We read in Leviticus 25 that the people of Israel were told to let the land rest every seven years. One year out of seven they were to leave the land (slide.33) idle—to let it (slide.34) overgrow and literally "veg out." This was done in order to make certain (slide.35) the nutrients of the land were replenished. Well, it turns out that you and I are a lot like that land. There's something about stopping from the grind of the week so we too might "veg out," and find our nutrients, and find our refreshment in God. Where we shut off the devices, and put the work away, and maybe skip the gym, and take a nap. And oddly, do you notice how often our best ideas, our most (slide.36) creative moments come at those times? Not while we're sitting at our desks staring into a laptop, but after we step away and sit back and shut our eyes for a bit.

Our Deeper Rest.

But there is also a (slide.37) fifth form of rest that is central to the other four and central to our lives. It's something that is greater than any vacation; greater than any weekend away. It's (slide.38) **our deeper rest**; the rest we find in Christ. A rest from our hiding, a rest from our self-justification, a rest from our need to prove ourselves. I love the verse from the psalm (slide.39) James led us in earlier in our service—this call for us to (slide.40) "cease striving." It's a command extended to the nations, but it's extended to us as well.¹⁵ This (slide.41) rich Hebrew word (*ra-phā*); this command to:

"Be still,"

"Calm down,"

"Let go,"

"Let it be,"

*"Stop fighting."*¹⁶

But it's presented/set forth, not as a product of self-discipline or drive or resolve. Instead, it's rooted in the recognition (slide.42) that God is God (with all the names Bill walked us through last week).

So how does this happen in our lives? It happens through the Gospel. It happens through the work of Christ on the cross. It happens through Jesus who, not only declares the truth, but also provides the way. This Jesus who says (slide.43):

Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.¹⁷

These are no ordinary words. This is instead a beautiful example of Christ's unconditional election. After all, who does Jesus invite? It's not those who think they have it all figured out. It's not them. No, it's the weary and the tired. Those who are burdened, saddled, and drained. After all, every single person is under a yoke. Some yokes are imposed from the outside, but most of them are inward. But Jesus says that His yoke is different. He speaks of a "yoke" that is found in Him, and a "rest" that is grounded in His gospel. A rest that originates, not in ourselves,

but in the one who delivered us. This Jesus who became the Second Adam and the True Israel. This Jesus who lived out their history, and replayed their stories, and rendered obedience where they were disobedient. It's what Augustine was getting at when he wrote the opening of his *Confessions*. It's the idea that (slide.44) God has made us for Himself and that our hearts are restless until they rest in Him.¹⁸ No person, no job, no accolade, no amount of money, no amount of respect, no praise, no hobby, no habit (whether good or bad). As Mark (slide/black.45) has been sharing, as Bill shared last week, nothing other than Christ and His work at Calvary can fully bear the weight of us as people made in the image and likeness of our Lord and Savior. Anything else we look to is too small; anything else we trust falls short. And to see this is music. To see this is poetry. This is the strength we seek. This is what it means to be clean. This is what it means to be human. This is the freedom, and the grace, and love, and the rest our souls desperately need.

Let's pray.

¹ OT reading: Ps 46:1-3, 10-11 (NASB 1995).

² C. S. Lewis, "Letter to Mary Willis Shelburne" (1955), in *Collected Letters Volume Three: Narnia, Cambridge and Joy 1950-1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

³ C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 1944, 1974), 83-101.

⁴ There are some analogies of this in the histories of the Babylonians and Hittites. A newly inaugurated king might choose to release debts upon coming into power in order to score points with his subjects. But what is radical about the OT sabbath laws is that they are completely detached from human initiation and sit above the power of an earthly king.

⁵ Nancy Gibbs, "Living: How America Has Run Out of Time," *Time*, April 24, 1989; Tyler Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2022), 36-37.

⁶ Dan Allender, *Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 6, 20.

⁷ For a thoughtful argument on the flexibility of the actual day see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 565-68.

⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Celebration of Faith* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir, 1994), 17.

⁹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Ten Commandments: What They Mean, Why They Matter, and Why We Should Obey Them* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 73.

¹⁰ R. J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition," in *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999), 326-27).

¹¹ R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2007), 342; cf. John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford Press, 1954), 233.

¹² See Chris Codwell, "Calvin in the Hands of the Philistines, Or, Did Calvin Bowl on the Sabbath?," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 6 (2010): 31-49.

¹³ Antonius Thysius, "Disputation 21: On the Lord's Day," in *The Leiden Synopsis: Synopsis of Purer Theology* (1625), 512; Charles L. Jacob, "Eat the Fat, Drink the Sweet, and be Merry: A Biblical Defense for Play on the Lord's Day," *IIIM Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 12 (2000): 3-10.

¹⁴ Tim Keller, "Time, Sabbath, and the Steward-Leader" (sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2007).

¹⁵ David M. Howard Jr., "Psalms," *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 930; cf. Wilson, *Psalms: Volume 1*, NIVAC, 721.

¹⁶ ESV, CSB, GWT, JPS, GNB.

¹⁷ Matt 11:28-30.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.