

Do not Steal

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[0 : 0 0] Father, open our eyes to your word and open our hearts and all these things we ask in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior. Amen. Please be seated.

So many of you probably know that I was in Angola for a total of 15 days. I was gone for three weeks, basically, but I was in Angola for 15 days.

And I'm not very brave. I'm a basically I'm a chicken. And I found one of the things I found very hard about Angola, the part of Angola that I was in, Lubangu, was that it was very, very African.

You know, you would see nobody who was my skin color on the street. And I found that intimidating. I really it gives you a great appreciation for immigrants coming to this country. And just some of the things that they the great courage that an immigrant has.

You know, I'm a child of immigrants, but my parents immigrated from Ireland. And anyway, you know, just everything. The you know, the city was very broken and very crowded.

[1 : 0 9] And I didn't want to just be one of those people who was trapped in a safe house. I wanted to get out and walk around the streets.

And that required some work on my part, some courage on my part. But that's just because I'm a scaredy cat. For many of you people, you would have just done it naturally. But I for me, it was hard. And but one of the things that I was a bit worried about was just I'd been to Nairobi twice before.

And some of you might know that the nickname for Nairobi is Nairobbery. And and I so I was just you know, I just wasn't sure walking around the streets, you know, what my safety would be like, what were safe parts of the city, what were dangerous parts of the city.

And so one of the things that all of the missionaries told me was that especially during the day, La Bangu is very safe. And that, in fact, Angolans are not other than the fact that they had a civil war, which went on for almost 40 years where they did horrific things.

Some of you might have seen my blog where I talked about I saw the spot where the government would take rebels when they caught them and take them to the edge of a big cliff, shoot them in the knees to watch them stumble and then fall backwards to their death.

[2 : 2 6] But apart from the thugs like that, that Angolans are very, very family friendly and it's very safe. But one of the things they shared with me was that if you're not careful, if you leave something, if you're somewhere and, you know, it could be a book or my phone or just anything, if I leave it and then maybe just take my eyes off of it for a few seconds, it'll probably be stolen.

But I'll never have to worry about anybody trying to take anything off me, but it would be stolen. And if I'm wrong about this, this is what the missionaries told me. And the missionaries said that it's almost as if for Angolans that that's not stealing.

Because if I'd really cared about it, I would have kept it on my possession or watched it. So that the fact that I left it unattended, it sort of meant that it was I didn't care about it, so it's not really stealing.

Now, we roll our eyes at that. We roll our eyes at that. But what it shows us, though, is that what I'm going to suggest is today we're looking at the 10th commandment, the 8th commandment, which is you shall not steal.

In fact, I'll read it for you from the Bible, but it's only those few verses. It's not something that requires us to all, you can just sort of take my word for it. But it's Deuteronomy 5, verse 19, and you shall not steal.

[3 : 47] That's the commandment. And my guess is that every single culture, including Canadian culture, has ways where we write off certain types of stealing as not really being stealing.

That every culture has this problem. And that we ourselves as human beings have this problem where there's certain things that aren't really stealing. I mean, technically, stealing is taking something that belongs rightfully to another.

We're cheating them out of something which is rightfully theirs. How many of us Canadians think it's stealing if we leave work five minutes early? Well, George, don't be a nitpicker, but a moment, you left work early.

You know, you've been paid to work for a certain number of hours, and you leave early. How many of us, when it comes time for a yard sale and somebody asks us how old the couch is, how many of us shave two or three or five years off the age of the couch so that we can get a few extra dollars for the couch?

And how many of us feel guilty afterwards that we've shaved two or three or four or five or eight years off the age of the couch so that we can get a few more dollars out of it?

[5 : 05] How many of us even asked about the couch, what asked as if we'd always owned it, when maybe we bought it secondhand? Why? Because we want to make a couple of extra dollars. Do we see that as stealing? We probably don't see that as stealing.

So here's the thing. We're going to spend, I'm not going to keep giving you time, example after example after example about different ways that we might get around this basic commandment, but I want to just try to have it drilled into our house.

So, Andrew, if you could put up the first point. Here's the first point, which is, it'll be there in a second. At one of the churches I was at this summer on my holidays, they had the scripture text up on the side on the screen, and it was sort of interesting the way the minister did it.

He'd keep pointing to the screen. You could tell it rather than reading from the Bible, he was reading from the screen, but it was neat. So here's the first thing. You shall not steal. That's what the commandment says. It's crystal clear, but I do not always recognize stealing.

I think that you can, I mean, you shall not steal is, it's so simple. You couldn't word it clearer.

[6 : 14] But the question is, are there things in my heart, or are there culturally acceptable forms of stealing or theft that blinds our eyes to when we're stealing?

And I think that there just is. And we see it the best when we look at other cultures, and we can listen to how they would reason, and we'd say, oh, that's just so stupid.

Of course that's stealing. Of course, if you just leave your iPhone or something just there for, you know, 20 seconds, and you walk away, and you take it, that's stealing. But my guess is that that's true of every single culture, that there's ways that we blind our eyes, our eyes are blinded to what we do.

How many of us, when it comes time to do our income tax, and if you use one of those computer programs that up on the corner, it can tell you what your rebate's going to be or how much you owe, after we see the number, say, that's not a very good number, I wonder if I can go through all of this a little bit and pad it or change in a little bit of a way to try to get that number to be a different number.

And I don't mean just going through to get something you missed. I mean, you know what, maybe I gave a little bit more to this than I thought. Or maybe if I just make this, I remember talking to one accountant, and he was a Christian, and he told me all of this with no hint that he was doing something wrong.

[7 : 40] And he knew the dollar amounts for deductions, that if you claim just under it, they wouldn't in effect, I mean, I don't know if it's still the case anymore, this was a few years ago, the government wouldn't look for receipts.

So that when he did his income tax form, for every single one of those categories, he took that amount of a deduction, even if he hadn't made it, just a little bit under, so he could claim all of these deductions, none of which he'd made, most of which he hadn't made.

If he'd actually made it, he'd take the right amount. But he knew how the system worked, and he did that with no sense whatsoever. He grew up in the church, he was a devout Christian, went to Bible studies, did all of that stuff.

He could tell you what the four spiritual laws were. He probably had about 30 or 40 or 50 Bible verses memorized. But he told me that with no hint of guilt that what he was doing was stealing.

Like not even slight. Now once again, in all of these cases, we might think, well, these people are really bad, but we're different. But I'm just going to suggest that this is true, that I do not always recognize stealing.

[8 : 45] One of the things, when I went to Angola, on the way to Angola, I had to have two overnight flights. And on the way back, I had to have one overnight flight.

And I wasn't in business class, so that meant I was in the working class seats. And trying to sleep on a plane when the seats aren't designed for sleeping is very, very difficult.

I was really blessed on my way back. The overnight flight, I actually happened to be in the middle section with three seats and there was nobody in either one of the other seats.

So I was actually able to sort of lie down. And that's a way better than trying to fall asleep sitting up. But let me tell you, there's these little ridges and other types of things.

And it was a lot easier to fall asleep. I'm not that big, but I'm big enough that I had to be curled up in a fetal type of position with my feet sort of jammed into the armrest on one end.

[9 : 49] And there's all still these pointy things banging into me. And that's what angular means. If you could put up the next point, you shall not steal is absolute and angular.

And I'm making this point because it's part of all of these commandments that they're absolute and angular. Angular means they're pointy. They jab you.

That if you meditate upon, you shall not steal. If that commandment, if God's word does its work and starts to be conscious in your mind that you shall not steal, it's going to be angular.

If you said to your coworkers, well, you can't leave 15 minutes early. That's stealing. What would they do? These religious fanatics.

You know, but you shall not steal. In many ways, it's a good commandment. Most of us, none of us really disagree. Nobody disagrees with this commandment. Buddhists don't disagree with this commandment. Hindus don't disagree with this commandment.

[10 : 54] Jewish people, secular people don't disagree with it. But the statement's made in an absolute sense. And it's made in an absolute sense. When I say it's angular, it means it's pointy and it jabs us.

And that as the commandment starts to have a bigger role in our lives, we'll realize that there's different ways that we break it. And it's an absolute statement, not only in the sense that it's just, you shall not steal.

But if you think about it, it's really sort of an interesting way. Because the way we normally think as Canadians is we would try to give you an argument as to why you shall not steal as wise.

You shall not steal because you'll get caught. You shall not steal because nobody likes a thief. You shouldn't steal because you're hurting people. You shouldn't steal because. Or you try to derive it from something.

In other words, you say we have this basic thing, you should love your neighbors. And if you want to really love your neighbors and you try to figure it out, it means you shouldn't steal. But it's an absolute statement. God doesn't argue for it. He doesn't say, these are the 15 reasons why you shall not steal as wise.

[12 : 03] He just says it. You shall not steal. It's an absolute statement. And what that means is it's a statement that we don't think our way to, but we think from.

We don't think our way to this as smart. It's part of the way that you think. It's an absolute statement and an angular statement.

Could you put up the next thing, Andrew, please? One of the things, one of the easy, one of the simple ways that probably in every culture and including in Canadian culture that we steal without thinking that we're stealing is we think there's exceptions.

It's all right to steal from the government because they, a bunch of yahoos, they're, they waste our money. It's all right to steal from an insurance company because they're making huge profits.

It's all right to steal from, and then you fill in the blank. But this doesn't give any exceptions. It shows no favoritism. You can't steal from gays because they're gay.

[13 : 19] You can't steal from the rich because they're rich. You can't steal from the poor because they're poor. You can't steal, you just, there's no favoritism in it. It cuts across all social classes, all of the normal ways.

Because you see, in most cultures, they would have this view that you can't steal, but in most cultures, they also have, in a sense, exceptions. You can't steal from your family or your tribe, but it's all right to steal from another tribe.

Or in our culture, you can't, it's sort of, you know, it's sort of all right to steal from the rich. Give you a good example. How many of us would be upset if we found out that somebody stole from Donald Trump?

Trump? In fact, most of the editorialists in the country would go, way to go, that person deserves a medal.

Right? Because we've created an exception. It's all right to steal from Trump. See, once again, this is how the thing is supposed to be to get at us. We carry these things around in our culture, just like our culture does.

[14 : 26] We carry around these exceptions. And this text, it's like a healthy virus to try to change our DNA. That's why every one of these points, except the last one or two, I'm going to keep saying you shall not steal, you shall not steal, you shall not steal.

And we need to guard our heart because our heart allows exceptions, but the Bible doesn't allow an exception. Next point. You shall not steal is unchanging, yet dynamic.

What that means is this. You shall not steal. It was true when it was written. Maybe it was written 1500 BC. Maybe it was written 1200 BC. There's some debate about when Moses existed.

Christians can disagree on trying to figure out the archaeological evidence. It's true when Jesus was alive. It's true today. It was true in feudalism. It's completely and utterly unchanging.

Yet it's dynamic because you know what? It's not always simple to figure out how to apply it. Cultural things change. It's one of the really interesting things if you go back in the bulletin and I have the growing in grace.

[15 : 40] No, going deeper. And if you go into going deeper and you look at some of the Bible passages which I send you to, the way the book of Deuteronomy is written is that there's a part later on in Deuteronomy where there's a variety of commands that help you to understand a little bit about what the commandment means.

And so one of the commandments, one of the laws that's developed from this is giving a man who's just been married one year that he doesn't have to serve, do any government service or military service after his marriage.

You see, that's very, very interesting because if you think about it, it's very easy for the state to say, we have these, I have these expectations of you and if you don't fulfill them, it's like you're robbing me.

That's how we could think about it. But this text says, one moment, there's limits about what the state can demand. Another really important, interesting thing if you go back and look at that list is it said that if you, somebody owes you money, you can't take their upper millstone to get them as part of the repayment of the debt and the way that you needed two, you need two stones to grind grain and it says you're not allowed to take the top one and that's a very, very interesting thing because what it's showing us is that property rights and stuff matters but people matter more and even though technically they owe you that money, you can't take the money away from them if it means they're going to die.

You see what I mean? You have this very simple commandment and on one hand it's unchanging but as it starts to come into our minds and we start to try to think of what does it mean in terms of downloading?

[17 : 32] What does it mean in terms of this? What does it mean in terms of our culture with this? You realize it forces you to think and to talk and to pray. Not in terms of there's some simple ones, obviously you don't have to be much thinking about whether you should go into a bank and rob it but there's so many different commandments that this sort of has a bit of an impact on that on one hand it's unchanging but it doesn't stop thought, it propels thought as you realize how important it is.

Next point. You shall not steal means that private property is good. You know, I'm going to be a little bit politically incorrect in Canada but that's exactly what it means.

It means that private property is good. It in effect says that communism at least in its theoretical form of the state owning everything is probably sinful because it would imply that if the state or the tribe owns everything and individuals never own something that's probably stealing going on but by the same part in time to our libertarian friends if everything is just owned by individuals and there's no group that owns anything there's probably stealing that's going on.

I steal from somebody by taking what is properly theirs and taking it for myself. And I have private property in quotes because as Christians we always have to remember something important.

If you want to turn your Bibles to 2nd 1st Chronicles I hope I wrote it down 1st Chronicles 29.14 1st Chronicles 29.14 This is very simply put and very powerfully put Solomon has just dedicated the temple and it's part of his sorry David David is praying over all of the offerings that he's made so that when Solomon comes along he'll be able to build the temple.

[19 : 42] Look at 1st Chronicles 29.14 But who am I and what is my people that we should be able thus to offer willingly and listen to this for all things come from you and of your own we have given you.

for all things come from you and of your own have we given you. So what this text is saying is that God is ultimately the one who owns everything I own nothing neither do you.

And when I was part of the Anglican Church of Canada often texts like this would somehow slide into an argument for socialism but that's not what the text is saying.

What this text is reminding us is that we're sub-owners we're stewards but it really is ours to care for. The government can't take it the bank can't take it an individual can't take it there's things which we properly own in the sense of it ultimately belonging to God but he's put it under our care to use it in a way which is for common good and for his glory but this text you shall not steal means that private property with the quotes is good.

Next point Andrew please you shall not steal is a great protection for the poor and the weak. Last night my wife and I and Emma we watched a movie on Netflix it came out two years ago I think it's called Lady in Gold is that what it's called Louise?

[21 : 18] Lady in Gold it's a really really good movie about a woman who decided to take the Austrian government to court to get back the artwork that the Nazis had stolen from her and the Nazis after they stole it from her gave it to an Austrian museum and she decides to go after them in court to try to get her property back and I didn't know of course I didn't watch it thinking I was going to talk I mean I knew I was going to talk about this but I didn't watch the movie for a sermon illustration but the Nazis just stole the property this text this commandment you shall not steal is a powerful protection for the poor and the weak the government cannot take your money the rich cannot take your money or your possessions or your house or your farm you shall not steal it doesn't become not stealing because the Supreme Court of Canada says it's all right doesn't become not stealing because the government passes a law if you go back in going deeper you'll see

I give two Old Testament examples how the Old Testament very clearly sees that the government can steal this isn't an anti government rant it's just that this commandment the more that it becomes part of our consciousness and our cultural consciousness is a powerful protection for the poor and the weak and we as Christians should always be concerned for that it's also a powerful thing we can't steal from another country just because it's another country and we have a more powerful military it is a powerful break on imperialism just as a bit of an aside one of the things which is more and more important for us as a congregation is for Christians a congregation of Christians is to be concerned for the poor I think the left in Canada has largely forgotten the poor the left is

I'm not putting down civil servant unions making no comment about it but the left is primarily made up now of public service unions that are concerned with upper middle class and middle class issues and there's a decreasing concern about the poor in a country like ours and that's a very powerful moment for Christians to always remember the poor the working poor the people who work at McDonald's the people who work at places where there's no benefits we have to have a heart for them and a great concern for them next point you shall not steal applies to individuals churches governments and every other social group one of the things which the Bible hates and we have to you know the state church in Germany turned fundamentally a blind eye to Nazism we all know that in the southern

United States and South Africa the churches turned a blind eye to the type of racism and destruction of property actually this is a bit of an aside one of the things which is really interesting remember I said if you go back to that other part in Deuteronomy that gives you some that Moses unpacks you shall not steal there's only one property only one type of stealing which deserves the death penalty one of the things which is so powerful about the Old Testament and you think of how in some cultures thieves in fact lamentably in our own culture they would hang I mean hundreds of years ago they would hang thieves in some parts of the world they'll cut off the hands of thieves but in the Old Testament people who stole they were required to give the stuff back they couldn't cut off their hands or kill them there's only one exception only one type of theft had a capital punishment kidnapping somebody to put them into slavery that was a capital offense if that text had grasped

Christians earlier the entire slave trade would have been seen as being completely wrong one of the things I learned when I was in Angola is that Angola was one of the hardest countries in Africa hit by the slave trade not only were there some tribes working with the Portuguese to capture and kidnap other people from other tribes but they'd sell them into slavery so in Brazil a large number of Brazilians are more like they're from Africa they all came from Angola for Angolans it's a very very slavery is something which is deeply still part of their consciousness because so much of their history was consumed with the slave trade but if people had read the book of Deuteronomy if they had grasped you shall not steal and saw how Moses helped to unpack it the worst type of thievery was to capture somebody for slavery one other tiny little thing I'm going to get in trouble maybe for this by some people and I don't I know for some people our culture has turned a blind eye to this this is an example I think of how our culture allows a certain type of theft without us realizing it is theft but in vitro fertilization means that you get fertilized eggs and you freeze them and you keep them how is that different than slavery if you have fertilized eggs

[27 : 25] Louise and I decided before we got a bit too old that we were going to get a whole pile of embryos fertilized embryos together and freeze them and we keep that for years and years and years and years how is that not like slavery how can I own another human life how can I own a human life and just decide whether or not I will have that life put to death or sold for profit I know this can be very painful for people who are trying to get pregnant but is this in fact a way that our culture has turned a blind eye to slavery to theft Portuguese are terrible but we're not next point we need to sort of wrap this up one of the things that came to me immediately when I was thinking about this you shall not steal is of course

Jesus there's I think about ten times in the New Testament it says Jesus will come like a thief in the night and it's very true Jesus will come like a thief in the night but he is not a thief this text in closing helps us to think of two things which helps to also bring this whole text of you shall not steal closer to home to us because the fact of the matter is is that for every human being including Christians one of the worries that we have is that Jesus as he gets closer to us will steal from us how will he steal from us he'll steal our time he'll steal our money he'll make a demand upon me in terms of how much money I should be giving he'll make a demand upon me in terms of my time he'll make a demand upon me in terms of how I should treat my wife or how I should treat my kids and that's completely separate from conversion a long time ago there was a young woman

I was part of a Christian fellowship group and she became a Christian and she came she was pretty messed up and she started to get sorted out but then one of the things was and I've seen this many many times since then her family put profound pressure on her to stop being connected with us even though she'd stopped sleeping around even though she'd stopped drinking I mean getting drunk even though she'd stopped doing her drugs the fact that she was getting close to Jesus profoundly worried them and they put unrelenting social pressure and familial pressure on her to not have anything to do with this and they eventually were successful at it and not that just that people who come to Jesus can instantly stop doing all of those bad things we struggle with all of them but she eventually went back to all of those things but they were worried that Jesus was stealing her from them so

Jesus will come like a thief in the night but he is not a thief final second to last point Andrew if you could put it up if you turn in your Bibles to John chapter 10 there's a very very wonderful text here that connects thievery to who Jesus is it's the text of Jesus being the good shepherd and it's a very very wonderful text and it goes like this Jesus is speaking truly truly I say to you he who does not enter the sheep pen by the door but climbs in by another way that man is a thief and a robber but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep to him the gatekeeper opens the sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out when he has brought out all his own he goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice a stranger they will not follow but they will flee from him for they do not know the voice of strangers now

John comments this figure of speech Jesus used with them but they did not understand what he was saying to them so truly truly I say to you I am the door of the sheep all who came before me are thieves and robbers but the sheep did not listen to them I am the door if anyone enters by me he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy I came that they may have life and have it abundantly I am the good shepherd the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep now here Jesus is talking specifically about his death on the cross you know if it was taken literally as an advice to shepherds the second the shepherd dies the sheep are all toast but he's getting at a very very important point that when

[32 : 54] Jesus comes into a person's life he doesn't come as an invader or as a thief he comes to his own remember earlier I said all things come of you and of your own have we given you so when Jesus comes into any person's life he's coming to what is his own and in this text Jesus very powerfully says I don't know how many of you have been robbed but it's it can be very destructive I don't know how many of you have had a house broken into but it can feel like a profound violation to have had somebody come into your house and to rob you I remember back when Louise and I hadn't been married very long and I was a student and we had no money and I remember there was this time we were at the corner of bank and fifth and I think we had Jesse or something in the stroller and I had Tosh by the hand and we just turned our eye away for a second and somebody took

Louise's purse you know I don't know what it was might have been a hundred bucks but that was a lot of money especially when you're poor like and in those days you know for many many years I wasn't able to get a credit card or anything like that and I didn't have a line of credit so when you're out money you're out money like it's really hard it's destructive and Jesus here uses a very powerful image when he says up here the thief comes only to steal and to kill and the word there kill it's a perfectly good word but it's sheep right in other words the thief steals the sheep to kill it and eat it that's what the word kill there means and to destroy we all probably have seen houses that have been broken into and part of the things that and it's very easy for us to think that when we get closer to

Jesus he's going to mess up our lives he's going to make us poorer and many non-Christians have that fear and if we're honest many of us Christians have that fear but Jesus says I have come I came that they may have life and have it abundantly I am the good shepherd the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep and if you go down and read a little bit later you'll see that in four more verses Jesus repeats it to make sure that we get the point lays down his life for the sheep the thief kills the sheep Jesus dies for the sheep he dies for the sheep to give us abundant life it can be very easy to think if disobey the commandment about stealing and do things on my income tax form so I get more money everybody does it it's just the government they won't miss it they just waste it and

I can do whatever I want and if I do it I'll have more money and if I don't my life's going to be a little bit tighter harder it's going to be a little bit harder but this text is saying to us that when we hear the voice of Jesus and follow him even commandments like this that seem at times that are going to crimp our lives it's actually part of the process by which our lives will get abundance from God even if it's abundance of being able to sleep at night you know there's that a clean conscience is the softest pillow you know you get a thing from the government later on you're not worried that they've caught your cheating on your taxes but however it is that Jesus does it abundant life doesn't mean that if you follow do not steal you're going to be richer it just means that you're going to have a life which is far more abundant and unexpected in terms of things which ultimately really matter the most and the other thing about this text which is so powerful that is as it gets as it grips us that

Jesus isn't a thief that Jesus is the good shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep as this image grips us as the cross grips us it starts to make us understand that the way we are to live our lives is to care for people that as the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep becomes more powerful in our lives it helps to form the way a dad should be a dad or a mom should be a mom a pastor a pastor a teacher should be a teacher a banker should be a banker a friend should be a friend it sort of paints a picture for us as to what we should be moving towards and as the reassurance that we have become Jesus is because of what he's done for us not because of what we can do for him the text doesn't say if you do not steal you will become my disciple but

[38 : 25] Jesus dies for us so that we will be his and as this grips us as well it starts to make reasonable and make sense a completely different way of living put up the final point please you know I like to do this often is to end with a prayer I'm going to ask you to stand in some ways the whole summary of the sermon is caught up in this I'll read it out first and then I'll enjoy and ask you to join with me please help me to recognize stealing is stealing I mean that's just the thing any one of the Ten Commandments it's one of the reasons if we do the Ten Commandments liturgically I think after every one of the commandments we say something about write this law in our heart and writing the law in our heart means that we know it that we remember it that it starts to have an impact in our heart but stealing opens up to us not just that we shouldn't steal that we start to recognize stealing but we ask

Jesus to help us so that we're gripped by the gospel and as we're gripped by the gospel from that context we don't steal but instead that we pursue a productive and generous life as we live for his glory we die to our own glory we die to just viewing life as accumulating as much as we can we understand that a type of dying for others and so I invite you to join with me in praying this prayer heavenly father please help me to recognize stealing is stealing please pour out your holy spirit upon me and make me a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel who does not steal but pursues living a productive and generous life as I live for your glory in Jesus name Amen father we ask that you would write this commandment do not steal in our hearts and we ask even more than writing this commandment do not steal in our hearts we ask that you write the story of the good shepherd in our hearts that that might be what grips us that as we even think upon these commandments we think upon you our good shepherd who laid down your life for us all these things we ask in the name of

Jesus your son and our savior amen