

**What Does the Third Commandment Mean to Us?**  
**Sermon on Exodus 20 : 8 – 11**  
**Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI**  
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**October 22, 2006**

God promised the Israelites: *Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.* And God has promised the same to us! Amen.

**Part One: We Confess Our Sinful Busyness**

Dear fellow busy brothers and sisters in Christ:

Life is hectic....

Life is hectic for you littlest kids out there. You wake up early in the morning, rush to eat, rush to day care, rush back home, watch tv, take a bath, and rush to bed.

Life is hectic for you students out there. You wake up early in the morning, rush to eat, rush to school, rush to sports, rush home, rush to get your homework done, and you get to bed way too late.

Life is hectic for you workers out there. You wake up early in the morning, rush to work, check the phone messages, check the e-mail messages, respond to all of them, entertain dozens of other such interruptions during the day, meet with dozens of people or produce thousands or tens of thousands of parts, rush home, rush to eat, check the phone messages, check the e-mail messages, respond to them all, and collapse into bed way too late.

Life is hectic for you parents out there. Besides everything I've just mentioned, you are taxi service: to and from school, maybe multiple schools, to and from work, maybe multiple workplaces, to and from sports or other activities for every child, and you have to maintain a household by cleaning the place, getting to the store, and handling whatever it is that has broken down most recently—whether machine, or offspring.

And life is hectic for you retirees out there. A lot of you “retirees” are still working. A lot of you are still bringing up families, grandbabies, and the like. And all the rest of you are occupied enough with the volunteer work you do and the doctors appointments you go to.

Life is hectic for us all!

Now, why is that? Why is life so hectic?

The plain and simple answer is: sin. Sin is why life is so hectic for all of us.

“No, pastor! You don't mean to tell me it's sinful to be busy?!” Nope, that's not what I said. What I said is that sin – the general presence of sinfulness in this world – that is why life is so hectic for us all. And I can tell you three things to support that.

First of all, wouldn't we all admit that sometimes it is our sinfully wrong priorities that get us so very busy? I know I've got to admit that.

Secondly – and here's one you can't argue with! – it is sin that brought death into the world. And because of death, our lives here are limited; they're temporary. In a sense we “have to hurry” to get our things done, because there may not be a tomorrow for us; we have a limited time with which to work. And that's because of sin.

And thirdly, sin is why life is so hectic for all of us because, sinfully, we fall into thinking that we really do have to get it all done ourselves. Sinfully, we get so wrapped up in our little world that we forget Somebody Else really does govern our world—and govern us....

## Part Two: We Acknowledge Christ's Rescuing Forgiveness

No wonder God gave his Old Testament people the Third Commandment! No wonder God said: **Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.** Literally: *Remember the day of ceasing* – it was the day God ceased his creating work; it was the day on which his people should cease theirs – *Remember the day of ceasing: to reserve it for God's use.* You see, that's what it meant to keep that day holy. Although the whole world belonged to the Lord, there was in the Old Testament the secular realm and the sacred realm—holy people, whom the Lord reserved for his use; holy things (for example, at the temple), which the Lord reserved for his use; and this holy day, which the Lord reserved for his use.

Going on, God explains: **Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day** – Saturday, in Jewish reckoning: six o'clock Friday night through six o'clock Saturday night – **is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.** Can you imagine? One whole day a week with no work—in the Old Testament that meant: no planting, no harvesting, no herding, no shepherding, no buying, no selling, no cooking, no traveling! Can you imagine?!

And ... no exceptions! – **Neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals,** because, after all, you'd have to work with your animals, **nor the alien within your gates**—the immigrant resident who had become a part of Israel—none of them shall work.

Why not? Why no work for one whole day on the last day of the week? It says: **In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.** If God, who had much more work to do than any of his people ever did..., if God, who was still doing all the work, even though he was now operating through his people to get everything accomplished..., if that God – the Almighty! – commanded his people to cease their work: then they needed to cease their work!

Forty years later, when he was repeating these Ten Commandments for a new generation, Moses gave another reason for the Sabbath observance. He said: *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.* In other words: if God, who freed his people from slavery in Egypt..., if that God wanted also to free the Israelites from slavery to work one day each week, so that they would remember that event: then they needed to cease their work!

And friends, all of this still also applies to all of us!

No, we no longer need to observe the Sabbath day; we no longer need to cease all our labor from six o'clock on Friday night through six o'clock on Saturday night. Colossians chapter two, verse sixteen, says clearly: *Do not let anyone judge you ... with regard to ... the Sabbath day.*

But we do still need – periodically, regularly – to interrupt our busy lives to be reminded, “God is still in charge of my life. When I am working, it is still really God who is doing the work. And when I personally am not working, God himself still is working for me.” We've got to interrupt our busy lives and remind ourselves, “All my food, all my clothing, all my shelter, all my everything comes from God—whether I'm working or not. I can trust in him! And I must take time to thank him.”

And we still need – periodically, regularly – to interrupt our busy lives to be reminded of that second thing, “God has also freed me from slavery. I do not work out of a slavish fear of starving to death or dying of exposure. And I do not work out of a

slavish fear that my work – or anything else I do! – contributes to my salvation. No! God freed me from that slavery!

We've got to interrupt ourselves to remind ourselves: "God has done all the work. God sent his Son. God grew his Son. God's Son preached and taught and healed and trained ceaselessly—to free me from such labor. And God's Son was tried, suffered pain, suffered hell, and died—to free me from all my sins."

We've got to interrupt our busy lives and remind ourselves, "My heavenly food, my clothing of righteous forgiveness, my heavenly shelter, it all comes from Christ Jesus. I can trust him! And I must take time to thank him."

### **Part Three: We Interrupt Our Lives to Listen to Word of God's Goodness**

Now, how can we best arrange to interrupt our lives in that way—and remind ourselves that God is in complete control and God has freed us from our slavery to sin?

Well, again we get a clue from the Sabbath day observance. Leviticus twenty-three, three says: *The seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly.* You see, the Israelites assembled together on the Sabbath day, on Saturday. And what did they do? Well, obviously they reminded one another that the Lord was their Maker and Redeemer. And how did they do that? Well, once the Old Testament was written, they read it together. And once the New Testament was written, they added that.

Can we do any better? Can we do any better – one day a week – than to get together and to remind one another that God is our Maker and Redeemer, just as he claims in his Word? Is any excuse really strong enough to keep us from being right here right now—and right here again a week from now? How can any excuse be strong enough! – with as great a God as we've got?

You see: our ancestors had it right, when they wrote on our altar Jesus' words: "Kommet her zu mir ihr alle, die ihr mühselig und beladen seid, ich will euch erquicken"; *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

In fact, when you think about it, don't we have to – for awhile every day – get together in our families and remind one another that God is our Maker and Redeemer, according to his Word? Is any excuse really strong enough to keep us from reading the Bible together at home every day?

You see: Martin Luther had it right, when he wrote in his Small Catechism: "We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his word, but regard it as holy, and gladly hear and learn it."

That's what the Third Commandment means to us. We confess our sinful busyness. We acknowledge Christ's rescuing forgiveness. And we interrupt our busy lives to listen to Word of his great goodness.

God grant that we do that every week – every day even – until that day Christ delivers us into his everlasting and heavenly rest! Amen.

God promised the early Christians: *You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* And God has promised the same to us! Amen.