

REFORMATION FOR THE WORLD

Exodus 20:8-11

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INTRODUCTION :

One of the great blessings that God has bestowed on us is a community of Sabbath celebration. As we commemorate Reformation Day and All Saints Day, this is a good opportunity to remember what our feasts are for.

THE TEXT: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...” (Ex. 20:8-11)

SABBATH AND FEASTING ARE FOR THE WORLD

Sabbath rest has from the beginning meant *giving* rest. As the command makes clear, the requirement to rest extended to family, visitors, and even to animals (Ex. 20:10). The Sabbath principle also applied to the land (Ex. 23:10-11, Lev. 25). Debts were to be cancelled every seven years (Dt. 15:1-2). Furthermore, in the 50th year (the seventh sabbatical cycle of seven years), a year of jubilee was proclaimed which required the release of slaves, the return of inheritance, and rest for the land (Lev. 25:8-17). The year of jubilee is in many ways the supreme expression of the Sabbath principle, and it began with the sounding of the trumpet on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 25:9-10) which celebrated the forgiveness of Israel’s sin, the gift of the covenant, freedom, release from slavery, and mercy. As we have rightly emphasized over the years, Sabbath means feasting. The Sabbath was one of the feasts of the Old Covenant (Lev. 23:1-3). But these feasts were not merely for the enjoyment of those who threw them and their friends. The Feast of Weeks was for the fatherless, the widows, and the strangers (Dt. 16:10-12). The Feast of Tabernacles was for the fatherless, the strangers, and the widows (16:13-14). And this emphasis was to be a way of life for Israel because they had once been slaves in Egypt (Dt. 24:10-22). The offering of firstfruits and tithes was likewise *for the world* (Dt. 14:27-29, 26:11-15). The Jewish leaders who established Purim also clearly understood the Sabbath principle (Est. 9:18-22).

LET US KEEP THE FEAST

It is no accident then that as the early church grew and multiplied, at the center of that covenant community was the doctrine of the apostles, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). At the center of the early church was worship, the Sabbath Feast of the New Covenant. And because this Sabbath Feast was the Old Covenant feasts all grown up and glorious, it’s not surprising that there was almost immediately problems distributing the bread to the widows (Acts 6:1). When the gospel breaks out in a city, one of the greatest challenges should be figuring out how to care for all the orphans and widows. This challenge appears to be the origin of the deaconate, and immediately following the close of the canon, we find deacons assisting with the Lord’s Supper and

taking the bread and other alms out to the poor of the church and community (e.g. Tertullian). This is the probable connection for why the deacons came to be primarily liturgical assistants in the middle ages rather than leaders of mercy ministry. But in the Reformation this was recovered by all the major reformers. Worship – and the Lord’s Supper in particular – was *for the world*. The gifts of bread and wine and milk and honey that were placed on the table during the offertory were alms for the poor. When we break the one loaf here, it is meant to be multiplied to feed thousands.

CONCLUSIONS & APPLICATIONS

As we celebrate Reformation Day and All Saints Day, we do so as people who are thankful and grateful all the way down to the ground. This is because we understand the gospel, and when we do, we immediately see our mission. There is a rich legacy of mercy ministry that has been handed down to us in the Protestant Reformation. Hand in hand with the recovery of the gospel and faithful worship was the recovery of mercy ministry.

As we pursue this calling it must be remembered that part of this means not carelessly creating more strangers, fatherless, and widows. There is no either/or dichotomy here. The command is still there to love your wife, love your children, and love your neighbor. But the promise is that there will be more oil. There will be more than enough bread to feed them all.



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