

THE ORIGINAL D-DAY OVERLORD

Sermon, June 3, 2018

Texts: Ezekiel 20:10-21 (Exodus 20:8-11), Mark 2:23 – 3:6

This Wednesday is the seventy-fourth anniversary of D-Day, the day Operation Overlord (*the military codename for the Battle of Normandy*) was launched, which was the successful invasion of German-occupied Europe during World War II. The sheer numbers involved in the logistics are staggering: Preceding the June 6, 1944 amphibious assault was a 1,200-plane airborne assault dropping eleven thousand TONS of bombs in the eight hours preceding the landing. Over thirteen thousand paratroopers made nighttime parachute drops early on D-Day, followed by another nearly four thousand glider troops, and big naval guns incessantly pounded the coast before the troops went ashore. In just ten minutes, six hundred naval guns fired another two thousand tons of shells at Nazi batteries. The amphibious assault involved more than six thousand vessels, carrying one hundred and sixty thousand troops across the English Channel on that day (*I think it was June 8, two days later, that our own Bud Voigt crossed over; Bud was injured by grenade shrapnel days later and evacuated back to the UK, for which he finally received the Purple Heart medal January 12, 2018, along with seven other medals and awards!*).¹ By the end of August more than two million Allied troops were in France. On August 30 1944, German forces retreated across the Seine, marking the close of Operation Overlord.

Why is it called D-Day? The **D** simply stands for "**day**." The terms **D-Day** and H-Hour are used for the **day** and hour on which a combat attack or operation is to be initiated. Why was it called Operation Overlord? I really couldn't find a definitive answer to that, but I'll hazard an educated guess: Overlord is defined in the dictionary as (1) an absolute and supreme ruler, or (2) a lord who is lord over other lords ... (*now, that's language we should all be used to, as we serve the One the Bible calls the Lord of Lords!*). So perhaps the code name was borne out of the desire to show Nazi Germany just who was boss.

The sermon title is again a bit of a stretch, but our passage from Ezekiel speaks about another **D-Day** of sorts ... the Sabbath Day, which God repeatedly says was **D**, desecrated. And our passage from Mark speaks about the original Overlord over this day, the Lord of lords Who is Lord of the Sabbath, which is an extraordinary claim of Jesus ... but we'll get to in a few minutes. In Ezekiel, speaking strong words of judgment against His people through His prophet, God says again and again, "*You have desecrated my Sabbaths.*" I remember years ago sitting behind the pulpit wincing as the worship assistant read this passage from Ezekiel ... the lector was nervous, and each time the lector came to the word "desecrated", the lector said a different "D" word: "*You have decimated my Sabbaths.*" "*You have desiccated my Sabbaths.*" And the third time the lector finally got it right: "*You have desecrated my Sabbaths.*" But then, as I thought about it, I said to myself ... "*Hey, that'll preach some day!*" And here we are! So don't be afraid to lector because you might make a mistake, because you never know ... you might just provide inspiration for a future sermon!

"Desecrate" means to treat irreverently or contemptuously or casually something that is special and holy; that's what it means to profane. God is saying through His prophet, "*You have profaned my Sabbaths, you have forgotten my Sabbaths, you are contemptuously or casually treating my Sabbaths like any other day.*" Throughout the Bible, desecrating the Sabbath was a clear sign the people had drifted from God. "Decimate" means to destroy a large part of something, and when we treat the Sabbath as any other day we DO largely decimate what God intended to be a blessing, a delight, a good gift for His people. As God also repeatedly reiterates through Ezekiel in our reading today, the one who obeys God's commandments will live by them ... really and truly live! And "desiccate" ... the word *desiccate* means to dry up, or cause to dry up; to dehydrate, to take all the juice out of something so that it becomes dead, tasteless, drained of flavor and vitality. The Sabbath isn't a day to be D, desecrated, decimated, desiccated, or, for that matter, a day to denigrate or dishonor! God intended for this day to be "D", a DELIGHT ... a Delightful Day to Display Devotion!

When the Ten Commandments were given, the Israelites had just been set free from four centuries of slavery in a land where they were not permitted to have a delightful day of devotion and rest. *Four centuries* they could not observe a Sabbath. Now, I can still remember ... even at my "young" age ... not being able to find any business open anywhere years ago in my home town except maybe Chester County Hospital, Rexall Drug Store, maybe a few restaurants and the Sunoco gas station twenty miles away up near the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Nor would anyone in our neighborhood ever hear the sound of a lawn mower

¹ See <http://warwickonline.com/stories/after-all-these-years-bud-voigt-receives-wwii-medals,131098>

anywhere on a Sunday; classy people just didn't do that sort of thing in the late fifties-early sixties. Also, no other community organization, and especially the schools, would even dream about scheduling any kind of event on a Sunday morning. How things have changed. Today, we observe virtually **no** cultural indications that Sunday is any different from the other days ... *everything* is open ... thus making it all the more difficult to "remember" the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. As a once Judeo-Christian culture that honored the Sabbath, we have come a long way. We have largely desecrated, desiccated and decimated the Sabbath.

(Due to time constraints, the following was edited out of the spoken sermon on the spot; I include it here.) My memories only go back sixty some years; the Jewish people at the time the Ten Commandments were given had to deal with *four hundred* years of enforced Sabbath neglect. So, in the Exodus, some six weeks prior to giving the Ten Commandments God initiated a remedial Sabbath training program of sorts. You may remember the story about the manna in the wilderness (*see Exodus 16*). The "Heavenly Breadman" started His daily deliveries exactly **six weeks** before the people would come to rest at Mt. Sinai and receive the Ten Commandments. The Hebrews were reminded over and over again, week after week, that they had to go out and work **every** day (*except for the seventh day*) to collect food. They also learned it didn't work if they went out to gather manna on the seventh day; the Manna Market was closed on the Sabbath. Every day for six weeks God drummed into His people two vital principles through the miracle of the manna, two principles He reiterated in this fourth commandment: **1.** All who are able must work daily to provide (*"Six days you shall labor,"*) and **2.** All must **cease** from labor and **rest** on the seventh day, keeping it as a holy day. The fourth commandment was a humanitarian legislation; God required His people to observe a regular weekly break ... a **complete** break...from their work. God knows human natures, and He knows our limits ... and He knows human beings need one very different day in seven; we need a day of rest. There is *always* work to be done, to be sure. However, as an old Greek proverb put it, "*The bow that is always stretched taut will soon cease to shoot straight.*" The bow will either snap, weaken, or become ineffective; you have to give it a rest! This commandment is one of the **merciful** laws of God, one from which even the domestic animals were to benefit. As is the case with all of God's laws, this commandment was meant to be a great gift, not a restrictive burden. (*end of excerpt*).

The New Testament makes it clear Jesus honored the Sabbath. He used it to pray, worship, and teach about its true meaning. It was never meant to be a desiccated, dried-up-of-all-joy observance. When Jesus said, "*the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath!*" He was insisting the Sabbath was meant to be a divine gift for us! Jesus used the day to perform some of His finest miracles. We just read about the man whose withered hand was healed by Jesus on the Sabbath. There is a sermon in itself here, but three quick points: (1) The man obeyed, although it was difficult, if not impossible, for him to physically comply ... and in his effort to obey came the blessing! (2) The Sabbath is a good day to bring our withered hands, our withered hearts, our withered hopes and dreams to worship and stretch them out in the presence of Jesus Christ ... for **rest** – oration! (3) As alluded earlier, Jesus made an extraordinary statement in claiming to be Lord of the Sabbath, because there is only One Who can claim that title. The "Overlord" of the Sabbath can only be the One Who established the Sabbath in the beginning; in short, Jesus is asserting His divinity.

The division of time into the week of seven days was not a Jewish invention; it was established by God in creation. The seven day week is frequently found among ancient cultures untouched by Jewish influence. The Babylonians had a seven day week; the seven Babylonian days corresponded to the seven gods or spirits of the then-known seven planets. The Romans had a seven day week; each day named for one of their gods, e.g. Saturn (*Saturn-day*), Apollo (*the Sun god, Sun-day*), and Diana (*the moon goddess, Moon-day*). The tribes and cultures scattered throughout pre-Christian Europe, Asia and Scandinavia all had seven day weeks. The thunder god Thor had his day (*Thor's-day*), the Germanic goddess of love, Fria (*Fria-day*), the Germanic god of war, Tiu (*Tiu's-day*). All pagan cultures, foreign to the religion of Israel, and yet each had seven day weeks. The seven day week is woven into the warp and woof of God's created order; it wasn't a Judeo-Christian invention. In the Biblical account of creation, what happens on the seventh day? Two things are modeled by God which He wants His people to emulate: (1) God **rests**, and (2) He hallows the day. He performs an act of consecration. He rests on the seventh day, He attaches a special significance of holiness to the seventh day, He declares it a holy day. This was centuries, if not millennia, before the Israelites were given the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment was not some brand new command for the people of God; that is why God commanded them to **remember** the Sabbath day.

So much more to say, but I'll just end with this for now: The triune God ... Father, Son and Holy Spirit ... has honored and sanctified this day, and calls us to do the same. Let us not profane it, let us not dishonor it, let us not treat it like any other day. Let us **remember** the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH: THE SEVENTH DAY OR THE FIRST DAY?

(Sermon addendum from last week's message)

After worship last week some asked about this subject that was only briefly addressed during the TIME WITH THE CHILDREN; time wouldn't allow a more thorough presentation of it that morning. When I found we had extra space in today's insert, I opted to include this little summary.

The excerpt below is from one of the major confessions contained in our **Book of Confessions**, which is Book 1 of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (*the Book of Order is Book II*). Begun in 1643 and completed 1649, the **WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH** was a joint effort of the Church of England (*Anglican*) and the Church of Scotland (*Presbyterian*); it was formally adopted only by the Church of Scotland. It was brought to America and became the doctrinal statement of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1729. The **Shorter and Larger Catechisms**, also found in the **Book of Confessions**, were vehicles for teaching the Westminster Confession. (*This is also found in the hymnal, p. 861.*)

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH Chapter XXI, "Of Religious Worship on the Sabbath Day"

7. As it is the law of nature that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11; Isa. 56:2,4,6; I Cor. 16:1,2; Acts 20:7).

I've also always liked this little excerpt of William Barclay from his classic devotional, **The Ten Commandments for Today**, p. 46:

For the Christian the Lord's Day should be used for worship. (Former Archbishop of Canterbury) William Temple's definition of worship places worship in the wider context which it ought to have: *'To worship,'* Temple wrote, *"is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."*

-- Pastor Clark