

“The Heights of the Earth”  
(Isaiah 58:13-14)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. This evening, we’re going to conclude this section on walking with the Lord on the Lord’s Day or the Christian Sabbath. We’ve seen this far:
  - a. That the fourth commandment – “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy” – continues by virtue of the fact that it is part of God’s unchanging standard, that the Spirit writes that standard on our hearts in regeneration, that the Sabbath was predicted as continuing in the Old Covenant, and that Christ declared Himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath.
  - b. That the day we are to observe the Sabbath is the day Jesus rose from the dead, according to the author to the Hebrews, and by way of the example of the early church.
  - c. That on this day we are not to work or cause others to work.
  - d. That we are instead to rest – not only from our work, but also from our worldly recreations, as well as any thoughts we might have or words about them – so that we might devote the whole day to God in worship.
  - e. That there are exceptions to this rule – the rule of necessity and mercy that apply not only to work, but also to recreation.
    - (i) This is what we considered last week.
    - (ii) When something must be done on the Lord’s Day, otherwise life or property might be lost, we need to do it.
    - (iii) Mercy also dictates that we do good on the Sabbath and not refuse those who need our help.
    - (iv) Necessity might also dictate that we gain a bit of exercise so as better to focus on worship.
      - (a) The person who is likely to sleep through the service would do better to get some exercise so that he can stay awake.
      - (b) The child who won’t be able to sit still would do well to use up some of that energy so he can sit still.
      - (c) When we talk about necessity, we are moving into an area that won’t be the same for everyone.
      - (d) The common denominator is whether it’s really necessary or not: we need to do what we must so that we might give God our very best devotion in worship.
2. We’ve spent more time on this topic because it’s something that is severely neglected or altogether lost in most churches today.
  - a. Many believers have had little if any teaching on the subject.
  - b. And yet it’s one of the most vital commandments to keep for our spiritual wellbeing.

## B. Preview.

1. This evening, we'll consider one more application of this commandment that we don't often think about, and then we'll consider the incentive the Lord gives us to keep it.
  - a. The principle is: God wants us to honor this day by making it the most special day of all.
  - b. The incentive He gives us for keeping it is that of promised blessing.
2. Let's consider both of these for a few moments.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, let's consider that God wants us to honor this day by making it the most special day of all: this is also what it means to keep it holy.
  1. If I were to ask you what the most special day of the year is to you, what would you say?
    - a. Some of you might say Christmas: the remembrance of Christ's birth, especially our children who like to give and receive presents.
    - b. Others of you might say Easter: the remembrance of Christ's resurrection.
    - c. Still others might add Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Ascension Day, and Pentecost, all which look back on important aspects of Christ's life and ministry.
    - d. But what is the most special day of the year? It's really the Lord's Day: this is the day the Lord wants us to keep special, the only day He commands us to keep special.
  2. How do we know whether the Lord wants us to observe something in His church?
    - a. There are really two ways:
      - (i) He commands it in Scripture.
      - (ii) He commends it to us by way of example in Scripture.
    - b. In the Old Covenant He commanded several feasts to keep the redemptive work of Christ before their eyes, though in shadow form:
      - (i) He commanded Passover to remind them of the Lord's redemption of His people out of Egypt, when He killed the first-born of the Egyptians, but passed over His people in His mercy (Lev. 23:5-8) – to show them that through the blood of His Son He would pass over their sins and redeem them from Satan's kingdom.
      - (ii) He commanded them to observe the Feast of Booths to remind them of their wilderness wanderings, "That your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt (Lev. 23:43). This was to show them that Christ would lead them through the wilderness of this world to the promised land of heaven.
      - (iii) He commanded several other feasts as well.
      - (iv) He also instituted one by way of example: Purim, when the Lord delivered His people from the hands of Haman during the time of Queen

- Esther (9:11-32). This was another picture of how the Lord would keep all His promises and deliver them from the hands of their enemies.
- (v) God's people knew these things were God's will because He commanded them or gave these things to them by way of example.
- c. What has He shown us in the New Covenant?
- (i) In the New Covenant, He has appointed only two memorials, both of which He calls by His own name: The Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day.
  - (ii) These two summarize everything the Old Covenant feasts and memorials were pointing to, everything the Lord did in His earthly ministry.
  - (iii) We need to remember the regulative principle here:
    - (a) The Lord tells us what He wants us to do in worship and all of life. We don't tell Him what He wants.
    - (b) The point is He didn't command us to commemorate every event in the life of His Son or His church, but He did institute two memorials that look back on the two most significant events in redemptive history.
    - (c) When Christ instituted His Supper, He took the bread and "broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me'" (Luke 22:19). "In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me'" (1 Cor. 11). He wanted us to remember His death.
    - (d) He gave us the Lord's Day to remember His resurrection: that it was on this day that He was justified, that He received eternal life, that He became the source of justification and eternal life for us, that He gave us His Spirit, and we are to rejoice.
    - (e) In other words, we aren't to remember Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension only once a year – such as what we tend to do when we celebrate all the holy days – but we are to remember them every week.
    - (f) These are the only two memorials the Lord has given us in the New Covenant, the only two that He attaches His name to.
    - (g) We are not to add to them, or take away, because if we do either, we are taking away from the glory of these memorials.
    - (h) The more we multiply holy days, the less holy the Lord's Day will be.
    - (i) If every day is special, then no day is special.
    - (j) Samuel Rutherford, that great Scottish Presbyterian pastor and theologian of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, once wrote to his congregation while in prison, "Remember that I forewarned you to forbear the dishonoring of the Lord's blessed name, in swearing, blaspheming, cursing, and the profaning of the Lord's Sabbath; willing you to give that day, from morning to night, to praying, praising, hearing of the word, conferring, and speaking not your own words but God's words, thinking and meditating on God's nature, word, and work; and that every day at morning and at night (at least), you should sanctify the Lord by praying in your houses, publicly in the hearing of all . . . And that no day

besides the Sabbath (which is of His own appointment) should be kept holy, and sanctified with preaching and the public worship of God, for the memory of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension; seeing such days so observed are unlawful, will-worship, and not warranted in Christ's word. And that everything, in God's worship, not warranted by Christ's Testament and word, was unlawful (*Letters*, 522).

(k) If we treat the Sabbath like other days or treat other days like the Sabbath, we take away from its special character.

3. Along these same lines, if we are to keep the Sabbath holy, we need to keep other holidays from intruding into it.
  - a. Have you noticed how many secular holidays fall on the Lord's Day?
  - b. This year, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, and Halloween will all fall on the Lord's Day. Three of these move around from year to year, but two of them are always on this day.
  - c. And so what should we do? Should we celebrate these events on the Lord's Day? Should we take our attention from Christ and place them on these other things?
  - d. And what about birthdays and anniversaries that also fall on the Lord's Day.
  - e. What should we do?
    - (i) First, we should thank God for fathers and mothers, for another year of life, for another year of marriage, for another year of freedom. There's certainly nothing wrong with this; though we should be doing this every Lord's Day. "Forget none of His benefits" (Ps. 103:2).
    - (ii) But we need to be careful. This time belongs to the Lord. Unless the Lord tells us clearly in Scripture that we can take His time to celebrate something else, we shouldn't do it.
    - (iii) This isn't really that difficult to resolve. We can celebrate these events on any other day of the week, and we should (excepting, perhaps, Halloween).
    - (iv) We need to keep the Lord's Day holy. Let's not intrude on the Lord's time. It belongs to Him. What He calls us to do on this day is far more important than any of these other things.

- B. Let's close this section on the Sabbath with an encouragement of what the Lord promises if we will keep the Sabbath holy.
1. We've already considered the spiritual benefits of spending a day with the Lord.
    - a. We'll be less in love with the world and more in love with God.
    - b. If you keep the day holy, you will become spiritually stronger.
  2. But consider also what the Lord says in our text. If we will remember His day to keep it holy:
    - a. Then we will delight ourselves in the Lord.
      - (i) We will demonstrate that we really do love Him.
      - (ii) And He will reveal Himself more and more to us so that we will delight in Him more.

- (iii) The more we take pleasure in the Lord, the more pleasure we will find in Him.
  - (iv) Our love for Him will grow.
- b. He will make us ride on the heights of the earth.
    - (i) This means He will watch over us and protect us: a high place is a place where our enemies cannot reach us.
    - (ii) It is a place of honor and exaltation (Deu. 32:12-13).
    - (iii) If we honor Him, He will honor us.
  - c. And He will feed us with the heritage of Jacob or the blessings of the New Covenant.
    - (i) Jacob's heritage was the land and the produce of the ground, all which pointed to heaven.
    - (ii) If we keep the Sabbath, the Lord will give us a foretaste of that heavenly city here, and will strengthen our assurance that the heavenly Canaan is ours.
  - d. God guarantees it: "For the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isa. 58:14).
3. When we keep the Lord's Day, we are putting ourselves in the path of blessing.
- a. God blessed the Sabbath at the beginning when He established it, and He stands ready to bless His people now who keep it.
  - b. Jonathan Edwards once wrote, "O therefore, how well is it worth our while to improve this day, to call upon God and seek Jesus Christ. Let awakened sinners be stirred up by these things to improve the Sabbath-day, as they would themselves most in the way of the Spirit of God. Improve this to call upon God; for then he is near. Improve it for reading the Holy Scriptures, and diligently attending his word preached; for then is the likeliest time to have the Spirit accompanying it. Let the saints who are desirous of growing in grace, and enjoying communion with God, improve the Sabbath in order to it."
  - c. May the Lord help each one of us to make the best use of His Sabbaths to strengthen us here and prepare our souls for heaven. Amen.