

A SABBATH TO REMEMBER¹

By Paul Penno Jr.

January 18, 2014

When Jesus says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28, 29), He means it. He has given us a promise of His rest in the fourth commandment. How can the fourth commandment become an assurance of rest for our souls?

It is a commandment that almost the entire world disregards. Why? Is it difficult to obey? No; God makes it possible for everyone to receive the Sabbath blessing that is wrapped within it. It’s a part of the riches of God’s grace He gives to anyone who is willing to receive. Let’s see what it says:

“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 male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:8-11).

There is no end of blessings wrapped up in this commandment! Here are only a few:

1. The blessing of Sabbath rest is for the whole world. No one is left out. God is speaking to you and to me, not just to the Jews. Jesus said, “The

¹ Mark 2:27.

Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). “Man” means everyone.

The “rest” that is in Sabbath-keeping is what our human hearts have always yearned for. It is far more than merely taking a nap to achieve physical rest from labor. It is peace of heart. Billionaires would give everything for genuine Sabbath-rest!

2. God rested on the Sabbath day to bless it and hallow it for us.

Because He has given the Sabbath as a gift to the world, it’s for us to enjoy. You never keep the Sabbath alone; you have fellowship with Him. “I am with you,” He says (Isa. 41:10), and Jesus promised, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:18, 23). Jesus and the Father will move in with you! (And that means joy!)

Jesus promised, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20), but the Sabbath day brings us into a specially intimate closeness with Him. It’s like He makes an appointment with us for a date; and if He is the object of our loving worship, then we will keep the date with Him. And it’s not once in a great while; the Sabbath is the special seventh day of every week.

The Sabbath is the glue that holds all the days of the week together. It gives the reason for the week. No human being invented the week; it is what God gave the world in the beginning when He created the heavens and the earth in six literal days, as Genesis 1 tells us. The Sabbath is the memorial of

His work of creation; evolution could never have come into the world to deceive so many people of the world had “remember[ed] the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” Keeping the Sabbath is therefore the “sign” or “mark” of God’s true people, for He says, “I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them” (Eze. 20:12). His “sign” is like His signature; it’s like He says, “I have been looking for them, and here they are—My true people; they keep My holy Sabbath. That marks them as especially Mine!”

3. Jesus Himself especially enjoys having fellowship with His people every Sabbath day.

We seldom think of the joy that our Sabbath-keeping brings to Him! Isaiah says that “He shall see of the labor of His soul, and be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). The Sabbath day is like a grand party of celebration; He invites us every week for this special time to meet with Him and with His people, and if you are not there, He is sad because He misses you.

There are no distractions on this “celebration” day. “In it you shall do no work,” He promises us. Ezekiel describes the other days of the week as “the six working days” (Eze. 46:1). There are all kinds of intrusions on those worldly days—heavy burdens, business, making a living, buying and selling, TV and radio, cares and labor that weigh us down, news of disasters and crime. There is no “peace” in the world.

But on the Sabbath day all those distractions are laid aside; it’s like we spend the day with Jesus in

His house, as it were as guests; a day of peace of heart, freedom from worry, a harbor of refuge from the angry ocean storms, “a garden intersected with streams from Paradise, a cooling fountain in life’s dry, dreary sand.”

4. We are delivered even from our bills that come due. We lay them aside on the Sabbath day; we don’t let them intrude on our peace with God because we trust that He will take care of us, He will bless the labors of our “six working days” so that we shall have enough to pay our bills without worrying. The Bible tells us to leave our financial planning and accounts until after the Sabbath, and do all that work “on the first day of the week” (see 1 Cor. 16:2). So this beautiful fourth commandment shows us how to enjoy the Sabbath with God, free from those tiresome, worldly intrusions.

The Sabbath becomes like a day of heaven on earth. Children especially love the Sabbath in a home where it is revered; they can’t wait until “next Sabbath comes.” When Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14), He meant: let them come on the Sabbath day. But if we don’t keep the Sabbath holy, they can’t.

5. The true seventh-day Sabbath becomes the happiest day of the week.

On most calendars that are used worldwide, the seventh day is called Saturday. To make it doubly sure, we can check by reading Luke 23:54, which tells of the crucifixion of Jesus: “That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near” (Luke 23:54). Millions observe Good Friday in honor of the

death of Jesus; that pinpoints the true Sabbath, for the next day of the week is the regular weekly seventh-day Sabbath.

And again we can pinpoint the true Sabbath day by reading the next verses in Luke: “The women who had come with Him . . . observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment” (Luke 23:55, 56). The next verses tell of His resurrection on Sunday: “Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they . . . came to the tomb, . . . But they found the stone rolled away” (Luke 24:1, 2). Christ had risen!

It is so clear a little child sees it immediately: “the Sabbath day according to the commandment” comes between Friday and Sunday. That’s the reason why the seventh-day Sabbath is the happiest day of the week: it’s the day the Lord calls “My holy day” (Isa. 58:13). His presence is in the Sabbath. To the extent that we love Him, we also love His holy day.

There are many sincere people who do not see this truth. Has God changed His holy Sabbath day? We must pause to examine some of the reasons why they are perplexed.

No, God says, He has not changed His law regarding the Sabbath. “I am the Lord, I do not change” (Mal. 3:6). There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that He made any change in His holy law. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul” (Ps. 19:7). Why should He change anything that is

“perfect”? He loves us too much to change such a blessed gift!

Jesus regularly kept the seventh-day Sabbath, for we read in Luke 4:16 that “He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” Yes, when He said to the Jews, “I have kept My Father’s commandments,” He told the truth (John 15:10).

All of the apostles followed His example in keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day. For example, the Book of Acts tells of 84 sabbaths that the Apostle Paul kept, but not one Sunday!

“But,” someone may ask, “doesn’t it tell of one first day of the week that Paul kept?” No, Acts 20:7, 8 tells of one Saturday night farewell meeting that Paul held with the Christians in Troas, because he was planning to walk 16 miles next day (Sunday) to Miletus, and they would never see him again. (No apostle would have walked 16 miles on the holy Sabbath day).

Luke describes that night meeting as being on “the first day of the week” because the Bible says the Sabbath begins at sundown Friday evening and ends at sundown on Saturday evening (Lev. 23:32). Any night meeting on “the first day of the week” would therefore have to be on Saturday night. And Mark 1:32 tells how on one Saturday “at evening, when the sun did set,” the Sabbath being over, the people brought many sick people to Jesus to be healed.

That is a delightful way to keep the Sabbath, “from evening to evening,” sunset to sunset. If you try to

keep it from midnight to midnight, you're asleep and you can't consciously welcome God's holy day! How could you welcome some special visitor who came at midnight while you were asleep? On Friday evening at sundown the family gathers to sing, read a Bible story, and in prayer to welcome another precious Sabbath day.

Why do many observe Sunday, and not the holy Sabbath day that the Lord "blessed and hallowed"? It is simple: someone without the authority of God changed it. He instructed His holy prophet Daniel to predict that this would happen. In chapter 7 the prophet described the rise of four world empires in history (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome), after which there would arise another great power, the "little one [horn] . . . speaking pompous words" (Dan. 7:8) that would combine church and state and would "intend to change times and law" (Dan. 7:25). Both Daniel and Revelation state that he would exercise his great power for 1260 years.

Paul described the same power in 2 Thess. 2:4 as one "who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

John's book of Revelation describes the same power: "And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies . . . And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb" (Rev. 13:5-8).

We have to decide then which "power" we will follow—the holy One who created the earth in six days and sanctified His holy Sabbath for us to keep, or the one who has dared to change God's law and direct people to observe Sunday instead.

Let us not be afraid to be different than the majority. Jesus said: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13, 14). All through the history of the world that principle has been true; Jesus is real, He's alive and watching, and He always identifies with those few who follow Him.

The good news is that He loves us far more than we think! He paid a supreme price to redeem us; He can never forget us. He still loves us so much that He wants us to spend eternity with Him. He is lonesome without His people! We live in the last days. Now, as our great High Priest in God's sanctuary in heaven, He is working night and day, worldwide, to prepare a people to be ready to meet Him when He returns.

But they need a special preparation, like children going to school. He will be our Teacher, and we can be in His "class." Therefore, Sabbath after Sabbath around the world, He meets with His people who follow Him as the Lamb of God, and by His Holy Spirit He teaches and prepares them to be ready in that great day when He will soon appear. Nothing that is happening on earth is as important as that special work now going on!

When Jesus said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” (Matt. 11:28, 29) He was inviting the world to enjoy His Sabbath-rest. After creating the world and us in six days, He rested on that first seventh-day in Eden. But “we” were created on the sixth day of that first week, so for “us” the sabbath was a celebration of all the work that God had done and had “finished.” “We” had done nothing!

The Sabbath is still a “sign” of our resting “in Christ” and thanking Him for what He has done, not glorying in anything we have done in saving ourselves. It follows that true Sabbath-keeping is possible only when we understand and appreciate what it cost the Son of God to save us by His great sacrifice. Only when we permit that *agape* to “constrain” us can our Sabbath-keeping be devoid of the polluting love of self in some way.

To appreciate “the width and length and depth and height” of that love (*agape*) of Christ will make keeping the Sabbath day holy the greatest joy of your life. And children will learn to love the Sabbath also. If Christ’s “yoke” is thus set before them as “easy” and His burden as “light,” they will get so they can’t wait for another Sabbath day to come. They will enjoy being “guests” in the “house of the Lord.”

As the most precious gift of repentance is received by His people, they will be endowed with the ability to proclaim the Sabbath more fully, so that many dear ones now scattered in what Revelation calls “Babylon” will be able to hear the “voice” from heaven that says, “Come out of her, My people.”

Just now the Holy Spirit is calling people worldwide to keep holy His Sabbath day; for that’s the special day when He meets with them to teach them. And His great fourth commandment assures all who will believe, they will know the joy of Sabbath-keeping rest “in Christ.”

* Are you one of those many people who are overworked? Too much to do? Working two jobs just to make ends meet, exhausted at night, tired each morning? Too busy even to gulp down a little “daily bread” that the Heavenly Father promises to feed you (see the Lord’s Prayer)? Feel almost driven to distraction? Your Heavenly Father has help for you.

The Sabbath is your day of rest (Ex. 20:8-11). “But you don’t understand,” you say, “today is not the Sabbath—it’s Monday, or whatever! There’s no ‘rest’ today!” Ah yes, but look again at that great fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy . . .” “Remember” during your exhausting week that your Father has delicious “rest” for you, and the simple remembering will ease your burden today. That’s part of what Jesus means when He says, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light,” so “Come” even if it’s Monday or whatever. Maybe every muscle aches and you’re “bone-tired.” To believe you have “rest” in Him is an immense relief to your “soul” right now, He says (Matt. 11:28-30).

“Yes, but you don’t understand! I feel like I’m just a slave! Endless labor night and day! I never have time for myself!” Now the Lord opens another window in heaven to pour you out a blessing: Paul

told the slaves of his day that they were especially beloved of Heaven (they still are!). "He who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor. 7:22-24, NIV). In other words, consider yourself the Lord's "slave" bought at His cross; not of the corporation you work for. He (not they) is a merciful Master. "Slaves, . . . serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone, . . . slave or free" (Eph. 6:5-8, NIV). You don't belong to yourself? "Remember": the Lord of glory became a "slave," giving up belonging to Himself, for you (Phil. 2:5-8). Be "free" in Him!

No matter who you are or where you are the "Lord of the Sabbath," comes to you on His seventh day and is a blessing that God does not merely offer you, but *gives* you. You may be sick in the hospital, or a prisoner on Death Row, but no one can deprive you of the holy hours of the true Lord's Day, the Sabbath.

You don't have to be converted, or be a good person, to receive this "gift" of the Sabbath. It's like the "gift" of justification that Romans 5 says five times God has *given* to the world "in Christ," not just offered us. You may have spent your whole life in disregarding this gift of the Sabbath; if so, you have deprived yourself of blessings you could have enjoyed immensely. The one who disregards the holy Sabbath day is like Esau, the man to whom God *gave* the inestimable blessing of the birthright

but "despised" it and "sold" it for a trifle of worldly pleasure (Gen. 25:34; Heb. 12:16, 17).

It's a new view of the Sabbath which lifts it far above the legalistic idea in which it has been viewed for so long. The new idea is that the Sabbath is closely related to the idea of justification by faith. It's the experience of realizing that you can't save yourself by any good work you can do, not even one per cent; it's the realization of heart that your salvation is totally a gift of the Saviour of the world (Jn. 4:42), "not of works, lest any one should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). Sabbath keeping is almost infinitely beyond the idea of "Keep-the-sabbath-or-God-will-zap you." There is not a trace of legalism in the Sabbath truth. It's John 3:16 repeated every day, reminding you that God so loved you that He already gave His only begotten Son, already redeemed you, already died your second death (Heb. 2:9), has already given you the gift of a verdict of acquittal "in Christ" (Rom. 5:15-18), reversing the condemnation that came upon you in Adam; the "rest" which the holy Sabbath brings you is rest from all your anxiety and fear. True, the Sabbath comes only on the true seventh day (Ex. 20:8-11) but the Holy Spirit brings to you the remembrance of it every day throughout the week, for the word says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." In an objective sense, the Sabbath is already holy, even if you don't keep it holy; but in a subjective sense, your keeping the Sabbath holy expresses your faith in the objective truth that it is holy. Thus, your heart appreciation of the objective truth that God so loved you that He

gave His only Son for you becomes for you the thrilling subjective experience of justification by faith.

At the commencement of the time of trouble, we read that God's people will proclaim the Sabbath "more fully."² That time is near! The time is near

² "I saw that God had children who do not see and keep the Sabbath. They have not rejected the light upon it. And at the commencement of the time of trouble, we were filled with the Holy Ghost as we went forth and proclaimed the Sabbath more fully." *Early Writings*, p. 33.

The truth of Creation vis-à-vis the loud cry message that lightens the earth with glory (chapters 1, 2). E. J. Waggoner offered a thoughtful comment: "An intelligent contemplation of God's creation gives us a true conception of His power; for His eternal power and Godhead are understood by the things which He has made. ... It is faith that gives victory; therefore, since faith comes by learning the power of God, from His word and from the things that He has made, we gain the victory, to triumph through the works of His hands. The Sabbath, therefore, which is the memorial of creation, is, if properly observed, a source of the Christian's greatest reinforcement in battle" (*Christ and His Righteousness*, pp. 36, 37; 1890 ed.). We have long known that the message of Revelation 18 will be God's people presenting "the Sabbath more fully" (*Early Writings*, pp. 33, 85). Obviously, that is what God intended the 1888 message to accomplish for us.

The heavenly angel predicted an event that had never before taken place: Unto "two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed." (Dan. 8:14) The books of heaven can not be cleansed of the record of our sins until our hearts are cleansed. The righteousness by faith issue thus comes into focus: justification *by faith* is more than a mere legal declaration; it makes the at-enmity soul to be at-one-with-God. Daniel's prophecy requires it.

Is such a repentance possible? Will God ever have a people who have so learned contrition that they feel that all

when God's people around the world, delivered from the last vestige of legalism, will "delight themselves in the Lord" by that kind of Sabbath-keeping.

When the Sabbath begins at sundown, welcome its holy hours. Kneel and thank its Giver for it. Turn off the voices of the world so you can hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. Don't reduplicate Esau in yourself—don't "sell" even a few moments of this holy time for a worldly indulgence of godless amusement, whether TV, CDs, DVDs, novels, newspapers, or what. Demonstrate that you cherish and treasure God's *gift* of the holy Sabbath—how else can you demonstrate that you cherish and treasure the sacrifice of the Son of God which Sabbath-keeping "signifies"? (That's how the Sabbath is a "sign" of sanctification, Ezek. 20:12.)

Of course, neither you nor I are the least bit worthy of this *gift* of the Sabbath. Our hearts are by nature carnal; the holy hours of the seventh day find us contaminated with worldly thoughts and desires. Hence, a sincere, honest, thoughtful prayer that the same "Lord of the Sabbath" who created the *gift* may hallow our soiled hearts, cleanse us, and grant us in these holy hours to be a student in the "school of Christ" for this one day.

You'll be sorry to see the Sabbath "go" when again the sun goes down and you'll immediately look

the sins of the human race could be theirs but for the grace of a Saviour, and who thus stand before the Throne "cleansed"? Will He have a people who recognize their 100% need of the imputed righteousness of Christ, who fully realize what they would be without it?

forward to another Sabbath to come. We live the six days for this tête-à-tête with our Savior. Which is what it means to “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”

Come back with me, across the centuries to a day nearly two thousand years ago, to the humble little village of Nazareth. We make our way down the narrow cobblestone street, past the little shops with their open fronts. We see the workmen plying their trades as we pass one shop after another. There is an Oriental atmosphere about it all.

And then we come to a shop that is different. The front is neatly whitewashed, and the street has been swept. We enter and find a kindly, stalwart man plying the carpenter’s trade, and by his side a young assistant perhaps twenty-one years of age. The young man is planning a piece of wood, making it true, making it straight. He rests a moment and wipes His brow. As He turns, we see that He has the bearing of a prince, of a king. For He is none other than the Prince of heaven, King Jesus, come to cast His lot with the toilers and the poor, to live among men and die in their place.

We hurry on. But we come back again, for we are fascinated by the little shop. We come back on Thursday. We come back on Friday. We come back on Saturday. But on Saturday the shop is closed. The tools have been carefully put away. The shavings have been gathered up from the floor. All is quiet.

We notice that the people are all walking toward a conspicuous building in the center of the village. We follow them and find our seats in the rear of a well-

filled church. We wait a moment. Then imagine our surprise as we see the carpenter’s Son make His way into the pulpit, open the scroll, and begin to read. The record says of a day some years later: * “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16).

The example of Jesus is clear and consistent. His custom was a Sabbath-keeping custom. There is no confusion. There is no contradiction. There need be no speculation. Your Saviour and mine, from the first to the last of His ministry, kept only one day—the seventh day of the commandment—as the Sabbath.