

Remember The Holy Sabbath

God's Holy Time

Ronny H. Graham

Given 29-Aug-26; Sermon #1891B

With the Feast of Tabernacles only a few weeks away, I thought that we would consider a question that invariably we hear almost every year at the Feast. And that question is, "Why are you here?" Now, of course we are not there yet, so I thought perhaps instead we can ask the question, "Why are you going?" For as long as I have been in God's church, the feasts of God have been something that we greatly anticipate throughout the year, having the chance to get away from our normal routines and jobs and be with people of like mind in worshipping God as He commands. Now many of our brethren we only get to see once a year, and this adds to the desire to be together.

Now for those of us who have been in the church for a while, understand when we speakers refer to what we did back in the Worldwide. But as time marches on, there are fewer and fewer of us, if for no other reason than what we just saw [from the announcements], getting old and dying off. Now many are now in the church do not have a clue of what or how we did things way back then. Again, sometimes as speakers we do not realize that our audience may not have anything to reference to when we speak of the old Worldwide days.

I do not remember which one of our kids it was, but we were talking about the church a few years ago and their response was, "I don't remember anything about Worldwide, and even less about Herbert Armstrong. I never heard him speak." I think Devon, our oldest child, was only around a year old when he died. Now for some of us, what I hope to convey today may seem elementary, but since we have had several baptisms in the last few years, I thought it would be beneficial to consider a couple of God's commandments leading up to the Feast of Tabernacles.

Let us go to the first one in Exodus 20, verses 8 through 11. This is a very familiar one, the fourth commandment.

Exodus 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

Now if there is one of God's commandments that the world completely ignores, this has to be at least one of them. "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy."

The second one I want us to consider is not one of the 10 commandments, but nevertheless it is a command of God regarding the Feast of Tabernacles, and this one we will find in Leviticus chapter 23. In Leviticus 23, let's begin in verse 33 and read down through 43.

Leviticus 23:33-43 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the Lord. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it. For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it. These are the feasts of the Lord which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the Lord, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, everything on its day—besides the Sabbaths of the Lord, besides your gifts, besides all your vows, and besides all your freewill offerings which you give to the Lord. Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy

trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days.'

It may be a while before we get to this second one, but I wanted to go ahead and read it so that we would see something here that is repeated six times in these 10 verses. I think it is easy for you to guess, and we can sort of keep it in the back of our minds as we prepare for the Feast of Tabernacles. I think we have all probably heard that when we see something written in the Bible three times, repeated three times, we should listen carefully and take heed. Well, in these 10 verses, the phrase for seven days occurs six times. That is two threes. So remember, do not forget it.

Now the fourth commandment starts out like no other commandment, in that it says, remember. Now just maybe God knows a thing or two about us humans, because I am sure many of you will agree that the older we get, the more we forget, or so it seems, at least for me. I can recall vividly what happened in Miss Maddox's first grade 60 years ago, but I cannot remember what I was talking about five minutes ago. Was I talking five minutes ago?

After the word remember we find the phrase "keep it holy." The word keep is a very familiar word, but it might be one that we just kind of gloss over. Now it can be used as a noun, but in most cases it is used as a verb indicating action. In regard to the Sabbath, it requires action in keeping that period of time holy. Now the word holy is one of those words that at times seems way out there and perhaps out of reach for some of us. In one sense it is, because we cannot make anything holy. God—and only God—can make things holy. On the other hand, we can profane something that is holy if we do not adhere to the law of God.

I remember my early days in the church when I was trying to explain to one of the local ministers in our neighborhood—this man was not affiliated with the church of God in any way, but he was at a church we attended—and I was trying to explain to him that we had come to understand that the Sabbath was holy and we should make every effort to keep it that way. His response was, "I keep every day holy." Now, since that time, I have come to realize

that this is a typical Protestant response. If we really consider what they are saying, it is one of pride, in that they get to decide what is holy. But that is not true. We cannot keep something holy that God did not make holy to begin with. We may have things that are special to us, we may have things that are sacred to us, but we cannot make anything holy as God does.

This same man tried to tell me that whenever wine was mentioned in the Bible (I am sure all you wine lovers will love this) it meant jam or jelly. My immediate was, "So I guess Noah got drunk after eating grape jelly on toast." This is where the conversation ended. I do not ever remember talking to this man again. There certainly was no use, but he took the Scripture and he adjusted it to his thinking, or we might say applying it to coincide with what he wanted to do. This is a very dangerous thing to do, especially for the called of God. Just ask Nadab and Abihu.

Now it did not occur to me at the time, but in trying to explain to this man what I had begun to understand was actually a holy act of God in calling me and setting me apart—and this is true for all of us that God has called, and we are on the road to sanctification—we are holy to Him because He has made us that way. He has chosen us. Now one other interesting note for the word keep came from *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, and it said, "to retain in one's possession."

For a second scripture, let us go back to Mark 2 and just pick up two scriptures here, just for a second.

Mark 2:27-28 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath."

Do we understand what this says? First, the Sabbath was made for man. God created it as a day of rest. God created it as a special day so we could come before Him, spend time with Him. And second, Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath. He, and only He, did make it holy. He, and only He, can decide how it is to be kept. When we go contrary to that, not keeping it holy as He instructs, we are putting ourselves in place of God.

Like I said a minute ago, the man who professed to keep every day holy was deciding for himself what he considered to be holy. When we make ourselves lord of the Sabbath, that is a very dangerous thing to do. Brethren, God's law is holy, and having been given the ability to understand His truth is an enormous privilege, and we should never take it lightly, treating it as mundane or mediocre, or in this man's case, just another day of the week. Do not forget it. We would do well to keep it holy as God instructs.

Now let us look a little closer at the word holy for a minute. As we saw just previously, only God can make something holy. So let us consider a few definitions for the word holy. According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, holy means to consecrate, sanctify, prepare, dedicate, be hallowed, be holy, be sanctified, be separate. *Vine's Expository Dictionary* denotes to set apart for sacred use, to consecrate or make holy, emphasizing distinction from the common. It is not just any old day of the week; it is holy to God. Just a couple more from *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary*, where it says morally blameless, consecrated to God, that we truly believe the Sabbath is set apart for sacred use, holy to God, and should be regarded as such.

Do we believe that we have been consecrated to Him? I am sure we have all heard that this is a high calling, but it is not only a high calling, brethren, it is a holy calling coming from God. Nobody else called us. Nobody else can call us. Nobody can open our minds to God's truth. Only God can do that. Again, only God can make something holy, and He has chosen to do so with us. This is an enormous privilege that I do not have enough words to describe how precious we are to God.

Just reference these two verses in Zechariah 2:8 and Deuteronomy 32:10. There we find the phrase "the apple of His eye." Do you know what the apple of the eye means? It is a person that is cherished above all others. That is a hard thing to think of in the world we live with so many billions of people out there. God chose us, His apples. God has chosen the called above all others.

Now the first real interaction that I remember having with someone in regards to the Sabbath actually came a few years prior to my family

beginning to attend the Worldwide Church of God. As it turned out, it was three of my first cousins. I was around 12 years old, and it was normal for my family to go to my grandmother's house quite a few times, normally every other week or so. And I was around 12 years old, and we would go to Grandma's. And it was a two hour drive, so we rarely went every week.

But one of my uncles and aunts on the other side of the family had begun to attend church on Saturday, and my cousins all of a sudden could not do anything on Saturday. We could not play ball. We could not ride bikes. We could not go fishing. We could not go swimming. They could not even watch TV. But all the good cartoons came on Saturday morning! We did not have 500 channels like they do now to go to them at any time. What would Saturday mornings be without cartoons?

About the only thing my cousins could do was sit on the porch and watch traffic go by—of course, after they got home from church—and why did they have to drive an hour and a half to get to this one church that met on Saturday? Why, in the church that I had been attending on Sunday, I would play basketball in between the morning Sunday school class and the worship service. Half the time somebody would come get me and say, "Hey, you gotta get back in here." This new church that my cousins had begun to attend seemed rather boring, at least to a 12 year old boy.

Little did I know that God was watching and working behind the scenes, and not too long after, my life would change, as we would learn that the Sabbath was holy time and was to be treated as such. There were plenty more chairs on Grandma's porch.

Now the Bible consistently presents holy as denoting separation for God's use. Do we get that the Sabbath is holy time for God's use, and for us to spend it with Him?

Let us go to another scripture regarding the Sabbath, and this one we do not hear very often. And I am not sure why, but it can be a very touchy subject, at least for some. Now, in the next scripture, if there is one word that describes the times in which we now live, I believe it to be this one, and we will find it in the book of Isaiah.

Now Isaiah is located in the Bible the first of the major prophets, and the book covers a time period which man really cannot agree on, because of the mentioning of Assyrian aggression in the beginning and the actual mention of Cyrus, the Persian king who conquered Babylon. So it appears that the timeline is somewhere between the 6th and 8th centuries. In Isaiah 39 we find that Isaiah prophesied that Judah would be taken captive and carried off to Babylon, with the Temple being destroyed as well. Now by the time we get to chapter 58, which we will go to in a minute, this prophecy seems to have taken place.

Just a few weeks ago, someone tried to tell me that the Bible is nothing more than a bunch of biographies written by men, and it was not to be taken literally. The next thing they told me is really shocking, or it was to me, coming from someone who professes to study the Bible and tries to do what is right. Listen carefully. Now, understand, this quote came from another person who is some sort of teacher on the Internet. I do not know if they actually have a physical church or not, but this is their conclusion of what God is. After all their studying of the Bible, the answer they arrived at was, 1) they got a deep conviction that they were loved, and 2) what they were called to do was love back in whatever way allowed them to love best and most.

Notice, *they* get to decide how to love best and most, just like the guy got to decide which day was holy. Now here is the punch line. This person had come to the conclusion that the specifics do not matter to God. I do not know what Bible they are reading, but it is not the same one that I read. But before we just brush that way of thinking aside as a worldly one, we must ask: do the specifics matter to God in the way we keep His Sabbath? Do the specifics still matter to God in the way we keep His feasts? Do the specifics still matter to God in the way we treat each other?

Finally, let us go to Isaiah 58. It seems at the first reading of chapter 58 that there is a definite shift in the focus after verse 12, and quite possibly a whole new subject, or perhaps an afterthought. But after looking into it, it might not be the case. Let us read the first five verses.

Isaiah 58:1-5 "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob

their sins. Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching God. 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?"

In verse 1 we find that God is speaking, and He tells Isaiah, "Cry aloud and spare not." Shout like a trumpet. Tell My people their sins. God, still speaking, says that the people were seeking Him daily. They were even fasting. Why was He not honoring their fast? Why was He not paying attention, responding to their fast and answering their prayers?

In the last part of verse 3 we find, "you find pleasure in exploiting all your laborers. You fast for strife and debate, and go so far as to strike with the fist." What is going on here, brethren? They found pleasure in exploiting their brethren, and even beating them with their fist, on a day of fasting. Now there is some speculation this might have even been the Day of Atonement, but it is clear to see that God was not happy with it, and they were accusing God of not listening to them, not accepting their idea of worship.

Can we say they actually thought they would force God to act and answer them? Had they decided what was holy, somehow thinking that God had to answer them? These people were having a knock-down, drag-out fistfight, all the while appearing righteous and thinking God owed them! Surely we are past all that kind of thinking in our day, are we not? Think about it, brethren. Are we better than that? Are we not better than that? Think again.

How many people fought—are probably still fighting—over the calendar? How many people fought over tithing? How many cannot agree on when to keep Passover? How many fought over the right counting of Pentecost of late? How many people fought over wearing masks or not wearing masks?

How many fought over praising God or singing praises to God? How many fought over even going to Sabbath services or the Feast? How many are now fighting over the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is God hearing our prayers? Does He accept our fast? Maybe I should ask, why do we fast? Why are there over 200 different groups of people that have come out of Worldwide, and they are still splitting? Will the fighting ever stop? Now since we are focusing on the Sabbath, how many fight, or have fought, over how to keep it?

Now getting back to Isaiah 58, we find that this is a unique chapter for the book of Isaiah. One, it is one of the shortest. Two, it describes the problem and gives corrective measures to be taken. And three, it tells us how to start to repair the breach. Now let us read a few more verses here. This is the next section. They are kind of long, but I have got plenty of time, so I think I will go ahead and read them.

Isaiah 58:6-12 "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones. You shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

In verses 6 through 12 He tells them to take away the yoke, the undue burdens that they are placing on their brethren. Brethren, they were even

neglecting their own families. Stop pointing the finger and speaking wickedness. Stop fighting. Now the commentators might think that verses 13 and 14 do not belong here, but I think they should think again, because, think of it, this might actually be the root of the problem. Let us go ahead and read verses 13 and 14.

Isaiah 58:13-14 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

If—perhaps the largest word in the entire English language. *If* you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your own pleasure on My holy day. Remember, I said Isaiah 58 contains the one word that describes the world in which we live. There it is, brethren, "pleasure." Also remember that when something is repeated three times we should listen up. Take notice: turn away your foot from doing your own *pleasure*, nor finding your own *pleasure*, nor doing your own ways, and He actually just adds a fourth one here, nor speaking your own words.

Now verse 13 seems to indicate that the Lord of the Sabbath is speaking—Jesus Christ Himself. Turn your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure. The very One who created it is reminding us of how special this time is to Him. What was the most significant thing that stood out when we first came to the knowledge of God's truth? It may be different for some of us, but for me it was the Sabbath, the sign that God gave to show where His people would be, and we can find that in Exodus 31:13.

Several years ago, Ali came across a picture posted on Facebook of a couple of our longtime friends in the church, and she pointed it out to me, and I thought, "That's nice, they're out to dinner." But then I caught the caption underneath, and the picture said, "Waiting to sail at sunset." I thought, "Wow, that is surprising." What was even more surprising was all the compliments and well wishes from their brethren for them to have a great

time. Well, I do not normally comment on these things, but they are good friends of mine, so I took the time and made a short little comment. My comment was not well received and promptly deleted. Then I received quite the tongue lashing for my efforts.

I think Martin mentioned a few weeks ago, do we think that we can keep the Sabbath anywhere, we can just stream the services and God will accept it as holy? These people in Isaiah were worshipping God, or so they thought, the way they wanted, where they wanted, and actually thinking that He would have to accept it. Are we turning our foot away from our pleasure?

I came across an interesting analogy in regard to turning the foot. In Exodus 3:5, we find Moses at the burning bush, and God tells him to take his shoes off and "do not trample on My holy ground." The ground was holy because God was there, and Moses did not dare trample on God and live. It was God's presence in that bush that made the ground holy. Do we still believe that God chose the Sabbath and is still putting His presence in it? The Sabbath, brethren, is holy ground. That time is to be treated with honor and respect not found in the other six days, because God is in it. Remember, do not trample on it.

Now briefly referring to something else Martin touched on, but I do not think he went to these scriptures, let us go back to John 17, and just breaking into Jesus' prayer here, just two or three verses. In John 17 we will read verses 20 through 22. This is Jesus Christ Himself speaking.

John 17:20-22 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one."

Do we believe that God the Father and Jesus Christ dwell in us? Are we one with Them? I would hope that we would answer yes, and if so, where do we take Them, especially on the Sabbath? Do we believe that God is one body with us, in us? Brethren, the problem with the Laodiceans is that they are poor, blind, and naked, and they do not even know it. And in reality, they are

making God sick to His stomach. Is there a worse feeling in the world than being sick to your stomach at any moment? It might happen.

Like I said at the beginning, many of us do not know what the old days of Worldwide were like, but they were different. We greatly anticipated the Sabbath, and we kept it differently than any other day of the week. It was set apart. It was holy time to God. No more cartoons. But after the death of Herbert Armstrong, things began to change, and then the rest is history.

What would God have done if Moses would have come up with some other reason why he could not take his shoes off and honor that ground, that presence of God being holy? We must turn our foot away from doing our pleasure on God's Sabbath, or He will not even let us come up to the mountain. He will spew us out.

Now when I first read chapter 58 of Isaiah, it appeared to be somewhat chopped up and difficult to follow, but after going into it, I think it is fairly simple. Let us go back to Isaiah 58 as we begin to wrap this up, and we will reread once again verse 1.

Isaiah 58:1 "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."

God tells Isaiah, cry aloud, tell them their sin. Now let us skip on down to verse 13, and we will read it again.

Isaiah 58:13 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words. . .

What was their sin? Can we conclude that they were seeking their own pleasure on the Sabbath, and forgot the God who created it? They were deciding how to worship God.

Let us close with one more scripture, and I believe this is just a single verse back in Leviticus 19.

Leviticus 19:1-2 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.'"

Be holy, for I am holy. Remember the Sabbath. And, oh yeah, do not forget: the specifics do matter to God.