

Good morning and welcome again to church online. It’s good to be with you. Next week is Mother’s Day and we plan to commence a six-week series on prayer. And so we come today to our final message from the book of Exodus. How appropriate this has been; and hasn’t God been speaking to us through His Word during these last four months?

Now, before we look into God’s Word, how would you like a holiday down at the beach about now? I wonder, have you ever placed your chair right at the water’s edge? Some people find that to be the most relaxing spot on the beach. The chair legs sink into the wet sand so that you are completely stationary. Leaning back and lying still, feeling the breeze, you unwind as the waves come up and cool your feet and the tide tickles your toes. Oh, this is what holidays are made of.

When we realise that we’re under the grace of God, it’s like taking a vacation for our soul. In a world where we are conditioned, educated, and trained on a good protestant work ethic; on how to work for a living, it’s easy to translate this work mentality to our church life and to faith; always busy; always on the go; always got to be doing something. Resting in God’s presence can feel wrong – but we are called to rest; rest in the grace of God.



**Prayer** “Father we come aside from the hustle and bustle of the world; we came aside from our busyness, and we want to rest in your presence; we want you to speak to us today; to encourage us through Your Word. We do pray for our church family and ask that You would meet with them; may they know Your presence and sense the ways that you are providing, protecting, sustaining and pursuing them; comfort those who are grieving, and may you bring healing and restoration to the hurting. Help us to rest, and help us to hear from You through Your Word. Thank you for all that you do and for all your blessings. Amen.”

You know, we are all the product of our society; we adopt a certain world view through the ways that we are conditioned and educated; the way that our culture impacts us. And one of our fundamental precepts is that justice should always be served; where the Law has been broken, then the offender should be duly punished.

And so today we come to the familiar words of Ex 20 and what we call the Ten Commandments; these are God’s directions. But what would our world look like if there were no laws? Well, consider this...

Imagine, today is the day! You’ve finally gotten that new car that everyone has been raving about, and boy is she a beauty. You climb in, put on your seatbelt and turn the ignition. As you start to head down the road, you notice the instrument panel has no instruments – no speedo, no fuel gauge. Then you notice the car doesn’t have any headlights or turn signals, and the glass is tinted almost to pitch black, including the windscreen.



It’s all a little unusual, but the salesman said it was supposed to be this way. Anyway, the car does have a great stereo. And the mirrors in the car are specially designed and placed to reflect only your best features. Never mind the fact that you can’t see where you’re going – you calmly ignore the occasional honks and screams and thumps under the wheels – they’re somebody else’s problems, not yours. But you do get a little annoyed when that other guy who almost hit you. Somebody ought to do something about those lousy drivers out there!

Sound ridiculous? And of course it is. But that’s what society would look like without rules; without Law; where everyone decided for themselves what’s right and wrong? It would be like living in a town where stopping at a stop sign was left up to the “relative decision” of each individual driver. There are safety features in place, but you can choose whether you want to adhere to them or not. It would be a chaotic world. And so for us we come back to the Ten Commandments and perhaps we’ve come to understand them as God’s Law.

Reading: Ex 20:1-17

**“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.**

**“You shall have no other gods before me.**

**“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

**“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.**

**“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**

**“Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.**

**“You shall not murder.**

**“You shall not commit adultery.**

**“You shall not steal.**

**“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.**

**“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.”**

As we have followed the story, God heard the cries of His people caught in slavery, and through His power displayed in the plagues and the parting of the Red Sea, He delivered His people into freedom. Now, you might expect that the giving of the Ten Commandments might come some time into their journey. God has blessed them so much; led them out of Egypt; through the Red Sea into safety; provided water and manna and quail; guiding them by a pillar of cloud during the day, and fire by night. He has done marvellous things. He has saved them; pursued them; protected them, and provided for them.

Kate spoke about this last Sunday. I’d encourage you as Kate did, to take some time to stop and reflect over the ways that you have experienced God’s grace. From what has He saved you? How have you known God pursuing you in the past? How have you experienced His protection and provision?

But here they are, they’re only three months into their journey into the desert. Only three months in. They’re a lawless rabble and without any rules, they start to do the wrong thing by one another, and so God needs to step in and begin the process of making them into a nation; they need God’s direction.

But what lies behind the giving of the Ten Commandments from God’s perspective? Is it about the Law that demands their allegiance and obedience? Is it about setting boundaries that keep them subservient to Him? Is it because God is so concerned about justice being delivered that He wants to set clear rules? Is our demand for justice, the lens through which we understand the ten Commandments?

As parents we constantly state the rules and enforce them with our kids; and if you do the right thing then you’ll get a reward; do the wrong thing then you’ll be punished. Is this God’s intention with His children, the Hebrew people? Three months in, and is this God enacting the Law to keep His people in submission to Him? Is this God making it very clear what must be done to keep Him happy? Is this God stating that if you step out of line, there will be dire consequences; but if you do the right thing then He’ll reward you?

Is your view of God influenced by the Ten Commandments, or is your view of the Ten Commandments influenced by your understanding of God? You see, you might view God as a harsh judge watching and waiting to catch people out for their sin? Does fear of stepping out of line; fear of being punished; fear of losing eternal life, stem from the call to obey the Ten Commandments?

When Bill Mills was with us earlier in the year, one of the challenges that he presented before us, was that God values mercy over justice; that there are many times when God doesn’t give us that we deserve nor punish us for not obeying His rules. There are times when justice is not afforded, but rather comes second to the mercy of God.

And the story of Moses reinforces this. Moses was brought up in the Palace of the Egyptian Pharaoh. And there was a time when he was so overcome with the injustice that he saw before him; a fellow Hebrew being so harshly treated, that he took things into his own hands and killed the Egyptian. No where do we see that Moses was ever punished by God for this. God values mercy over justice.

King David is another case in point – after the Law was given. He commits adultery, and then orchestrates Uriah’s death. He is not punished directly, but he does lose his son born to Bathsheba, and he is more miserable from this point on. But God shows mercy upon David.

GOD	MAN
1: Do not worship any other gods	5: Honour your father & mother
2: Do not make any idols	6: Do not murder
3: Do not misuse the name of God	7: Do not commit adultery
4: Keep the Sabbath holy	8: Do not steal
	9: Do not lie
	10: Do not covet

GOD  
VALUES MERCY  
OVER JUSTICE

This idea that God values mercy above justice challenges our thinking and perspective. Where there are rules that are not followed, then punishment must follow! But, could the Ten Commandments be something other than rules that require dutiful obedience?

You see, the word “commandment” was not found until the King James translation of the Bible in 1603. In the Hebrew, these words of God were known as ten sayings, ten matters, ten terms or ten words. The Authorized Version was the first to call them the Ten Commandments and other translations have followed suit. So, in the original Hebrew, these were not commandments as we understand commandments, but rather ten foundation stones or principles. They were more than guidelines or suggestions, but were foundational principles. Could these words of wisdom be God’s words of direction?

We’ll come back to our reading. So, the people had consecrated themselves, washed their clothes and stayed well away from the foot of the mountain. They had obeyed that rule, and then following the sound of the trumpet blast they were allowed to come to the foot of the mountain.

V.16 of chapter 19, **“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.”** V.18-19, **“Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.”**

Can you imagine the scene; imagine yourself there with the people. I’ll re-read these words again and notice how frightening this must have been for the people...

Imagine the scene; this is God coming before His people. What an awesome and fearsome sight. And the people are left trembling in fear.

And then chapter 20 begins with God speaking to His people. Now, we can’t be sure whether the people understood God’s voice, and it was Moses who later revealed what God was saying, but either way they still understood this to be God. And we begin in v.2, **“I am the Lord your God, who bought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”** I don’t believe that God is saying this to reiterate His power and authority but rather to remind them once again that it is He who has saved them.

There is a humility here, that we see in God. He’s not demanding obedience, for it will not be in the keeping of the Ten Commandments that the people will be saved – for God has already saved them. It is not the keeping of the Ten Commandments that saves us: salvation is a gift of God. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. We are not saved by keeping the Law; by obeying the rules. We are saved because of the humility of Jesus; God has provided for our salvation.

God is saying, “I brought you out of Egypt; out of slavery. I am the God who saves. And although you may have lived in a land where multiple gods were worshipped, I am the Lord your God and you shall have no other god. Remember the plagues in Egypt, and how I defeated at least one of their gods in every plague. You shall not make for yourself any form of an idol or god to worship – not even anything that represents me. Because I am the God who loves you and has saved you, I am giving you ten words; ten foundational principles by which to live; to live abundantly. These are not commandments to be obeyed out of duty or obligation, but these are foundation stones that if followed, will see you live in peace and prosperity.”

The first four words of wisdom from the Lord are about giving God the honour and respect; the worship that He deserves. Because He is the God who has saved us, we should not worship any other god; nor do we use His name in vain; and we should honour Him by taking one day a week to give special attention to Him and resting in His presence; we rest spiritually and physically. Are we guarding our mind and our heart by keeping out anything that might dishonour God?

These ten words are given in love; for the wellbeing of His people, and the glory of His name. The last six words or principles concern our relationships with one another. You see, God’s directions point people in God’s direction. And Jesus had something to say about this. In Matt 22 it is recorded that an expert in the Law, a Pharisee (those who has put in place even further rules that had not been given Moses), came to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied, **“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**



The greatest commandment is not “You shall have no other gods before me.” The greatest commandment is love; love God, and then love one another. If we love our Heavenly Father, then we’ll keep the first four, and if we love other human beings then we’ll keep the last six.

Did Jesus obey the Ten Commandments out of duty or obligation: or fear of punishment? No, He loved His Heavenly Father, and he loved people, so obeying the commandments was not a duty, but a compulsion born out of love. He didn’t obey them because they were Commandments, but because they were direct wisdom from God.

And so, I believe we need to see these words from God, not as Ten Commandments, but ten words of wisdom; born out of a loving Father who want a relationship with us, and wants the best for us in our earthly relationships. We should be drawn to obey because He loves us and we love Him; not because He’s a divine taskmaster that requires our obedience for salvation. Loving God and loving people will see us fulfil these guiding principles. They were given in love, and they are fulfilled in love. Amen.



Now, just before we share in communion together, can we think about Moses for a moment. As God speaks to the people, how grateful was Moses? How overcome was He by the grace and mercy of God. **“You shall not murder.”** “Oh, but I have! And Father God, you have forgiven me. You have been gracious to me and blessed me. You have revealed Yourself to me, spoken to me, and used me to set your people free. How wonderful that you didn’t punish me for my sin.”

How wonderful that God has not punished me for my sin. As we take the bread we are mindful that the Bible assures us that no one has hit the mark, we all sin and fall short of the glory of God, but goodness and righteousness have already been attained for us. We are justified, we are made right, brought up to heavenly standards by God’s grace, through our faith in Jesus. Our souls can sit in beach chairs by the tide, lean back, and soak up the warmth of God’s radiant love. Let us pray... “Father we take the bread now in grateful adoration; in love for you, our Lord and Saviour.”

As we take the cup we are reminded that Jesus took the place of the Passover lamb, and His blood has covered the price for our sin. Jesus died on the cross; dying in our place, the innocent dying for the guilty, the righteous dying for the unrighteous. He was without sin, keeping every aspect of the Law. And so, the angel of death passes over us, and we will transition from this life into God’s eternal and glorious presence. “Father, we take this cup now; we proclaim the death of our Saviour, until he comes again.”



Can we sing together... How marvellous that His wounds have paved the way for our salvation; our forgiveness; our resurrection.



**Song: TN213 How deep the Fathers love for us.**

We cannot boast in anything of ourselves – not even our ability to live according to God’s ten words. In Ex 20:18-19, following these ten words of wisdom from the Lord, we read that the people were still trembling in fear and said to Moses, **“Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”**

And how beautiful are Moses words in response. He know His God; he knows His mercy and forgiveness, and says, **“Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”** “Don’t be afraid of God.” God want you to live without sinning – because it’s the best way to live.

These ten words of wisdom are given not to keep us in fear and obligation, but freeing us into a disposition of love. Free to love God joyfully and peacefully; and free to love one another; forgiving one another and extending mercy. Not held under obligation and fear, but compelled by love and gratitude.

Although God is awesome in power and might, He wants us to live without sin. He wants us to live in relationship with Him under His wing, in His care. God’s directions point us in God’s direction and His way is the way of love. Can we live like this on our own? No. But as Paul said, **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”** (Phil. 4:13) With God’s help, I can live the way that God has called me to live.