

Text: Exodus 20.1-3

Series: 10 Ways to Be Perfect

Sermon #1: The First Commandment

Date: 6.2.2019

This morning we are beginning our summer sermon series where we are going to look at the 10 commandments. And I am REALLY, REALLY excited for it. I'm excited because this is like one of those pinnacle parts of the bible. Everything you need to live the good life...its right here in this brief ancient code. In fact ya'll, If I'm honest with you what makes me nervous is that I won't come close to bringing into the light all of the riches here for you in this one chapter of scripture. My stack of research books is crazy because each commandment reveals God's good design for an entire area of life.

Now I know we are all coming from different places. But regardless of whether you've never actually read them before, or you've known them for years, I think there is SO much for us in here. I mean just a quick glance at Exodus 20 where these commandments are and you will see:

- The answer to big stuff. Like what makes my life matter. There is a clear compelling answer for that
- God's answer to work life balance is right here.
- The cure to stress is in the commandments. I actually believe just shifting your life more in line with them can lower your blood pressure. You should try it this summer. I'm going to. What's your summer health plan? Oh I'm trying the 10 commandments. Ever heard of it.

- Everyday Vitrally important relationships are given instruction that help them flourish. We could have marriage strengthening seminars built on this. How to raise your kids built on this.
- There is deep, deep truth in here about the kind of person you are meant to be to those around you. The kind of friend & co-worker. The vision is an inspiring one about someone who can be so humbly resolved in who she is or he is that they don't need attention on themselves.
- This code unlocks freedom from the race to keep up with the Jonses.
- Most importantly: The 10 tells you who God is and how you relate to him!

I'm telling you it's amazing. And you gotta lean into these. And I know its summer but there really isn't one you can miss. You go to the beach you better get that podcast because this thing is more whole life transformative than if you did Whole30, Cross fit, & Marie Kondo all at once.

So let's do something real quick if you'll allow me to have you do an exercise. You know those workout commercials that do the before & after pics? Well, I want you to be able to see how God changes you over the summer and a simple way is just seeing how you absorb the 10 commandments. So let's do a little self-assessment before picture. Again no judgment its just for you ok. I want to give you 72 seconds to see how many of the 10 you know. Take out your phone or your journal and just jot them down. Don't look them up. Hint: That would be breaking one of the commandments.

36 Second Jeopardy Theme Music – Play it twice

let's see how you did (Appear one at a time):

1. Do not have other gods besides me -- Exodus 20:3
2. Do not make an idol for yourself -- Exodus 20:4
3. Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God -- Exodus 20:7
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy -- Exodus 20:8
5. Honor your father and your mother -- Exodus 20:12
6. Do not murder -- Exodus 20:13
7. Do not commit adultery -- Exodus 20:14
8. Do not steal -- Exodus 20:15
9. Do not give false testimony against your neighbor -- Exodus 20:16
10. Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor -- Exodus 20:17

Ok how did you do? I imagine most of us, even if we are new to Church got one. like...I got the one about murder. So, just take note of how many you got. If you got all 10, just know that means you have less excuse for breaking them than the rest of us ok. So calm down. And who knows maybe you wrote down some that didn't make the cut? Tuck that away and we'll see how you are doing in a couple months.

So each weekend we are going to have pretty much the same basic sermon outline. We are going to look at what the commandment says (including what the bible says in other places), what it looks like to obey it, and what happens when we break it.

But this first weekend will be a little different. Because in addition to giving his people the 10 commandments, God also gave a KEY to understanding the 10 commandments. And this key is VITAL. Without it you will misunderstand and misapply everything ok. Thankfully, God was kind enough to us to put this KEY right in the introduction to the 10. So nothing complicated, but it is very important and we often miss it. So today we'll spend a good deal of time understanding the KEY to the 10 commandments and THEN, THEN we'll look at the first one ok?

The KEY to the Commandments: Exodus 20.1-2

Ok so if you've got your bible. You can get over to Exodus 20. I want you to look at verses 1-2. This is where we find our key.

1 Then God spoke all these words: 2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

I think even *noticing* that the 10 commandments do not start with a command may catch some of you.

And the point is that before God tells *them* what to **DO**, he tells them WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE! Super Super

Important that you take in the order. God wants to make sure their Obedience is a RESPONSE to who he is and what he has done for them. The same is true for you and I. At the heart of Christianity is not what we do for God, but what God has done for us. **10 Commandments Key: We do not obey to earn salvation from God, we are saved by Him and so we obey.**

The order is so important. God summarizes the first 19 chapters of exodus in that one verse. But since we are picking up here in the middle of the story, let me recap it for you. After all it is THIS STORY that the rest of the bible uses as an illustration for the deliverance God brings in our lives.

See here's the situation. As Exodus starts, God's people are in slavery in Egypt. They are oppressed, being worked day and night as slaves to a Pharaoh who oppresses them so harshly because he fears them. The Israelites outnumber the Egyptians and he fears if enemies attack, they will rise up against him. So his fear leads to his oppression. Well, God hears the cries of his people and raises up a deliverer who will lead them out of Egypt. The man named Moses. Short origin story on Moses: He was born Hebrew, but raised Egyptian. Then kills an Egyptian, pharaoh puts a hit out on him for it, so he flees Egypt into the wilderness. God calls him to be the deliverer of the Israelites from slavery. Moses says: Well, when I go in there, and they say 'who sent you?' what is his name?

"God replied to Moses 'I AM WHO I AM' This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." Exodus 3.14 That's big because what does our KEY verse say? God starts the commandments the same way he started the deliverance.

I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD. So Moses goes in and says to Pharaoh: I AM says let my people go so that they may worship me. AND because I AM never changes, his promise to his people is still true today to you.

HE is not I WAS....as if he was only there for Israel. He is not I WILL BE as if he's only sitting in heaven and we are on our own until we get there. NO. HE IS I AM. PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE he remains simply I AM.

WHO IS God? 'I AM' THE LORD YOUR GOD

I AM **YOUR** God. This is God talking in the language the bible calls covenant. It's God saying he has a very particular and unique relationship with Israel. In fact, God's common way of describing his relationship to his people is like he is their husband. And this unique relationship is very important because it shows us how God feels about us and relates to us. Which helps make sense of the first commandment we are about to look at.

I've got a wedding coming up I'm pretty excited to perform. Lynn and Mark. Now, Imagine if in Mark's wedding vows if he said "I promise to be A lawfully wedded husband." Aint gonna fly. Lynn's gonna say...**whose** husband are you promising to be? He's gotta say I promise to be **YOUR** husband. Because his identity as A husband is directly bound to his relationship with her. he can't just be A husband without being HER husband.

And God is saying I'm not just some detached deity. I am bound to a people. There is no richer declaration of God's love-link with his people than the simple phrase "your God."

And in Christ...he is your God today. The promises of his presence with us now come to us in Christ. And he says he will fiercely and sacrificially love you until the end of time because in Christ he is now & forever **YOUR** God. Lemme ask you something...you know him like that? Is he **YOUR** God? Now the problem is when I say "Is it like your relationship with your spouse?" You might say 'yeah it is' we talk for 3 minutes a day before we turn the lights out and otherwise we are just co-existing together. That's commitment, but its dysfunctional. God is not satisfied with a committed but dysfunctional relationship. Neither is your spouse btw.

But look the proof of that is in What he has done. Look verse 2, our key verse, tells us who he is **and** what he has done.

WHAT HAS GOD DONE? HE HAS DELIVERED HIS PEOPLE FROM CAPTIVITY

Pick back up in the Exodus Saga....Moses says let God's people go. Pharaoh says no thanks. I AM sends 10 plagues to show Pharaoh how much more powerful I AM is. Pharaoh doesn't turn. He stiffens his back pokes out his chest and says nope. So then God kills every first born Egyptian boy. And THEN, Pharaoh let's them go. BUT then Pharaoh tries to chase them down. Moses asks I AM for help. I AM provides it & destroys Pharaoh's army. And so the book is called exodus because it is the story of God, I AM, delivering his people out of slavery. **HE IS A DELIVERER**. And if he can deliver 2 million people from slavery, if he can command the sea to part so he can deliver them to safety, AND HE's still the same God today...It is biblically faithful and pastorally imperative that I say to you: he can deliver you today. from addiction, from depression,

from SIN! He can deliver you From whatever sin is enslaving you. Because just like he wanted Israel, like he claimed Israel, he wants you! And he is a God who sets captives free.

Well, they set off into the wilderness and God provides water & quail & manna every day so they can eat. God himself was the first Chick-Fil-A.

I AM is also a PROVIDER. You need to hear he is still a provider. **19And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. -- Philippians 4:18-19.** do you actively trust him as provider? Do you believe he will supply your needs? I'll never forget my friend Raudel telling me about growing up in Cuba and his family was in the type of poverty where he wasn't sure if they would eat that day. And he said one night they sat down to the table with no food at the house and held hands to pray. And Raudel was mad because they were thanking God for provisions that WEREN'T there. His dad says God will provide. Well, they finish praying and immediately someone knocks on the door with food for their family. Maybe that's not you with food. But he is I AM. He cares about your needs. And he will provide for them. Maybe he will withhold your desires but he will only do so because he is providing grace.

When an army called the Amalakites attacks, God says NAH. I got you. And OBLITERATES this army. **I AM IS A PROTECTOR**. And you need to hear he is still a protector of his people. Paul says the Thessalonians **3But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen and guard you from the evil one -- 2 Thessalonians 3:3**

And what I'm trying to show you as you hear me recount Israel's story you is that I AM never changes. HE is still a deliverer. In fact, the language of the new testament, specifically Romans 6 is that Christ has DELIVERED us from slavery to sin. Ephesians 2 says while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place. THEN, after we believe that...THEN we walk in the new life he has called us to. But so many people miss the heart of the 10 commandments & the whole message of the bible because they think Christianity is about a moral code of what we are SUPPOSED to do for God.

At the heart of Christianity is not what we do for God, but what God has done for us.

The 'gospel' is called the good news. **Because it announces what God has done for us.** He has seen us in our sin, our rebellion against his law where we choose our way over his way. And he says even in that moment, especially in that moment, I love you. Now God has said that the payment for sin is death. That's justice. Yet at the same time, he loves us too much to let us die. So he sends Jesus to die in our place. A perfect sacrifice. So our sins past, present, & future are paid for. AND, in his resurrection he defeats death. So now, acceptance by God cannot be based on performance. Because we all fail. It has to be based on Christ's performance. And God looks at Christ and says, he's perfect. He is a worthy substitute. I will accept his payment and your debt is satisfied. This is Christianity.

God doesn't call us to obey him so that we can be accepted by him. He says in Christ you are accepted, therefore you can obey. And in Christ he will be that same God very present with his people now.

You see only when you read the commandments with the right perspective of who God is and what he has done, can you really understand them correctly. That's why verse 2 is the key to it all.

Kevin Deyoung: God doesn't come into Egypt while his people are in slavery and say "Ok, I have 10 commands. I want you to get these right. I'll be back in 5 years and if you've gotten your life right, then I'll set you free from Egypt." But that's how people view Christianity! God has rules, and if I follow the rules, God will love me and save me. But that's not what happened in the story of Exodus! The Israelites were an oppressed people and God said "I hear your cry. I will save you because I love you. And when you are saved, free, forgiven, I am going to give you a new way to live."

And we need to hear it again. **Salvation is not the reward for obedience. It is the reason for obedience.** Jesus does not say "If you keep my commandments, I will love you." No instead he says if you love me, you will keep my commandments. ALL OF OUR DOING is because of what he has done for us. The 10 commandments are not instructions on how to get out of Egypt. They are rules for a free people to stay free.¹

We are a redeemed people, rescued from certain death. And now we are under the authority of the one we were created

¹ DeYoung, Kevin. The 10 Commandments (Crossway Wheaton, Ill. 2018) 24 -25.

to follow and he lays out the rules of life that explain how we are to flourish in the freedom he has provided for us.

10 Commandments Key: We do not obey to earn salvation from God, we are saved by Him and so we obey

That leads us to the first commandment. Verse 3 of our passage

3 Do not have other gods besides me

With each commandment in this series we are going to do three things. We are going to make sure we understand what the commandment says, we are going to explore what it means to obey it, and what happens when we break it.

So what does the first commandment say? it's pretty straightforward right? Well kind of. I think what we'll see with each of these is that they are a lot deeper than we thought.

This command is written as a negative right? Telling you what to do by telling you what not to do. The positive form would be the great commandment in Deuteronomy 6 that Jesus quotes in Matthew 22.

36 "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest? "

37 He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind -- Matthew 22:36-37

The positive form is: Love God with ALL you have. So much so that there is no room for loving anything else as your God. You can love other things. Jesus says right after that, love your

neighbor as yourself. But you can only worship-love one thing: God.

Think back to our friends Mark & Lynn. If Mark says to her "Lynn I promise to make you my favorite wife. Out of all my wives, I'll love you the most." Again, not gonna work. Because Lynn isn't down for being **one of** his wives. AND, you and I would not call her intolerant for that. We'd say a healthy sign of marriage is exclusivity, she should expect him to love her and her alone with everything he has. That's what Jesus is saying God wants with us. No other gods is no other objects of worship.

When you keep the first commandment you will be actively & fully satisfied in God.

In who he is and what he is done for us. And as you follow this command it will change you inside and out. On the inside, you'll have more peace & purpose. Because you are finally finding your worth & value & significance in something that is strong enough to carry the weight of your soul. Something so secure it will never let you down. And Externally that will change how you begin to interact with the world around you. When tough times come, you won't be as shaken by them. Because you are secure in God. People will be more blessed by you because you won't NEED to use them for your own self worth. And most importantly, your relationship with God will grow deeper & stronger.

The assumption built into the 1st commandment is one that might be a little abrasive if you've never heard it before: you will make something your god. everyone worships something.

You hear that phrase ‘other gods’ and maybe you think about Hinduism or another religion where there are multiple gods. But if we can see that we each look to things or people to find security & meaning, that we give our ultimate allegiance **to something**, we will see that we make all kinds of gods.

Next week we are going to talk a lot more about how we make and then worship false gods. But because we are hard-wired to worship, we will worship something. We will give our ultimate allegiance to God, or to some god substitute. And when we give our devotion, our hope, to something other than the one true God, our lives will suffer. Because just like cars were made to operate with gas in the tank, so we will only function properly when our worship is given to the one true God.

The thesis of the whole bible is to show you that you have lifted up and latched on to other gods besides God and that is the source of all your problems. It is the source of who you’ve become and why you act as you act and why you have the problems you do.² Your gods set your motivations, determine your behaviors and emotions, and ultimately let you down.

What are these gods? Well here are some diagnostic questions to help you figure out what you worship:

- What do you feel you need in order for life to be good?
- What makes life worth living?
- When you dream about the future, what do you dream about obtaining?

² Keller, Exodus 20 sermon. Citation still being located but this is attributed to him.

- Where do you go for comfort?

Again we’ll dig a lot more into this next week but you gotta understand it because keeping the first commandment will lead to keeping all the others and breaking the first command will lead to breaking all the others. **Because all sin, all disobedience to God’s commands, is first a worship problem.** Your answers to questions like these will reveal what you may have moved into a place of worship.

And it can be a good thing! What happens so often is that God gives us GOOD THINGS. James 1 says every good gift comes from God. And when we keep it in its place as a gift from God...its good. But then over time we start to find our happiness in the gift and not the gift giver. **And that’s when it moves in our hearts from being one of God’s gifts to being one of God’s competitors.**

Present Personal Example: My career. For me, that’s directly tied to you guys. And surely church should be a gift. Yet I so often take the gift and start to obsess about it. And here’s how **I know I’ve started worshiping mercy as a god: I look at my symptoms. That’s what those questions are about. When my happiness and contentedness is primarily driven by how much success mercy church has...I have a worship problem.** And when my fear and anxiety is most heightened by any sign of failure Mercy may be experiencing...I have a problem. Mercy has moved from God’s gift to being one of God’s competitors in my life. And when I worship something other than god, my life suffers.

See Those emotions are like smoke from a fire. Don't focus on the smoke, Follow the trail of smoke back to the fire and you will arrive at the altars of the idols you are worshiping.

- If you find yourself being angry a lot – Follow the trail of smoke. What makes you so angry all the time? Is it because your real life isn't how you think it should be by now? Because you deserve more or different than you have? If your soul is not satisfied that in Christ you have far more than you ever deserved, its because you have another god. and that god isn't delivering.
- If you find yourself, like me, obsessing over work – follow the trail of smoke. Why are you so willing to sacrifice your family and your friendships on the altar of work? Why do you take performance reviews so heavily? It's because you have made work your identity. It's your god.
- Maybe you obsess over a relationship. That's smoke.

Listen if you want a shortcut to discovering what other gods you may be worshipping? Ask someone close to you who you trust to point them out to you. Gonna be brutal. But we are usually not as good at hiding our 'gods' as we think we are. But we are really good at deceiving ourselves.

And listen everytime we sin. Every time we break any of these commandments, we break the first one.

Every sin is a form of breaking the first commandment.

And Romans 6 tells us

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our lord. Romans 6.23

See the commandments represent a problem for us don't they. We cannot keep them. The effect of sin on us is that even after we KNOW other things won't work as gods, we still go after them and worship them. And God says this wage, the payment for that...is death. Spiritual and Physical death. Spiritually we are separated from God.

Because if you think about our running illustration today, sin is adultery. It's saying something else is my authority here so I am rejecting God and choosing it. And God says it will lead to suffering here on earth AND it grants you what it wants: separation from God now and forever.

And the power of the gospel is that we didn't first love God, he loved us. And gave himself for us as a payment for our sin. So that we might be reconciled to him. Your sin doesn't have to define you.

What do you do if you've broken it? BE RECONCILED TO GOD!

TODAY receive the gospel news. WORSHIP again and be free.