



3 THE LAST WORD

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect his Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.

From the moment you are called out of bed in the morning—by your parent, guardian, or an alarm clock mimicking their voices—until the moment you say good night, your day is filled with words. They pop out at you from the toothpaste tube, spill out of the radio or TV, stare at you from the cereal box, and send you off to school.

When you get there, words say hello, convey lessons to you from your books and teachers, and carry fun between you and your friends. Words follow you to the athletic field, supermarket, or wherever you go. They even invade your dreams. Words make your day.

Words make the world's day, too. Business, government, entertainment—everything depends on words. Words can be



a nuisance sometimes, and they don't always do the job they should. But we'd be lost without them.

Hidden in this worldwide flood of words is one word that stands apart. It hits the ear and vibrates the eardrum just like any other word. But it is different. It is the word of the God of the promise.

Having decided to be your God and having given you his name, God is going to speak with you. God is going to tell you his decision and keep calling out the new you that will be his.

But that's not all. God has made a decision about the whole creation, which he wants to tell you about. God is going to make a new heaven and a new earth. Just as God had the first word at creation, God is going to have the last word, to make you and all things new.

Because it is so important for us to hear this word, God sends this commandment into all of the noise of our world. "Listen," God says. "I'm going to tell you the story of Jesus. And I'm going to tell you the end of the story, too—the end of your story and the world's story, what I've got in mind for you and my creation."

The new day coming

That is the purpose of the Third Commandment. God uses it to clear some time for the promise. This time also becomes a time when we can rest while we await God's new day.

God's word is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword," as Hebrews says (4:12). It is a powerhouse, bristling, snapping, and teeming with energy and life. When God speaks, the word goes right to work.

With the word, God made the world. By the word, Jesus healed the sick, drove out the demons, made the deaf hear, the mute talk, the blind see. And it's with the word, too, that God is making not only a new you but a brand new world. That's the goal God has set for everything that was made: to make all things new.

The promise of God's new creation coming is written all over the New Testament. When Jesus came out of the wilderness preaching and teaching, the promise of God's kingdom was



the first word on his lips: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near," he said. "Repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15).

It's this same promise that Paul sings of in 1 Corinthians 15:21-26 when he tells how Christ will destroy all of God's enemies, including death, the last and worst one. When that happens, the book of Revelation says, God will dwell with us, wiping away every tear. Then "death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (21:4).

That's what God has in mind for the whole creation. Now the old self is hard at work in you, struggling to strangle the new you and to be done with God once and for all. Now death looms before you, rubbing its hands together saying, "Someday you'll be mine." Now the creation is filled with animosity and trouble.

But that's not the end of the story. It's not going to go on like this, one day after another, everything the same. God has decided that it won't. God's going to have the last word. God's going to write the end of the story.

When God speaks that word to bring in the new day, everything—you and the whole creation—will be made entirely new. Then all of God's enemies will be destroyed. There will be no more old Adam or Eve in you to fight and struggle against the new you God has made. There will be no more death and dying to leer at us, threatening to destroy the creation. Anything that tries to come between God and us will be destroyed.

That's how the story's going to end—not with the cold stillness of the grave but with the joy of hearing God's voice break the silence. Then we will have the final rest, the greatest rest of all, resting safe and secure with our creator. That's what we're looking forward to, the last word, the new day God has promised.

Resting in the word

It's because God wants to give us this word—the word of what has happened and will happen in Christ—that God commands us to remember the Sabbath day.



Jean-Claude Lejeune

The Sabbath is like a rest stop on a long journey. If you've been on a journey or heard about somebody else's travels, you know what rest stops are like. Sometimes they are quick, with just a few minutes to fill the tank and use the facilities. But there are longer rest stops, too, better ones where you can really rest. Then you can take some time to talk over where you've been and where you're going. And you get a chance to stretch your muscles, to rest and relax before hitting the road again.

Just as you might take time from your travels to talk over where you've been and where you're going, God takes time on the Sabbath to tell us what he's done and what our destination is going to be. God tells us of the decision that has been made for us in Christ, of his promise to be our God, to put the old Adam or Eve in us to death and make us new. And God tells us of our destination, of how Christ is going before us into the future to destroy all of his enemies and make the whole creation new.

The most important thing about the Sabbath, then, is that it is a day to hear God's word. It's not just hearing some words about God; it is God's own word, God speaking to us.

Maybe that's kind of surprising. In fact, you might even think it's preposterous—the very idea that almighty God, the maker



of heaven and earth, the one who raised Jesus from the dead, would ever speak to us! But it's not just an idea; it is Christ's own promise. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them," Jesus says (Matthew 18:20). "My sheep hear my voice," he says. "I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

How does it happen, then? God speaks to us by making his word like one of our words—a word fit for the lips of pastors and teachers, farmers and pharmacists, assembly line workers and astronauts, the oldest great-grandparents and the smallest children. As your pastor and others bear witness of Christ, telling you what God has done and promises to do, God is with you, speaking to you. You have Christ's word on it—that you will hear God's word.

That makes Sunday an entirely different day. Gathering for worship isn't just getting together to hear some nice words about Jesus. It is gathering together with our neighbors to hear what Christ himself has to say to us, to hear the Word and to receive the sacraments.

There's something else that makes Sunday different, too. Just as a traveler's rest stop provides a chance to stretch muscles and relax for a while, the Sabbath provides one day each week to take it easy. We are not machines that can run day and night without ever stopping. We need some time to get out from under the load. So God commands us to take at least one day off each week, a day that is free from the everyday responsibilities of work, study, and other duties. It is a day of rest, rest in the word, a holiday in a holy day.

The ear and day pluggers

You can bet that the old self isn't going to just sit still, quietly listening while God's word is spoken, though. The word is seed, sunshine, and rain for the new you and the new creation. But for the old Adam or Eve, it is a death sentence and obituary all wrapped up into one. So it squirms and fights, trying to plug your ears and your days and so deprive you of the word and the rest that goes with it.

One of the most obvious ways that the old self goes about plugging your ears and your days is by filling them with all



sorts of other things. It is an easy trick. You have lots of studies, and there are all sorts of interesting and fun things to be done. The old self only has to push a little bit, convincing you that there is something you really have to do or something that would really be fun, and it can rob you of your Sabbath completely.

This strategy is so successful that the old self usually doesn't have to get more clever. But it can when it has to. Sometimes the old self attacks the word with a little bit of religion. It works like this: "I read the Bible at home, when I'm alone, and I don't need the rest of that stuff." Or, "I feel so close to God in my garden, when I'm in nature"—or someplace else—"that I don't need that Sunday morning business."

If that's all there is to it—doing a little something to feel close to the Almighty—there's probably no reason to break the daily routine. But that's not the way it is. God has a word for you. Doing a little something to feel close to God is just another one of the old self's tricks designed to close ears to the word and deprive people of the company of others who will make them stronger.

Another of the old self's tricks is reserved for people who do get within earshot of the word. "Just words," the old self sniffs, "no action. All of it is just so much boring talk." Or it may try to make it seem that the word is meant for everyone but you. "God may be speaking to so and so over there," it says, "but this word certainly doesn't apply to you." Either way, the old Adam or Eve fills your ears with so many other things that you can't hear the word.

But don't you worry. God is at work to clear time so that we can rest and hear the word. And one day, sooner than we think, God is going to call the old self's number once and for all, bringing in the new day, the new creation God has promised.

That will be the end of the story that began in Jesus: God's ultimate victory, the coming of God's kingdom, "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). This promise makes Sunday an entirely different day: a day of rest to hear the word, a rest stop on the way to God's new day.



THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean for us?

We are to love and honor God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and others in obedience, but respect, obey, love, and care them.