

2008-09-5 Exodus 20:8 The Third Commandment: Worship the Lord, our God!
Pentecost 7 July 19, 2009

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior...

God's Word to help us value our time in worship is written in Exodus 20:8

This is the Word of our God. We pray: Lord, open Thou my heart to hear and through Thy Word to me draw near; let me Thy Word e'er pure retain; let me Thy child and heir remain. Amen. (ELH #24 v.1)

Dear Friends, in Christ,

Many of you have seen the show *The Price is Right*. On the show a contestant needs to guess the right prices of certain items. Not only can people win the items priced right, but they can win cars or many 1,000's of dollars. If they get the values wrong on items, they win nothing. Life in our world is much more important than a game show. Yet, so many people can put a high value on things of little consequence and seem to scorn things of high value. Some sports players are paid more in a season than many of us could earn in a lifetime, while other valuable professions receive little compensation for what they do to help people.

Unbelievers would list hearing and reading God's Word low on their priorities, reserving it for special occasions. But, God has given us the 3rd Commandment to keep our values high. God is ready to offer to children, teens, and adults what has real lasting value. He is offering Himself and blessings for those who follow Him. So,

Worship the Lord, our God!

First, we are to take time to rest! God said in the Commandment, "*Remember the Sabbath (day of rest) to keep it holy.*" (v.8) The Old Testament regulations for the Sabbath were strict. People couldn't work in the fields, start fires, or cook meals. If a child wanted to visit a friend, he or she had better live within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the home, because people couldn't travel more than that on a Sabbath. These laws were restrictive. Yet, God had two purposes in giving the Sabbath. One, the people needed physical rest. Two, they needed to set aside time for spiritual rest. God knew that if people work constantly, they will eventually burn out and not benefit from their work. He also knew that people need time to recharge themselves spiritually or they will find little joy in life. We can be burdened by sin, guilt, feeling neglected, having a illness, and carrying concerns about others. It's like picking up one piece of luggage after another until we get overloaded. We need a place to unload spiritually. Jesus promised, "*Come unto Me, all you who are wearied and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28)

What day is best for worship? In the Old Testament the Jewish law said Saturday. The Bible states that the Sabbath and all the Jewish ceremonies were given in preparation for the Savior. They served as a sign telling what was to come. Jesus' coming ended the ceremonies. He is described in the New Testament as our true Rest. The early church in freedom chose Sunday in honor of Jesus' resurrection. But, we could choose any day. The important thing is to set aside a time to hear God's Word and honor Him. That is following God's command to make the day holy.

Second, we keep this commandment by valuing God's Word. When Israel observed the Sabbath, they spent time in worship. During Jesus' lifetime, He also kept the law regarding worship. We especially think of Him at the age of 12 when he went to the temple in Jerusalem for the first time. He stayed beyond the appointed time to discuss and ask questions with the great teachers of His time. Why did Jesus know so much? It wasn't simply that He was the Son of God. He didn't use His divine power and knowledge until His ministry at age 30. As a child, He had studied God's Word in His home town, memorized it, and had valued every opportunity to learn and discuss it.

That should be our attitude as well. Luther wrote, “We are not to despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” (S. Cat.) We aren’t coming to church just to fill a pew. We are here to listen, to retain, and to honor God’s Word. Martin Luther wrote, “Continually keep God’s Word in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. For where the heart stands idle and the Word is not heard, the devil breaks in and does his damage before we realize it.” (Large Catechism) Today, we hear God’s Word. The rest of the week we practice doing what we heard. At the next worship time we return to be assured of God’s love, forgiveness and strength in our Savior.

By regularly hearing God’s Word at church we are showing how much we value His Word. It becomes a powerful life sermon that parents can share with their children and children with their parents when they show their love for Jesus by coming to church. It has been said that the strength of a country is not in its leaders. It begins with the moral power of the people. If Christian people don’t set a high standard, including attending worship, who will? Also, we show our value for God’s Word by supporting it with our offerings. The Bible states, “*Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.*” (Galatians 6:6) The church has been your instructor in calling a pastor and setting up times of worship and teaching so we can gather and be blessed. It’s only right that we join in supporting it so that the work may continue.

We also value God’s Word for what it brings to us. The greatest part of worship isn’t what we do for God, but what God does for us. He brings us to faith and keeps in the faith with His Word. He gives the sacraments to strengthen us by holding before us Christ, who has taken away all our sins and replace them with His sinless life. In response to God’s Good News we praise Him. In worship we hold up the name of Jesus as our Savior to the world that has no clue of His value.

Jesus promised, “*Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.*” (Luke 11:28) We Christians are in a daily battle against evil. Hearing God’s Word in worship offers a break from the fight. We see the crown of eternal victory held out by Jesus for us. Filled with new zeal and hope we return to the battle to use the weapon of God’s Word. With it we hold up the crown of Jesus’ blessing for all people. Jesus once told a parable of a king who held a great banquet. He invited his subjects, but many refused to come. (Luke 14:16-24) Finally, he sent word out into the highways to bring in strangers until the room was filled with guests. So, we should consider ourselves greatly blessed to be among the people who God has chosen in Christ that we might feast at His spiritual table of blessings.

St. Paul encouraged, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach ... with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*” (Colossians 3:16) If someone guaranteed that through a certain amount of work and savings that you would be rich the rest of your life, would you be willing to follow their directions? Probably you would. God is giving us directions for using His Word so that we will have the riches of heaven forever. Jesus gives us life to the full. Why go anywhere else beside His Word?

How do we respond when someone says, Going to church can’t save me. I don’t need to go to church to get to heaven! We can say, Sitting at a dinner table doesn’t feed us, but eating and drinking the food on the table will! So, receiving and believing the message and the sacraments offered in the church will save us in Christ. Some people may think us foolish for regularly attending church. But, do people make fun of a musician who often practices the music she loves? Is an athlete criticized for often playing the sport that he loves? Why shouldn’t we Christians want to spend time with the God we love and with His Word that gives us strength?

Like the Old Testament Israel, God has chosen us as His own special people. He had His Son spend a lifetime and then die to make us His own. We have complete forgiveness through Him. Our response is to praise Him and to value the saving Word of God in worship and in our lives. We may not always guess the right price when it comes to a game show. But God’s Word tells us of our Savior. We know that the price for our salvation is right in Him. Amen.

