Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Last Sunday afternoon we noted that with the Heidelberg Catechism’s treatment of the 10 Commandments, only the 3rd Commandment gets two Lord’s Days. And my question to you was If you had been asked in a quiz to guess which commandment gets two Lord’s Days, would your guess have been the 3rd Commandment? And I asked several of you this after service and you all said, “No.” And then I asked which commandment you would have guessed and a common response was the 4th Commandment. And that is not a surprise because probably a vast majority of professing Christians today would reject the idea that we ought to observe a Sabbath in any way. So yes, they go to church on Sunday morning, but going shopping afterwards or working or eating at a restaurant or attending a sports match is absolutely fine. They see the whole notion of observing a day as Old Testament, ceremonial law, and not for believers today.

But our Lord’s Day talks about a “festive day of rest.” And ‘festive’ has to do with feasts and festivals and celebration and joy. And the Westminster Confession of Faith says,

*God … in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment biding all men in all ages – has specially appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy to Him. [In Old Testament times it] was the last day of the week. Beginning with the resurrection of Christ, the appointed Sabbath was changed to the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord’s Day, a day to be to continued until the end of the age as the Christian Sabbath.*

Now we hold that the Confessions faithfully summarize the teaching of Scripture. So **what reasons do we find in Scripture for Christians to observe a “festive Day of Rest”?** That’s our theme question for today. And we are going to consider four reasons using three passages of Scripture. And I trust that these reasons will help us observe the Lord’s Day with that sense of joy and celebration that the Lord intends for us.

1. So let’s start with **reason number 1**. Please turn in your Bibles to **Exodus 20:8-11**.
   1. And as soon as I said Exodus 20, many of you will know that that is where we find the? 10 Commandments. And where else do we find the 10 Commandments in the Bible? Deuteronomy 5. And that is where we will turn for our third reason. And we will look at the words of Exodus 20:8-11 as our second reason, but even before we look at the words, **the very fact that we are dealing with one of the 10 commandments is reason number 1**.
      1. In our journey through Leviticus, we have noted the three types of law that God gave in the Bible: The **ceremonial** law, the **civil** law, and the **moral** law. And the moral law is the 10 Commandments. And the moral law is for *everyone* in *every* *age*. God did not give 10 Commandments to Israel and 9 or 6 or 4 commandments to everyone else.
         1. On Judgment Day, God will condemn some people to an eternity in hell. And if they ask, “Why?” He will reply that it is because they are sinners. And if they ask why they are sinners, He will reply, You are a sinner because I gave you my commandments but you did not keep them. **Romans 6:23** says, “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.” And we fall short of the glory of God because we do not keep His commandments. And so, God’s judgment will be a just judgment.
         2. Now, I hasten to add that the **good news of the gospel** is that eternal life in heaven is not about our ability to keep God’s commandments; it is about believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life* (**John 3:16**).” So if you have believed in Jesus Christ, then on Judgment Day, though you have also not kept God’s law, Jesus will step forward and say, “I kept all the commandments for this one and I died on the cross to wash away this one’s guilt. Father, this one is my brother/sister! Let him/her enter into our eternal rest!” That’s the good news of the gospel!
         3. But our point here is that because the 10 Commandments are God’s moral law, He expects *all* people at *all* times to obey them. The 4th Commandment was not just for Old Testament Israel. So that means that He expects everyone alive today to obey the 4th Commandment! And unrepentant sinners who stand before Christ on Judgment Day will be condemned to hell for breaking the 4th Commandment as well as all the others.
2. So the first reason why we ought to observe the festive day of rest is simply that God commands us to do so. And while that should be reason enough, God Himself provides more reasons within the commandment itself. So the **second reason** to observe the festive day of rest is spelled out in **verse 11**: “*For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy*.” And we call this the **creation reason** to observe the festive day of rest.
   1. And the logic is pretty simple – God did the work of creation in six days and then He rested on the seventh day giving us a pattern for our week – six days of work and one day of rest.
      1. Now, this commandment was given first to the people of Israel. They had just left pagan Egypt and they had a lot to learn about living as God’s people. And yet, turn back a few chapters to **Exodus 16**. There we have the story of the sending of the manna. And I am sure you boys and girls will remember that story. The people complained about a lack of food and so the Lord told Moses to tell the people that He would send them a miraculous bread. And God said to Moses, tell the people to gather it each morning but on the sixth day, gather twice as much because I will not send any on the Sabbath day. And that is what the people did. And Moses said, “*Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord … Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none*.”
      2. And **what is fascinating is that the 4th Commandment had not been given yet**. But the concept of a Sabbath day already existed among the people of Israel. And this is because it was a **creation** **pattern**. All that the people of Israel had at that time was the oral tradition – people passing down the stories of creation and Noah and Abraham from one generation to the next. But so foundational was the pattern of creation that *before* God gave His people the 10 Commandments, they already understood and practiced Sabbath observance. Now, there was more they needed to learn about the Sabbath, which is why God gave them the 10 Commandments and had Moses write them down on tablets of stone and put them in the Ark of the covenant. But the key point here is that Sabbath observance goes back way beyond Israel to Creation itself. So observing the festive day of rest has *creation* origins.
   2. Now, just to be clear, **this is not to suggest that God somehow needed to rest from His creation work**. It is not as though He was tired from six days of hard labour and needed a day off. And this was true, also, for Adam and Eve, at first. For they were to observe Sabbath before the Fall; before hard sweaty toil and weeds became a reality. In fact, I don’t know if you have considered this before but Adam and Eve’s first full day in creation was the Sabbath! They were created on day six, so their first full day was the Sabbath. They had not even begun their work when they joined God on the Sabbath and rested. But God also knew that sin would come into creation and that we would get tired from our six days of work and we would absolutely need a weekly day of rest. So He set the pattern for us right at the start of creation.
      1. And that is why He says in the commandment, “*On this day, you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who stays within your gates*.” God wants everyone to enjoy a day of rest. This is why you should not work and why you shouldn’t go shopping or to a restaurant, etc, because then you make it necessary for others to work.
3. But this kind of foundational and basic and universal reason to observe a Sabbath is filled with a gospel flavour as we come to the **third reason** to observe the festive day of rest. And this is where we turn to **Deuteronomy 5**, which is where the 10 Commandments are given again. For in **5:15** you will see that the reason for keeping Sabbath there is different than the one given in Exodus: “*You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day*.” And we call this reason the **redemption** **reason**. Why were the people of Israel to observe the Sabbath? Not only because God commanded it, and not only because it is a creation pattern, but because they were a redeemed or rescued or delivered people.
   1. Young people, how do you react to your parents telling you that you need to be home by 10pm? Do you think, Wow! My parents love me so much and they want what’s best for me and they want me to know maximum joy! Or do you see their rules as designed to keep you from having fun and make you miserable? That’s how we typically view laws, isn’t it. On the motorways the speed limit is 100. And petrolheads like me see this as a joy killer; why can’t I go as fast as I want like on the autobahn? But the 100 km/h speed limit is designed to save lives. And I can assure you that being alive is much more joyful than being in a car accident. Well, it is the same with God’s commandments. Over in **chapter 6** Moses was to tell the people, “*to do all these statutes [and] to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as we are this day*.” So God’s commandments were designed to maintain prosperity and freedom and life, including keeping the Sabbath.
   2. But God also knew that **the only thing that could truly motivate obedience was thankfulness**. So that is why His law begins by referring to redemption from slavery in Egypt and the reason given here for observing the Sabbath was redemption from slavery to Egypt. He did not want His people to become slaves to work or slaves to possessions or slaves to entertainment and recreation or slaves to other gods, so He said, Remember, I redeemed you from slavery in Egypt. So put down your tools and your toys and turn to me. Focus on me. Celebrate me. Rejoice in your redemption.
   3. And those of you who know your New Testaments will already know where we head next – **Romans 6**. Romans 6 is a celebration of the fact that we New Testament believers have been set free from slavery to sin and death by the blood of Jesus Christ.
      1. **Verse 6**, “*Our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin*.”
      2. **Verse 17**, “*But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin … have become slaves of righteousness*.”
      3. **Verses 22-23**, “*But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*.”
      4. So we have an even greater redemption than the people of Israel as a motivation for our obedience; we have the redemption in Christ that their redemption is Egypt was just a tiny foretaste of.
      5. And that means that if they had good reason to observe the Sabbath day, we have even more reason to observe the festive day of rest! In fact, we could paraphrase the 4th Commandment like this: “*Remember that you were slaves [to sin] and that [Jesus] brought you out of there with a mighty hand and [His] outstretched arm[s]. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the [Lord’s] Day*.”
      6. God says, My children, I know you have busy weeks that make it hard for you to focus on your salvation in Christ. So I give you one day where you can drop everything else and make Christ your focus. I will clear that day of your usual appointments and duties and recreations so that you can come together with your brothers and sisters and hear me speak to you in preaching and respond in song and prayer. And you will have time to visit with each other and to visit those in hospital or prison or care homes, and to read my word and good books and do bible study preparation. This is my gift to you. It is for your good. Celebrate your redemption in Christ. Use this day well!
4. And if **the command itself**, and the **creation** reasonand the **redemption** reason were not enough, God gives us a **fourth** **reason** in **Hebrews 4:9-11**: “*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience*.” And here we see that the 4th Commandment not only looks ***back*** to creation and to redemption ***in the here and now*** but also ***forward*** to eternal life in heaven. And the theological term for everything to do with the Second Coming of Christ and heaven and hell is eschatology. So this is the **eschatological** reason.
   1. When God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt they began their journey to the Promised Land. And you will see in **3:11** that God called life in the Promised Land “rest.” But because the people of Israel kept complaining on the journey, a whole generation was not allowed to see this rest and they died in the wilderness. Look at the last verse of chapter 3: “*we see that they were not able to enter [God’s rest] because of unbelief*.” Well, the original readers of Hebrews had professed faith in Christ but because of persecution they were thinking about abandoning Christ and going back to Judaism. So what the author of Hebrews does is to equate the Promised Land with heaven. He says, if you abandon Christ, you will be like those Old Testament Israelites who did not make it to the Promised Land; you will not enter the rest of heaven. And he does this in **verses 9- 11** by saying, “*There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God* … *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience*.”
      1. Now, the rest of eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth is much greater and more wonderful than life in the Promised Land! They still had disease and enemies and hard, sweaty, weed-afflicted work, and death. But in heaven, there will be no more enemies, and no more hard, sweaty, weed-afflicted work, and no more disease and dysfunction and death.
      2. But the key point here is that a part of the reason that God gave the 4th Commandment was to point His people forward to their eternal rest. We see this in the term “*Sabbath rest*.”
         1. For the Old Testament Israelites, the Sabbath allowed them to celebrate life in the Promised Land but also to look forward to the greater rest of heaven.
         2. And for us, the Christian Sabbath or the Lord’s Day allows us to celebrate salvation in Christ. He has come and He has secured the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. But there is something that Christ still has to fulfill in the future – He has to come again and take us to be with Himself. So this day also allows us to prepare for and long for when we shall be with Him in glory.

I am hoping you all know the basics of baseball or softball, but when you start playing those games the first thing you have to do is hit the ball. But you don’t get any points for just hitting the ball, you have to run around the bases and back to home plate to get a point. And typically, if a child is playing baseball, they have at least one parent who lives the dream with them. They come to each practice and they do batting skills at home and they watch games on TV together. And the parent cheers the first time the child hits the ball, even if it just plops down in front of them. And there are words of encouragement to ‘try again!’ and ‘you will make it to the base next time!” each time the child gets out. And there is a loud cheer the first time the child hits the ball and makes it to first base and hears the umpire call ‘safe!’ But there is absolute elation and jubilation for both child and parent when they make it to home plate the first time and score a run! Well, the Christian life is much harder and the stakes are much higher than playing baseball. And arriving in heaven is something far more glorious than making it to home plate in baseball. But the reason I have used this analogy is because there is much toil as we journey toward heaven, but we are encouraged all along the way by our Father in heaven, and there will be elation and jubilation when we finally arrive in heaven for us and for Him. And in a very real sense we ‘practice’ for that day every Lord’s Day. We receive His encouragement to keep going, and He reminds us of His promise to bring us home, which is ‘Yes’ and ‘Amen’ in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So congregation, let us observe the festive day of rest because God has commanded us to do so, because it is a creation pattern, because of our redemption in Christ, and to prepare us for the home in heaven that awaits us. Amen.