

Our Blueprint for Love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 September 2021

Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

[0 : 00] We hope that you enjoy this teaching from Christ Church. This material is copyrighted and no unauthorized duplication, redistribution, or any other use of any part is permitted without prior consent from Christ Church.

Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Hello, everyone.

My name is Megan Kelly, and I am part of the Central Berkeley Community Group. Today's reading is from the book of Deuteronomy, selected verses from chapter 5.

We have added one verse, but it's otherwise as printed in your liturgy. And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them.

It was not with our ancestors that the Lord made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire.

[1 : 09] I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house 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. Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy as the Lord your God has 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 do no work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey, or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest as you do.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

[2 : 46] Honor your father and your mother as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you 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 neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice, and he added no more.

And he wrote them on two tablets of stone, and he gave them to me. You shall be careful, therefore, to do as the Lord your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

You shall walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.

[3 : 54] The grass withers and the flowers fade. Good morning, my God. All right.

Well, good morning to you all. If you've been here for any length of time, you know that I love, love, love the bumper stickers of Berkeley. And one of my favorite bumper stickers is, Welcome to Berkeley.

Now stop doing that. Has anyone seen that? It's a great bumper sticker. I've not seen anything written on stones around this town, but there are certainly lists of commands, lists of prohibitions and prescriptions that are expected of you as a citizen of the People's Republic of Berkeley.

In some ways, you could argue that the yard sign has become the new bumper sticker. There's a woman named Kristen Garvey. She's a librarian in Madison, Wisconsin. She developed a new yard sign in 2016.

She took a Sharpie with a white poster board, and she inscribed these words. It says, In this house, we believe black lives matter. Women's rights are human rights.

[5 : 16] No human is illegal. Science is real. Love is love. Kindness is everything. Anybody seen this sign around town? This sign has also spawned other versions.

In this house, we believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and on and on through the Nicene Creed. I kind of like that sign. There's another sign that says, In this house, we believe that simplistic platitudes, trite tautologies, and semantically overloaded aphorisms are poor substitutes for respectful and rational discussions about complex issues.

And I particularly like that sign, if you know anything about me. I bring this up because the human heart and human society can't live without lists. We can't live without lists of basic beliefs and behaviors, of simple creeds and conduct that flows out of that creed, of a list of, you know, basic truths about reality and guidelines for how to live in alignment with that reality.

And because the mission of Christ Church is to lead people into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, I want to help us grapple today with Jesus' short list.

Jesus' short list of essentials. His short list of non-negotiables. And that's why we're going to dive back in to Jesus' favorite book of the Bible, the book of Deuteronomy. And we're going to look today at this most influential text in the history of the world, the Ten Commandments, these God-given standards of the Ten Commands, are really the heart and the foundation of the message of Deuteronomy because they represent Yahweh, the Lord, and His loving, covenantal, marital relationship with His people.

[7 : 00] There's a certain here and now urgency about these commands for us here in the East Bay in 2021. And I don't know why we left this out.

It was my bad. But verse 3, you just heard Megan read. In the Hebrew, it literally says, with us, we, these ones here today, all of us living now.

That's who God has made this covenant with. It's a contemporary claim with each new generation of God's people. And these Ten Commands are given to Israel as a whole, collectively, as a comprehensive unit.

And yet, each one is spoken in the second person's singular, you. You, Jonathan. You, Catherine. You shall bow down to no other gods besides me alone.

Each of us are directly responsible to God for each of these things. And what this list really is, is a sketch of a contrast society.

[8 : 07] It's a sketch of an alternative way of life. A way that's different from the Egyptians. A way that's different from the Canaanites. This is a sketch of a different way of envisioning and living in a world where Yahweh, the Lord, is king.

And in that sense, it's a blueprint for how to love Him. It's a blueprint for how to order and regulate the loves of our community so that we can live in harmony and peace under the rule of God.

That's what the Ten Commands are all about. I could preach, I think, a year's worth of sermons on this. But what's the one thing I think we need to hear today? It's this.

That our bondage breaker commands rest and shalom. That's what I want to see today, is that our bondage breaker commands rest and shalom.

And I like to start by talking about our bondage breaker. Because there's a widespread assumption that if God is there, He wants us to follow the rules.

[9 : 13] In order to find credibility and acceptance with God, we must behave ourselves and obey His laws and follow His rules if we want to win His love and get in His good graces.

Where did that idea come from? Why do we associate our behavior with acceptability to God? I don't know, but it's deeply ingrained in all of us, myself included. I've got to set things right in my life.

I've got to do better. I've got to start praying. I've got to pull it together. Then God will notice me. Then God will love me. Then God will rescue me. But I want us to look at verse 6.

Verse 6 is the foundation stone of the Ten Commandments. And there's different ways to read it. One way is just to not read it. To skip over it. So that this sounds like this. God said, you shall not.

If you want to curry my favor, if you want to gain my love, then you better behave. You better act right. And if we skip over verse 6, then God seems like a severe, harsh, exacting, demanding, inflexible God.

[10 : 17] But another way to read it is not to skip over verse 6, but to just kind of change verse 6 a little bit to read like this. I am the Lord, I am the Lord, the God, which makes God seem distant and impersonal, like a detached, indifferent, unloving God.

But what does verse 6 actually say? It says, I am the Lord, your God. I'm a personal, intimate God.

I'm your God. And you already are mine. You're already in. You belong to me. These rules that follow are not the condition of a relationship.

They're the confirmation of a relationship that I've made with you by grace through faith. You don't gain your acceptance. You don't gain your deliverance through your behavior because I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

I've already shown that I'm your advocate. I've already proven that I'm your defender, your rescuer, your liberator. I saw you.

[11 : 26] I heard you and your groaning. I came to save you. And that's why I'm commanding all of your love right now.

Here's a couple of examples. Any dog owners here or dog lovers here? I see you out there. We had a dog growing up named Junior. Wonderful. Well, he was a dog that tried really hard.

He was a golden retriever. We loved him. He was a terribly behaved dog. But the question is, when did Junior become our dog? Did he become our dog when we put him in our yard behind the protection of our fence?

So that if Junior got out, he wasn't our dog anymore. Right? And our neighbors would find Junior and they'd call us up and they'd be like, hey, we found your dog. And we're like, no, that's not our dog.

And they're like, well, your name and your number's on his tag. And we're like, yeah, but he's not in our yard. He's not behind our fence anymore. He's not our dog. Junior became our dog when we chose Junior.

[12 : 33] Junior became our dog when we purchased Junior. And then we put Junior in our yard and behind our fence because he was our dog. And we wanted him to become the best dog he could possibly be.

He never really got there. But kids, here's another example. Kids, any of you have parents? Okay. Do any of you have parents who give you rules?

In my family growing up, we had some rules that if you didn't follow them, you got in trouble for the three Ds. It was disrespect, dishonesty, and disobedience. My parents wanted me to be respectful, be honest, and be obedient.

And they, but they didn't say to me, hey, if you follow my rules, then you'll be my child and you'll be part of our family. And if you don't follow the rules, then you're out.

Like, good luck with life. Hope you find somebody who can care for you. And it's the same with me and my parenting. Following my rules does not determine whether or not you're my kid.

[13 : 39] You don't obey to be loved. You obey because you're loved. Right? And we, that's how it works with God. What?

You're mine. I'm yours. I already belong. Wow. Thank you. How can I please you? I just want to learn how I can love you back.

And that's why this blueprint of the Ten Commandments is not a blueprint for salvation. It's a blueprint for love. It's a blueprint for grateful love.

Now that you know who I am, that by grace, I am the Lord your God, that I took initiative for you to belong to me and belong to my redeemed people. And now that you know what I've done, that by grace, I brought you out of Egypt, out of your captivity, out of your oppression.

I don't want you to obey some cold set of rules. I want you to have a warm relationship with me. Salvation is by grace.

[14 : 41] And grace leads to gratitude. God says, I've set you free. And these commands are the way to protect and preserve your freedom.

If you learn my character in these commands, if you learn to love what I love, if you learn what pleases me, if you can learn how to have an exclusive, undivided, loyal love relationship with me, then you, my people, will be the freest people in the world.

Because that's who I am. I'm the bondage breaker. And that's what it means to have a relationship with me to be a free people. Amen?

Amen. Our bondage breaker commands rest. And I just love this because, you know, a lot of people see the God of the Old Testament as an angry, vindictive, harsh, tyrannical, oppressive kind of God.

But the longest of his commands is a command for us to rest. And that's why I want to focus on commandment number four, keep the Sabbath holy. It's the longest and most specific of the commands.

[15 : 49] It's the hinge command between how to love God and how to love other people. It's the most reiterated command in all of the Old Testament. It's the most ignored command by the North American church.

We've had a pandemic year of over a year's practice of not Sabbathing together. And here we are in this post-pandemic, post-industrial information economy where all of us feel hurried, overburdened, and exhausted.

And we're like Bilbo Baggins. I am too little butter spread over too much toast. Right? So let's look at this command for a second.

Verse 12. Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

This is not a casual, nonchalant, take or leave suggestion. It's a command that involves one out of seven of our days, almost two months of our year, 10 years of our life over the span of 70 years.

[16 : 57] What does it mean? What does this word Sabbath mean? The word Sabbath literally means cease, stop, rest. And what does it mean to keep this Sabbath day holy?

It means that we set it apart as special, that it's unlike other days. It's totally different. It's not a day off because you just had that yesterday. It's not a second Saturday. It's not more me time.

It's not more time to do what I want, to cram in more, get more travel, get more sports, binge more of this or that. It says, keep the Sabbath to Yahweh your God.

Not keep the Sabbath to me, keep the Sabbath to the Lord. The Sabbath exists to remind me that life is not about me. And the default mode of the human heart is to put myself at the center.

Our mothers and fathers of the faith, they used to say, you know, we are, all of us, homo incurvatus in se. We are human beings curved in on ourselves. And our fatal flaw is that we push God out, that we make him irrelevant and trivial and peripheral and marginal to our lives.

[18 : 08] And having done that, we create, we make created things ultimate things. We take good things and we turn them into God-like things. Our work, the money that we make from our work, the achievements that we accomplish in our work, the approval that we get in our work.

And instead of saying, you know, God is the center, God is everything for me and work is how I serve him. We so easily say, you know, my work is everything. And that's where I find my identity and my purpose and my very salvation.

And that's why God gave us this command. This seventh day tells us that life is not about me and it's not about what I produce. Life is about the Lord and what it means to have a relationship with him.

The people of God had 400 years under the tyranny of unceasing work, not a single day off. But the Lord of the Exodus came and he willed their freedom.

And when he willed their freedom, he also willed for them to have one day in seven where they were free people. And you see, the freedom is not the absence of restrictions.

[19 : 18] Freedom is finding the right restrictions. Freedom is finding the most liberating and humanizing restrictions. There's a huge difference between freedom from and freedom for.

And God says, yes, you are. I want you to be free from your work, but I want you to do that so you can be free for worship. We all need the external rest of our bodies, right?

I mean, is that just me? Who's exhausted? We need the external rest for our bodies. But what we need even more is the inner recalibration of our souls.

When Catherine and I have a date night, which is not as often as it should be, and that's just a public time of confession for me, I know some of you will keep me accountable to become a better husband, the husband that I should be.

But when Catherine and I have a date night, it enables us to move from coexisting and running, mutually running St. Clair Enterprises to sitting down and looking one another eye to eye and sharing heart to heart and enjoying this union that we have and renewing the covenant that we've made with each other.

[20 : 34] My kids are like, ooh, Dad, that's gross. You're embarrassing us. But the Sabbath is kind of like that. The Sabbath is like a date with the Lord our God to renew our intimacy and our joy and our pleasure in having a relationship with Him.

Listen to what He says in verse 15. He says, remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

God is saying, look, it doesn't take long for our memory to fade. It takes about six days to forget God, to forget your identity in God, to forget about your relationship with God, to let your heart grow cold.

And so what you need is a day to be reminded of the strong hands of your creator God who worked mightily to redeem you from the chains that had you in bondage.

What you need is a day to be reminded of the strong arms of the Lord that stretch themselves way out in compassion for you to bring you close to Himself.

[21 : 42] What you need is a day to be reminded of how this God uncreated and dismantled an entire kingdom, an entire empire in order to set you free.

And see, the early Christians got this, right? When they celebrated their Sabbath day, it was a day of just unbelievable joy and delight.

Because when they came together, they were remembering that resurrection day when they heard the news, Christ is risen from the dead. And that's what shifted the Sabbath day to Sunday, right?

And they would come together on Sunday and they would celebrate their liberation from their old life of bondage to sin and death. And they would celebrate their entry into this new life of freedom that Jesus bought for them by His blood.

They would celebrate His mighty hands that He allowed to be pierced for their salvation. They celebrated His outstretched arms of love on that cross.

[22 : 47] They celebrated the rest that Jesus won for them when He cried out, It is finished. All the work that was needed for your salvation has been accomplished.

You are a free people. You are a victorious people. And the first Christians, they would come together and they would meditate on that deliverance story from the scriptures and they would literally chew on Jesus.

They would chew on the gospel at the Lord's Supper. And then you know what they would do? They would linger. They would linger and they would luxuriate with what they called an agape feast.

Their agape feast was this love feast where they had like a long, lavish lunch party with Jesus, the resurrected Jesus as their host and the center of attention.

And these were such raucous parties that the Apostle Paul had to write a letter, 1 Corinthians. And he had to say, hey, your feasts are so festive. You need to kind of dial it back a little bit.

- [23 : 53] Some of you are getting drunk. Some of you are going home from church getting drunk. Why were they so excited? Because the living Lord was in their midst. The crucified yet risen Jesus had come among them and he had said, come to me, all you who are weary and all of you who are burdened, because I want to give you rest.
- I am rest. I am the Sabbath. I am everything that the Sabbath has always been pointing to. Come to me. Our bondage breaker commands us to rest and to rest in him.
- But he also commands us not just to rest. He commands us to practice shalom. He commands us to practice shalom. I read this article this week.
- It said, when Jews say Shabbat shalom or Sabbath peace to family and friends after a draining work week, we mean far more than have a peaceful and restful day.
- What we are really saying is, may God restore you to wholeness on the blessed Sabbath. So let's practice that. Shabbat shalom. Shabbat shalom.
- [25 : 14] You can turn to your neighbor and say Shabbat shalom. Shabbat shalom. So the Sabbath is this gift that restores us to wholeness because it centers us and saturates us with the Lord himself, but simultaneously it centers us and makes us concerned about our neighbor.
- And you can see how we're to desire Shabbat shalom for the other people around us in verse 14, where it says, You, my people, are responsible to give the gift of Shabbat shalom, that restoration of wholeness to the most vulnerable of people, kids, youth, the next generation, to your servants, people who are employed by you and depend upon you for their livelihood, to refugees, people who are foreigners and who sought refuge among you, the people of God.
- You need to even give the gift of Sabbath and Shabbat shalom to your animals. Amazing. Speaking of animals, George Orwell wrote a book, and in that book, the animals rebelled against their farmer and they turned manor farm into animal farm.
- You read this book? They adopted these seven commandments of animalism, the most important of which is, all animals are equal. And then if you keep reading that book, as the years pass, those seven commandments of animalism are a bridge down to one simple phrase, and it says this, all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.
- Some animals are more equal than others. That's precisely what this law is meant to protect us from, that some people are more equal than others.
- [27 : 23] It says, do not recreate the oppressive empire of Egypt among yourselves, where the outsiders and the powerless, the slaves, women, people in the lower classes, worked unceasingly to get all the stuff done, while the insiders and the powerful people just enjoyed leisure.
- This is a protective act for the vulnerable, for the sake of social justice. And this is why Jesus himself is so serious about Shabbat Shalom for the most vulnerable, because what did Jesus do to get himself in so much trouble on the Sabbath?
- He fed the hungry. He exercised mercy to those who were sick and wounded and broken. In fact, we have seven stories recorded for us in the Gospels, where Jesus healed and restored people on the Sabbath day.
- There was a man who was dehumanized by demons. There was Peter's mother-in-law who was raging with a fever that would have killed her. There was a man who had a withered hand and a woman who was crippled because she was bent over like this for 18 years.
- There was a man who had endema. His whole body was just swollen. There was a man who was unable to walk for 38 years. And then there was that man born blind, never seen the light of day.

[28 : 52] There are at least seven people. We know there was probably many more not recorded in the Gospels who walked around with their testimony, their eyewitness testimony of Shabbat Shalom, that on this holy day, Jesus put me back in a right relationship with God, and he put me back in a right mind.

On this day, Jesus gave me life and energy so that I could serve other people. On this Sabbath day, Jesus gave me the ability to work again.

And on the Sabbath, Jesus caused me to stand up straight with dignity. On the Sabbath day, Jesus came and he comforted me and he relieved me of my pain. And on the Sabbath day, Jesus caused me to, my feet to start running and dancing in a way they hadn't done in a really long time.

On the Sabbath day, I saw the world. I saw colors. I saw people and human faces for the first time. All these people had their Shabbat Shalom stories about this Jesus who came, that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

And why was Jesus so intentional about Shabbat Shalom for the most vulnerable? Because he said, my heavenly father is a liberating God who's given us a liberating ethic to make us into a liberating people.

[30 : 20] And so as we close, I just wanna invite a little bit of reflection on some application. Christ Church, how do you sense the Lord Jesus inviting you and challenging you maybe to keep the Sabbath consistently holy to the Lord your God?

Some of us might change the way we prepare on Saturdays. We might sleep more so we can wake up more rested on Sunday. We might show up more prayed up. We might clear out our schedules and set aside our work and get our chores done and have our hearts primed and ready for a day that's centered upon and saturated with the Lord himself.

For some of us, we might change our mindset about what this holy day is, that it is indeed a holy day, that it's liberation day, that it's resurrection day.

And that means that it's a day of joyous feasting and cheerful celebration and grateful thanksgiving with our crucified yet risen Lord. For some of us, we might place a higher value on in-person worship.

Before the pandemic, average Bay Area Christian attendance at church was 2.5 Sundays a month. I have zero data to back that up. I'm just spitballing here as a pastor.

[31 : 38] I can't imagine it got better during the pandemic. But when you are not here, we cannot harmonize our voices with yours. When you are not here, we cannot share the bread and wine with each other.

When you are not here, we cannot teach your children the Bible and help them nurture relationships around Jesus himself. So maybe we need to wrestle a little more with the way that this act of Sabbath, this practice of Sabbath is an irreducibly physical and embodied act of worship as a community together.

Some of us might need to come with more of a readiness to welcome people we don't know into Shabbat Shalom. To show up and intentionally make this a sacred and special day for someone else by receiving strangers into our companionship of Sabbath rest with us, looking for the people who need to experience the shalom of the Lord.

And last thing, some of us may be wondering, hey, when are we gonna do this agape feast, you know, with all the wine and the joy and all that? Well, let me say, anytime you want.

Anytime you want. At your home, at a restaurant, at a park, invite me, I'll bring some wine. Anytime you want. We are, as a church, gonna have another nacho bar.

[33 : 01] You remember the nacho bar back in June? We're gonna have one of those on October 17th. We're gonna need an army of crockpots, meat, cheese. And we're gonna party.

We're gonna have an agape feast, a love feast that's holy to the Lord. And we hope that you'll come and celebrate with us because that'll be the 15th birthday of Christ's church that we're celebrating. I'll stop talking now.

Our bondage breaker commands rest and shalom. And I want you just to hear these words from God through the prophet Isaiah as I close. This is what he says to his people.

If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or saying idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord.

And I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

[34 : 17] In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.