

The Ten Commandments

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. It's a great honor to open God's Word this morning. I know we say it, or at least I say it every Sunday. I really wish we could be together. I think it's wonderful that we have technology. It's still an honor for me to preach, to open up God's Word, even if it's in front of a camera. But please pray that we may meet together soon. We're in Deuteronomy chapter 5.

Matt read. The next two weeks, we're going to be looking at the Ten Commandments. This week, next week, we'll be looking at the Lord's Prayer. Very, very important passages in Scripture.

In many ways, this is gospel living and praying for God's people. So this is a big passage for us Christians. But before we get into the passage, you know, finding when you're doing translation work, it doesn't have to be with a Bible. It can be, I mean, whatever it may be, but you're translating one language into another. There are some serious difficulties with capturing the essence of a specific phrase, not just into the language that you're translating into, but into the culture that you're translating into. So I'll give an example. I used to work at the Canadian Bible Society before I worked, before I came on as an intern at Messiah a number of years ago. I wasn't on the translation team at the Canadian Bible Society, but I would get all of these updates from the translation team. And what they were working on primarily was a decades-long translation campaign to translate the Bible into Inuktitut, the language of the Inuit people. Just remarkable. I think it took from start to finish a little over 30 years to do it. But one of the most comical stories in the whole translation process was trying to find an equivalent word for a camel for the Inuit people.

You picture it. The Inuit people live in, I think, all the territories. I think they live in Greenland as well. They live essentially where there's cold most of the year and not much sunlight a lot of the year. Pretty well the complete opposite terrain as the deserts in the Middle East. So when you're translating the Bible, how do you translate a camel into the language of the Inuit people? I mean, I don't really know. I can't kind of give you the story of how they did it, but like there is no word-for-word equivalent. So you just kind of, I guess, grasp the essence of what a camel is or the animal. I'm not sure, but I always thought that was hilarious. Like they have polar bears up there.

They have elk, caribou, not so much camels. So this morning, this is pertinent for us because we're going to look at the Ten Commandments or the Decalogue, and it is in the law of God.

[3 : 2 2] When we hear the word law to our English ears, it's not a bad word, but it's not a word that necessarily elicits excitement. Maybe for those in our congregation that have gone to law school, or if we have any kind of policy workers, you know, talk about laws and regulations and policies, and that is what gets them up in the morning. But for the rest of us, laws are fantastic, but they're kind of stiff. So when we talk about the law of God in the Old Testament, we are translating the word Torah, which is Hebrew, to law in English.

The Torah, the law of God, it works in some ways. We kind of get an idea of this translation, what the Torah is about, but it doesn't capture the essence of what it truly is.

To somehow think that God's law is stiff, it is not very exciting. It's kind of the part of the Bible, if you're going through a Bible reading plan where you yawn, or you are just, if you're super committed, like you plow through and you struggle through reading through the law.

But the Hebrew understanding of God's law is not just jurisprudence. It is God's ways. Of course, it has to do with do's and don'ts, but it is the ways of God, the very essence of how God designed the world to be. In fact, God's law reflects his very character. It tells us about who God is, what he likes, what he doesn't like, what he loves, what he hates. It teaches us about justice, but that justice then points to God, who is justice himself. So what we see here in the Torah is more than just a law. It is a wonderful, beautiful, robust, comprehensive view into the very nature of God, a manifesto, so to speak, of God's character and his loves and his desires for his creation, whom we are a part of. We're part of God's creation. This is why when we read in the Psalter,

King David especially, and especially in Psalm 119, King David gushes over God's law. He says that his law is better than life. How many lawyers have ever done that or policy analysts have ever just like, man, federal regulations, they are better than life. Nobody gushes over that. And yet King David here, it has gripped his very heart. You see God's law, his Torah, his Torah is much more than just that. So this week, like I mentioned, we're going to be in the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, in the book of Deuteronomy. And we need to understand that this, that these Ten Commandments are first and foremost, they're not just air, kind of airdropped in scripture, but they're part of a grander story. So they're found in the book of Deuteronomy.

[7 : 14] And this is the second time we see the Ten Commandments in scripture. The first time we see it is in Exodus. Deuteronomy is kind of like, I mean, the name of it is second law in, that's what Deuteronomy means. It's kind of like an elaboration or a revisiting of the law that we've already seen in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. And we have to understand that it, like I mentioned, it's not airdropped. It's not a series of disjointed commands and laws, but rather it is a culmination of God forming the Israelites into a nation after he had rescued them from 400 years of Egyptian slavery. And right before he leads them into the promised land. So God gives the nation of Israel his law on, at Mount Sinai through Moses. And it is a part of this grand narrative where the Israelites are going from slaves to their redeemed people, but then on their way to the promised land. So it's important that we grasp this, not just the Ten Commandments, but where it is in scripture, because the Exodus is such a key integral part of not just the Old Testament or the five books of Moses, right? Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But it is for the entire

Old Testament for the writings and the prophets. It's so crucial. And it's also incredibly crucial that we understand it if we are to understand the New Testament. Because the New Testament is constantly seeing the Exodus, seeing Egypt as they are symbolic of something greater. And we'll get to that in a bit.

But suffice it to say, it's very important that we have a good grasp on the Ten Commandments and on the story of the Exodus. So the Ten Commandments is a central piece of this story. It's far from do's and don'ts.

And remember that God's laws express God's very good and very perfect character. So as that is a bit of an introduction, let's take a look at the Ten Commandments. We'll see three things that the Ten Commandments will show us. We'll see through them that they reveal to us God's good design for life.

The second thing is it will show us that we have an inability to enjoy God's good design for life. And the last bit that it will reveal to us is the true beauty of God's law.

[10 : 09] And why we ought not to see it as stiff, but as a beautiful, robust, wonderful invitation for us into what it means to be God's people. So I'll repeat those things.

The Ten Commandments will reveal to us God's good design for life, our inability to enjoy God's good design for life, and then it will also reveal to us the true beauty of God's laws, God's law. So we'll look at the first thing, God's good design for life. I want you guys to consider, what is the cause of strife and heartache in your life? Within your family, at your workplace, wherever you may be, at school, with siblings, with spouse, and by the way, if you're not experiencing strife right now, praise God, but think back on a time that you might have experienced strife and heartache.

Is it not the cause of a relational breakdown? Is that not the cause of all, almost all, or if not all, of our heartache and strife in this life?

All of our, the ills find their genesis, so to speak, in relational breakdown? Organizations spend tens of millions, hundreds of millions of dollars on workplace training that includes conflict resolution.

Family members, partners, spouses, friends, they spend great sums of money on mediators and therapists, psychiatrists, to work through the aftermath of relational breakdowns.

[12 : 13] I really do think that relational breakdowns and relational brokenness, it really is at the heart of our pain and ill. It's also at the heart of our estrangement with God. So it's not just that we have relational breakdowns with each other, but we also have a relational breakdown with God.

And whatever your spiritual background may be, know this, that God's good design was to make you and I and all people to enjoy a deep and transparent relationship with Him.

But at the core of what it means to be a Christian, what it means to know the only true God is to have a relationship.

And not in a quaint way, but a deep, satisfying, transparent relationship with Him. And yet, relational brokenness rears its ugly head in that as well.

Sin comes into the picture. And what is sin if not a rejection of God's good plan for us to be in a relationship with Him? Somehow, I know what's best.

[13 : 25] I know what is going to make me tick, what I need, what kind of relationship will suit me better. And it is not God. Is this not the cause of our estrangement to God?

I mean, look at Genesis 1 and 2 and 3. God makes everything. It's good. He makes the first Adam and Eve and the story of creation. And there is a rejection of God.

And what is it, if not a relational breakdown? So we have a relational breakdown vertically between us and God, a relational breakdown with each other.

That's horizontally. But undergirding all of this, I think, is a relational breakdown internally. What do I mean by all of this? Human beings have a conscience.

We know right from wrong. And contrary to some of our thought leaders, not all, but some of them, and some very predominant ones, right and wrong is not a mere social construct.

[14 : 33] It is remarkable to see children know right from wrong almost from, I don't want to say infancy, but like from toddlers, even maybe before that.

That it's something inherent in us, knowing right from wrong. And it is a feature, a key feature, of what it means to be made in the image of God.

Animals, other animals, other beings, they don't have the, they don't have a conscience. They don't differentiate between right and wrong. It's only us. It's a key feature of what it means to be made in the image of God.

God. But consider, for us, what inner turmoil looks like. We know the right way to go, but we don't do it.

We have inner dialogues with ourselves, some more vibrant and robust inner dialogues than others, but all of us wrestle, have this internal wrestling with the things we ought to do and the things we ought not to do.

- [15 : 37] The things that are inherently right and the things that are totally wrong. And there are relational breakdowns also with inanimate objects as well.

We have relational breakdowns with money. And what do I mean by that? We put a lot of emphasis on income or possessions or relationships.

And it is not a healthy relationship that we have with these things. For some of us, it's an unhealthy relationship with food, with our devices. All of these things speak to a breakdown of a relationship.

Our desires are completely disordered. They're completely disordered. And this is the wonderful thing about the law.

The law recognizes this. God's ways recognize this. It recognizes that God had a perfect design and that there's a relational brokenness that has destroyed it.

- [16 : 48] The law primarily is separated into two parts. Those parts that pertain to the relational breakdown between us and God and that part that relates to the relational breakdown between us and one another, me and you, you and your family member, you and whoever else it may be.

And although at the surface, the text says stuff like, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, for just three examples of the law.

But it's important that we don't just read the prohibition, but we ask ourselves the question, well then, what's the opposite of that prohibition? Is the opposite of not, of stealing, simply not stealing?

Or is there something greater and more robust to it? Is there something greater and more robust than just not killing somebody? Like, is that just what the text is asking?

I mean, at the very minimum, yes. Yes. if somebody is not killing somebody, but they have a desire to, and somehow they're not doing it. I mean, that's a good thing.

- [17 : 59] But the law speaks to something more robust, more wonderful, more incredible. Remember, that God's law, God's Torah, it reflects his very good character and his very perfect being.

The Westminster Larger Catechism, question 99 says this, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded.

So, we need to ask ourselves, that's a very helpful little bit to think through. Where we see something that is forbidden, we need to ask ourselves, not, how do I not just commit that sin?

Very good question. But more so, how do I capture the essence of the opposite? The first command calls for fidelity to the only true God.

This is what it says, sorry, in verse 7, you shall have no other gods before me. I guess in many ways, it's not just the first, it's the second and the third as well.

- [19 : 07] You shall not make for yourselves a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. And then, the next one, in verse 11, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

The first, the second, the third, all call for fidelity to God. God calls himself a jealous God. The first commandment makes it clear, the second and third really flesh that out.

To have other gods besides the one true God is not a simple rejection of the Christian faith for another tradition or no faith at all.

It is a rejection of what it means to be a flourishing human. What it means to live as you were designed to live. Remember, God is the creator of all and he is good.

[20 : 12] And his purposes are good. And for him to create you and I and then give us his ways of how to live, it is a good thing.

And to go the opposite is to not experience flourishing. It's to not know the very thing by which we were made to live for.

to live into. To know in part this true connection to the divine, to God and to trust that there's a promise that although in part we can know this relationship and know this this deep satisfaction, this relational satisfaction in part in this life but also the promise that in the life to come we will know it fully.

this is the relational heart of God and to know God and to serve him and to not see it as this faith as just one of many and I just want to pick it because it sounds better than say Hinduism or transcendental meditation or just a type of secularism.

It's no, it's not that. It is instead to follow God and to experience and to lean into and to grow into relational health or to not.

[21 : 43] And this is the beauty of God's law. It is good and it is for our flourishing. The next few commandments have everything to do with flourishing for human society.

Healthy family units, prohibition of murder like I mentioned, adultery, theft, dishonesty in court. It's all absolutely critical like just sociologically speaking for a society to be healthy.

Think about it when this stuff breaks down on a societal scale. Okay, well, pause on that. When it breaks down within a family unit, what happens?

the family unit breaks apart. How about in a city or in a country? Why is it that murder, theft, dishonesty, when that becomes a mainstay of a nation, we call those nations failed states.

These few commandments are so integral just for life to function, let alone thrive. But, here's the thing, the last commandment, it speaks to not covet, to not envy.

[23 : 06] Let me read it to you. And you shall not covet, this is verse 21, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his male servant, or female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Christine, my wife, she reminds me often that coveting is the begetting sin. Oftentimes, we don't, we don't start with theft or murder or adultery, but it starts with coveting.

So, if we are looking at the law and seeing the prohibitions and asking ourselves the question, well, what is the opposite of that? What is the true essence in flourishing, I guess, the essence, the goodness of the law for coveting?

It would be contentment. And just, just imagine if the city of Ottawa, the residents, regardless of the neighborhood they were in.

Imagine in your own house if you were content. Imagine if you were content, not for a day or two, but well after the new thing lost its shine.

[24 : 34] Or the new promotion, it didn't carry as much kind of weight in the office or at the workplace. or if the honeymoon phase is over.

What would it look like if you were truly content? How would that change society? How would that change your family? If you look back on the other commandments, we can see God's design for human flourishing when he talks about not bearing false witness.

that's not just being honest in a courtroom. It's about not slandering people. It's about not gossiping. It's about speaking highly of people.

It's about giving them the benefit of the doubt. It's about not strawmanning your enemy. Imagine if that happened.

Would Twitter exist? not stealing. It's not simply just taking what is not yours but giving so that people don't need to steal.

[25 : 50] It's about seeing needs and meeting them. And murder we see in the gospel that Jesus himself it's not just murder is attacking somebody but it's hating somebody.

So how do we then see the opposite of this how do we then look with eyes of love? Doesn't that speak of human flourishing? I mean if we go through the law and just the ten commandments here and just take our time and see God's good purpose and design wow like it really is something else.

It sounds almost too good to be true but it's worth doing and encourage you take some time we don't have time to go through this I mean each what three four summers ago at Messiah we did a whole summer series on the ten commandments we don't have time to exhaustively go through this take time yourself this week and plumb the ten commandments asking yourself where is God's good design found in this the ten commandments show us how terrific God's design for life is but it also shows us our inability to live up to it it's so obvious what to do and what the result is in our life when we try to make this happen we are rebels at heart I've mentioned that we are insurrectionists we have large eyes and greedy bellies it's a terrible combination we want what we don't have we grow tired of the things we do have we don't have any contentment we have seared consciences and no distrust and suspicion much more intimately than we ever ever ever wish we did we put up walls so that we're not hurt by people we are broken people and by the way if you don't really feel like you're a very broken person

I think that's fantastic and there are a lot of both Christians and especially non-Christians that are really really healthy emotionally healthy people they have great relationships they've figured out ways to deal with conflict really well but is anybody perfect has anybody had a good run of 70 or 80 years of relational perfection I have a friend who has a friend who it would seem to me that that this person not a Christian has everything going right and had everything growing right from his childhood to his adolescence to his time at university to afterwards getting a job like there's no issues in his life until there was a strain on relationships it hits us all and we have an inability to keep

God's law perfect so much so that in the letter of St. James chapter 2 verse 10 it says this for whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it or has become a law breaker that does not seem fair perfection or nothing in your law breaker but consider this these laws aren't just disconnected prohibitions but they're deeply deeply interwoven like I mentioned about coveting being the begetting sin you can covet and not murder but I almost guarantee you that if somebody's a murderer they've coveted you don't necessarily have to be a thief if you're a person that covets but if you've stolen it's because you're coveting take idolatry as another example you can keep all the other commandments except you can't if you're an idolater because what is idolatry if it is not looking to other things or other people or whatever it may be for true satisfaction for deep deep belonging for true flourishing if it's disconnected from god all of these things are interconnected and at the very minimum if you sin against another human being you are sinning against somebody made in the image of god you are desecrating in a sense something that god made someone that god made so it makes sense then when i look at james chapter 2 and it says for whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable of all of it so this is the thing the law isn't just there to show us god's beautiful perfect design for life the law also acts as the means by which human beings know they're sinful and this isn't a bad thing it's part of god's design that in the beginning there was this incredible scene in the garden before sin entered the picture and it is wiped away like it is gone because of sin but god is redeeming it and he has redeemed it and he is inviting you to be a part of that redemption the law was never designed as a means to achieve one's salvation how could it we are destined to fail but remember that this was given to the israelites on mount sinai after god had rescued them from egypt guys this is this is a picture uh um god communicating to redeemed people how redeemed people ought to live look with me verse six this is how it opens up before we even get into the commandments itself it says this in verse six i am the lord your god who brought you out of the land of egypt out of the house of slavery four hundred years and israel cried out to god they did nothing themselves and god it says with with a strong arm and an out a strong hand and an outstretched arm he rescued israel he rescued them a stiff necked people a people that pushed god

[33 : 12] away and what does he do he invites them in and makes a covenant with them the the all caps lord that we have in verse six is the covenant name it's used in place of the covenant name of god and that covenant name speaks to the relational aspect of who god is these people are already a part of god's covenant people they can't earn their salvation because they're already saved and this is what the law does as well it shows us a great need for a savior and god is saying i'm your savior so we don't have an ability to keep the law but it it's a beautiful thing because it points us to the one that will that will rescue us completely and holy the third thing and it's connected to verse six is the law showing the true beauty of who god is with this declaration of of in verse six where it says i'm the lord notice what does it say right after it says i am the lord your god your god there's no greater declaration for god to say over former slaves that i am your god so it's him saying that you are you are no longer under the lordship of sin and slavery and death you're under my lordship no longer are you a slave you're a son you're a daughter the ancient gods and we read about this in in the scriptures but also archaeology helps us to understand a bit of this too the ancient gods of the nations that surrounded the promised land the gods of the canaanites they were impersonal gods but they called for worship that entailed gluttony that entailed drunkenness ritual cult prostitution child sacrifice with a promise that that will lead to the good life do this and you will know real human flourishing we don't have a pantheon of canaanite gods that we worship here in canada but our own gods in canada i mean they are they're not much different canada is full of all sorts of different cultures so it's not as if i'm speaking of a monolithic culture of canada and yet there are so many commonalities within the the different canadian cultures maybe that's a better way of saying it that are so similar to the canaanite gods for instance gluttony this inordinate desire for more if that's not gluttony i mean that is gluttony gluttony is never being satisfied eating acquiring possessing to no end because there is no satisfaction what is drunkenness if not a desire to connect in some kind of ecstatic way to and when i say drunkenness drug use as well to some kind of higher power or a means by which we cover up and dull our pain because we have an inability a crippling fear to deal with our pain how about cult ritual prostitution we don't have temples to whatever god where there's cult ritual prostitution but sexual conquest is something

that is still i mean it is it is still seen with a type of sick virtue and i say sick virtue not because those terrible people out there it's because it's within so many of us in the church a desire also to know sexual pleasure completely disconnected with responsibility and i don't mean responsibility in like like i need to do my chores before i can go outside i'm an eight-year-old responsibility but like responsibility for people we unhitch sex from procreation in our culture i mean child sacrifice this is the one that it just always blows my mind because in the ancient world if you wanted your crops to grow if you wanted success in your life you'd sacrifice a child on a statue of the god molek and it's not the the the morgent taller clinic just a temple to molek and by the way if you have been pushed into or know people that have been pushed into an abortion it is heinous and broken and i'm not coming down hard on people that have a ton of pain and baggage from that but the lie is if you have a child it's going to ruin your prospects it's going to it's going to if it's an unwanted child there's going to be stigma around that and it's not going to cause you to flourish you're not going to have a flourishing life these are what the false gods tell us do this and your life will flourish and what is the result time and again it is relational brokenness it is not flourishing being estranged from family members because of some terrible beef that happened or choosing to push people aside for your own gain or feeling like if because of some issue that you didn't deal with right there is no redemption for you because that thing has taken on a monster status in your life whatever that may be that is not flourishing it's not flourishing it's slavery but

God's law I mean we have this absolutely stupid understanding in parts of our culture maybe in your own life that an unhindered life is the best life a life devoid of restraint is the best life but I'm telling you restraint is a beautiful wonderful thing and especially when it comes to God's law because it orders our desires in the way that they're supposed to with God at the head desiring our best mending broken relationships setting the ground work for future healthy relationships and ultimately dealing with our sin and brokenness in a way that's not a cover-up in a way that's not just numbing pain but dealing with it deep down I'll go one thing I might go two things one last at least one last thing

I'm not sure if you noticed that I touched on nine out of the ten commandments I touched on commandments one two and three and then I touched on commandment five all the way to the end I made no mention of the fourth commandment which is keeping the sabbath it's the largest portion within the decalogue the ten commandments and I'll read it out it's four verses this is what it 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 therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath it's interesting as well that in Exodus the ten commandments in Exodus on top of that there is the mention that God created all things and rested on the seventh day the ten commandments that it is if the ten commandments deal with relational health flourishing between us and God the vertical and the horizontal us one another the fourth commandment straddles the two it deals both with with God and with one another there's this internal connection that happens and the other commandments I mean they touch on this but the Sabbath it just does such a fantastic job of connecting our relationship with

[42 : 55] God and our relationship with one another but what is more is that the commandment of the Sabbath looks to something much greater than a day off a week in the New Testament but also within the Old Testament as well the Sabbath is a picture of the age to come about all of the promises fulfilled to know God in his fullness to know him without any obstacles in the way we call it heaven we call it a return to Eden it is perfect unbroken relationship with the living God so much so Jesus he talks about entering his rest entering his rest I love that in verse 11 and 12 or sorry in verses 15 and 6

I guess just 15 why why do we we take a day off a week it's because God has saved us we're no longer slaves and the picture of heaven is an ending of our strivings an ending of our sin of trying to figure out how to make sense of difficulties in life an end to doing the things we ought not to do I mean we in the confession there's no health in us we are miserable offenders it's an end to that the end to that the Sabbath looks to Jesus himself that when we enter the Sabbath we are entering rest and eternity with God through Jesus and it's this wonderful beautiful picture so here's the thing how should we then live as redeemed people well we should do our very best to keep

God's commandments but remembering always that we are doing it from a place of freedom that if we have put our trust and our hope and our ultimate longing for the good life the flourishing life then by God's spirit and it's interesting here that today is Pentecost that God gave the church his Holy Spirit the promised Holy Spirit Jesus said I will go so the helper may come and the Holy Spirit is God's own spirit the third member of the Trinity to dwell in his way to flourish and follow God's ways and it's interesting I say it's interesting because today's Pentecost we can read about it in Acts chapter 2 but Pentecost was a pre-existing holy day before Acts chapter 2 and what does it mark it marks the giving of the law what we read today is first

Pentecost and God laid out his plan for the flourishing the good life and deeply embedded in that he was pointing to Christ and pointing to the redemption of not just the Israel nation but all who put their trust and faith in him giving us the Holy Spirit not to do away with the law but that we may live to the glory of God the law and to know what it means to be people that bless and not curse people that see needs and meet them people that declare the goodness of God that worship the one true God that call people out of a life of slavery into a life of contentment not contentment just because yeah they have enough stuff but because they know God because he is the true gift friends it is a wonderful day to to to recommit to that if you don't know the

Lord if you're curious about the faith I would encourage you to read this but but more than that I would encourage you to cry out to God as if you were an Israelite enslaved in Egypt and I promise you I promise you he will save you and if that happens guys please tell one of us we want to connect with you we want to fellowship with you connect with you read the scriptures be friends worship God together and that would be just terrific let's pray heavenly father we thank you so much for the 10 commandments they aren't stiff laws but they're an expression of your very nature they're the blueprint to what human flourishing looks like they're the very thing that point to you Lord please help us to not look to false gods that promise the world but completely under deliver but instead let us look to you the

[48 : 13] God that sacrificed on our behalf that doesn't demand first and foremost that we sacrifice for some vague union with you in the good life but rather you sacrifice uniting us with yourself so that we may live lives of sacrifice in thanksgiving to you so Lord bless us as we go our own ways bless us as we try our best by your Holy Spirit to live a good life in you in Jesus name Amen