The Sabbath was Made for Man

 Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Certain things just belong together. Given that is now the season of springmer certain things just fit in better this time of year when the really nice days roll around. For example, on a Friday, Saturday, or Sunday that has rather favorable weather I have noticed that nearly a third of the traffic that goes past my house either has a trailer with a boat or is a motorcycle. Summer weekends seem made for outdoor activities, whether that be working in the yard or garden, hiking or walking around, or simply just sitting outside and taking in a beautiful day. When I was younger my brother and I used do go out and catch fireflies in a jar in order to observe them blink that soft, alien yellow as we drifted off to sleep. Once my grandfather retired, it was on these summer days and during these summer evenings that we would make our way down to the ballpark. So many of my favorite sports memories have been made watching the Pirates lose, and a few made while watching them win. Some nights, while I would be working delivering pizzas, I would listen to the Pirates over the radio. Baseball and radio, another one of those combinations that just belong together. This is the case for so many things. Red wine and steak, fire and oxygen, Penn State and B1G Championships, you know, certain combinations that just work together for the betterment of us all. Do these things go together by chance? Or is there an order to things? Man and woman, yet another example of a perfect combination. Have you ever sat and thought about that? I think that it’s no secret that men and women operate differently in a variety of ways. Yet despite the fact that men and women are different physically, emotionally, and mentally, when a man and a woman come together to create a life with one another, something magical happens. Despite the differences, they are meant to go together and what’s more is that the evidence for this is clear. The statistics clearly show us this not only when it comes to the ability to bear children, but also the success rate of the nuclear family as opposed to one that is separated. We have seen the breakdown of the nuclear family begin to have severely negative effects on our society, yet we stand around looking at the sky and wondering how this could happen?

 This breakdown begins also because of another combination that is ignored. Our Old Testament reading for today comes from the book of Deuteronomy. This book is the final book written by Moses and the final book in the story of Israel before they would inherit the promised land. One thing you might notice about this book, should you decide to read it on your own, is the overlap that it has with the book of Exodus. I once heard the book of Deuteronomy described as “Moses’ Small Catechism”, for the people he is speaking too are the generation that is about to inherit the promised land. This also marks the end of the generations that wandered in the wilderness. That means that this generation is not the one that came out of Egypt, but rather the one after it. SO what we get in the book of Deuteronomy is a retelling of the story of Israel’s deliverance and a re-giving of the laws that governed civil life, worship practices, and criminal activity, just as had been given in Exodus as well as Leviticus, to the previous generation. This is also where our reading for today comes in, for it is a re-telling of the story when Moses went up to Horeb and received the ten commandments from God himself, chiseled in stone. Why would something like this be important? Why would this generation need to hear these stories? Well for the same reason that we study our history today. History is a rather important thing that is often overlooked or twisted in order to fit a narrative. It is through our history that we learn who we are and what has brought us to the place in where we are economically, socially, militarily, etc. That is the knowledge that Moses passes on to Israel in the book of Deuteronomy. In fact, Moses opens these commandments with the same words that God opened them with, “**I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.**” Here it is not only Moses that is reminding them of their history, but God himself. God is reminding them why it is they are to listen to Him and follow His commands. It is because He is responsible for bringing them out of bondage. He is responsible for raising them out of slavery and giving them this land that they are about to inherit and thus God lays out the way in which the people are to live in this land. Our Gospel lesson also contains a bit of a history lesson as Jesus’ disciples come under fire for plucking heads of grain. Jesus reminds them that even king David would eat on the Sabbath, and what’s more is that David would eat in the temple, in the presence of the high priest! Then Jesus states, “**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.**”

 When you think about it, it makes perfect sense. We commemorate the Sabbath as the day of creation in which God rested. Thus, we are to rest from our labors. But again, as Jesus said, that is not because we are in need of a day off, but rather we are to rest from the distraction of our earthly labors so that we can focus our attention towards God. How many of us could take an entire day and devote it to God? Sure we take a piece of our Sundays to come and worship God but do we really feel it necessary to devote the rest of our day to studying His word and speaking with Him? As Christ says, our worship day was made for us, and as our Old Testament lesson showed us, it was not made for us as an optional thing, but rather its observance is a command given to us from God himself. “**Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.**” The Sabbath observance not only fell to the master of the house, but to all that were under his roof, family, animals, servants, and even guests were to make this an observance. Again, this is not only appropriate for the nation of Israel to remember in their time, but it is an important thing for us to remember in ours as well. For God then says, “**You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.**” Just as the nation of Israel was to take a day to remember their former status as slaves, so we should also. For throughout the letters and writings of Paul, and even through Jesus himself we are told that we are slaves to sin. We are slaves, in the same manner that these Israelites were. Our human nature commands us and at times we are helpless but to obey. Yet the Sabbath was man, and the story has changed. No longer was Israel a nation of slaves, for their God had freed them! The same is true for us. For Paul writes that we are no longer slaves to sin, for our Christ has freed us from our chains. There is another element that is important for us to remember, God changed the status of the nation of Israel from a slave nation, to a sovereign nation. No longer was Israel going to be a nation that was subject to another, for this was a turning point for them. They were to command a new respect, for their God was going to lead them to conquer the land he set aside for them. In the same way, our liberation from the slavery of sin is an elevation of our status. Thanks to the blood of Christ we are elevated to be called sons and daughters of God! We are elevated to have a place with our eternal, everlasting God. This is what the Sabbath was made for. This is why it was made explicitly for man. The Sabbath was made so that we could recognize this history. It was given to us as a gift, so that we wouldn’t have to search for purpose or meaning. Instead God gives us the Sabbath so that we can come to hear his word and strengthen our faith. He gives us the Sabbath so that we can learn the history of God’s people and how He Himself is woven in that history. He gives us the Sabbath so that we can receive his other gifts like the forgiveness of sins and fellowship with him at his altar. It was given to us so that we could have a time where we come together in fellowship as the body of Christ and be in the presence of God himself. The Sabbath was made for man, so that man could remember where he came from. For we did not raise ourselves up. But rather through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, we were elevated. This knowledge is our treasure, and this treasure has been ours and will be now and forever. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.