

Divine Institution

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Preacher: Keith Buist

[0:00] 19 and 20 today, this morning. So we read the first six verses of Exodus 19 last week, and now we're up to 19, verse 7, and we'll read into chapter 20.

Getting into the Ten Commandments themselves this morning a little bit. Exodus 19, starting in verse 7, So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak.

And the people all responded together, We will do everything the Lord has said. So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. The Lord said to Moses, I'm going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.

Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said. And the Lord said to Moses, Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow.

Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, Be careful that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the foot of it.

[1:26] Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows. Not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.

Only when the ram's horn sounds in a long blast, they may go up to the mountain. After Moses had gone down to the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes.

Then he said to the people, Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations. On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud over the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast.

Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the Lord descended on it in fire.

The smoke billowed up from it, like smoke from a furnace. The whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.

[2:39] Then Moses spoke, and the voice of God answered him. The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain.

So Moses went up, and the Lord said to him, Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord, and many of them perish.

Even the priests who approach the Lord must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them. Moses said to the Lord, The people cannot come up Mount Sinai because you yourself warned us to put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.

And the Lord replied, Go down and bring Aaron up with you, but the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord, or he will break out against them. So Moses went down to the people and told them, And God spoke all these words.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in the heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters below.

[3:57] You shall not bow down to them or worship them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who punishes the sin, the children, for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter or your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God has given you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery.

[5:10] You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, speak to us yourself and we will listen, but do not have God speak to us or we will die.

Moses said to the people, do not be afraid. God has come to test you so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.

The people remained at a distance while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was. the word of the Lord. So I'll just start with a little quote here, a claim by Dr. Reichen.

He says this, he says, we live in an age of imminence, an age that sees God more as a personal friend than a supreme deity.

[6:39] Most Christians today feel more comfortable with a user-friendly God than with one who is holy and majestic. We come to church the way we would drop by someone's living room rather than the way we would enter the throne room of a king.

So what do you think? Is he right? Is that true? He claims that we live in an age of imminence, imminence means nearness, closeness, intimacy, closeness.

It's the opposite of transcendence. Transcendence means greatness, beyondness. Dr. Reichen says we live in an age of imminence.

He's talking about how we see God, how we understand God, specifically how we relate to God.

And he's saying we pretty much take God to be our personal friend.

And that's kind of what we emphasize about God, that he's companion, that he's nearby, relatable.

We live in an age of imminence. That's his claim. And, well, he's probably at least partially correct.

[7:53] He seems to be on to something. It's not always been that way, though. Christians, for a long time, they saw God, probably first and foremost, as transcendent, as beyond, as shrouded with mystery, above and beyond.

Generations gone by, built sanctuaries with really high ceilings, and fancy spires, and arches, and steeples, all this verticality.

They fasted for long periods of time. They fell silent, walking into church. They fell down on their knees when they prayed.

And a big part of the church, people didn't even approach God themselves to confess their sin. And they didn't read the Bible for themselves either, or sing in their own language.

They kind of kept God. God was just always kind of kept at an arm's length. And the church, the institution of the church, sort of stood in between, like a buffer, between common people and a holy God.

[9:10] In most parts of Christianity, that's not how it goes so much anymore. Christians today are just as likely, probably, to worship in a gymnasium or a storefront as they are to worship in a cathedral or some tall steeple sanctuary.

Our church buildings and our Sunday habits and the songs that we sing and the prayers that we pray more often skew toward God as friend and close and relatable and imminent.

So to some extent, it's probably true. We live in an age of imminence. It's me and Jesus. Prayer is casual.

Sunday is casual. And God is friend. In one of our hymns that we sing, we refer to God as our gracious teacher, friend divine.

Another one of our hymns, we sing of trembling before him and reverencing him with holy awe. So which is it?

[10:17] Gracious friend or supreme majesty? Which is it? Well, both. It's both, of course, right?

That's the wonder of God and who he is. He's both friend and he's king. He's both gracious friend, teacher to us, who comes near to us, and he's the one who dwells in unapproachable light. Both. At the same time. Throughout history, Christians have tended to focus on one or the other, and that's been a problem.

It's always been a problem because God is both. So how do we get this right? How do we get God right? How do we come to approach God in the right way?

Well, to put it simply, we read the Bible. We go to scripture. That's what the Bible's for. We read both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We read both psalms about God as a good shepherd and psalms about God as the almighty creator, judge, and Lord of all.

[11 : 23] We read about all of the ways that God has revealed himself to us, starting with God revealing himself as the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and just kind of standing in awe of the mystery of that, three in one, one in three.

We read about God coming in humility at Christmas and also about God coming in power and glory at the end of time. We need the full counsel of scripture. We need this revealing of God that's not skewed by the time in which we live or the culture in which we live or our own personal biases. Scripture gives us God as he truly is, our imminent gracious friend and the transcendent, beyond, all-powerful one.

In fact, even right here in Exodus 19 and 20, we have both, right? Chapter 19 starts with God's imminence, his closeness, and that's what we looked at last week, and I shared with you a parable of sorts about a teacher and a girl named Tricia who had a very hard time in school.

Every day for Tricia was a struggle, and her teacher, Mr. Falker, he came near. He was always an authority figure, always a teacher to her, but also befriended her and saw her in her needs, saw her needs, saw her as a person, defended her, taught her how to read, encouraged her, helped her along, and in a way, led her out of a dark place.

[12 : 59] It was like an exodus for that little girl. And we talked about how our God is like that and how he heard the cries of those slaves in Egypt and he came near to them and he defended them and he walked with them and he helped them.

We talked about that pillar of fire and cloud and what that represented and he led them through the sea and he met them there in the wilderness and spent lots of time with them there and kind of held their hand along and he was present with them, teaching them, guiding them.

Exodus 19, verse 4, you yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings, brought you to myself. God's the eagle.

Israel's like this little hatchling. He goes on to call Israel his treasured possession. There's this tenderness. There's this closeness. This embrace.

That's imminence. God as imminent. So we didn't use that word imminence last week, but that's what we were talking about. Now today we're focusing more on God's transcendence because that's where the Bible goes next as you read on in chapter 19.

[14 : 13] You can feel it. It gets pretty epic. You can feel it. This epic thing that's going to happen. It does happen. And this experience of God's holiness and his beyondness.

They're at Sinai. And well, what happened there, it's been described by one author as one of the most awesomely terrifying displays of divine power that anyone has ever experienced.

And in the lead up to all this, God, he comes to Moses and there's these extensive instructions, right, about preparation for this. Told Moses to get the people ready.

And then right on schedule, on the third day, he came. And it was this overwhelming experience as God came near, right?

The mountain, for one thing, it looked scary, right? It was covered with this dark, ominous cloud and its peaks were charged with lightning and its rocks were blazing, glowing red hot with this fire and belching smoke.

[15 : 17] It also sounded pretty scary. Besides the thunder, of course, we all think of this booming thunder, you also had the incessant blowing of a trumpet, probably like a giant shofar.

Sound of the trumpet. It grew louder and louder and louder as God came closer and closer and closer. What an experience. The people even felt it.

They saw it. They heard it. They also just, in a very real way, they felt it. That mountain on fire, it would have radiated an intense heat and they felt that on their faces.

And they were also just sort of waking and trembling as the earth itself was shaking beneath their feet. In verse 16, it says, everyone in the camp trembled.

So they were literally trembling. They were also sort of trembling in fear, their whole being shaken. And then in 20, verse 18, it says, they stayed at a distance and said to Moses, speak to us yourself and we will listen, but do not have God speak to us or we will die.

[16 : 37] They experienced something of God's holiness and glory. And they came away knowing deep in their bones the awesome power of God.

There's this moment in the Chronicles of Narnia that maybe some of you might remember. So Aslan, the lion, is there.

And the children, one of them asks, is he safe? And the reply comes, who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe.

But he's good. And that's God. He's no giant teddy bear. But he's good. He's not jolly old Saint Nick. He's good. He's good. We can't tame him or confine him or even fully understand him. His majesty and his glory will undo us.

[17 : 42] But they'll undo us in a good way. In a good way. He's not safe, but he's good. And it's important that we see that, that we see God's majesty, that we sense his glory. And there's all sorts of reasons for that.

But Exodus 20, verse 20, what we read here this morning, it tells us one of those reasons. It says, Moses said to the people, do not be afraid. God has come to test you so that the fear of God will be with you.

So that the fear of God will be with you. And then it adds, to keep you from sinning. God wants to keep us from sinning, to keep us from ruining ourselves and others, and to keep us from pulling away from him.

He wants to keep us from sinning. And what do we need for that? Well, one thing apparently is the fear of the Lord. Fear of God will be with you and keep you from sinning.

So if somebody comes to you and says, I'm going to put the fear of God in you, say, yes, please. We need that. Right? We need it.

[18 : 49] In fact, we read about it in our call to worship this morning. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. He is to be feared above all gods. Great is the Lord.

Be feared above all gods. But now, of course, when the Bible talks about the fear of God, it's not talking about being afraid.

Actually, look at the verse, right? Moses says here, right? Right here, point blank. He says, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. So we know that's not the intent.

The fear of God has to do with reverence for God. And I'll let R.C. Sproul and Martin Luther kind of explain that a little further for us.

So here's R.C. Sproul. He says, Martin Luther made an important distinction concerning the fear of God. He distinguished between servile fear and filial fear.

[19 : 51] He described servile fear as that kind of fear a prisoner has for his torturer. Filial fear is different.

Filial fear is the fear of a son who loves his father and does not want to offend him or let him down. It is a fear born of respect. When the Bible calls us to fear God, it's issuing a call to a fear born of reverence, awe, and adoration.

It is a respect of the highest magnitude. Kind of bottom line summary. It is a respect of the highest magnitude. So our God, he's imminent and he's transcendent.

That's where our faith needs to start by seeing God as he truly is. And it starts with this reverence, awe, adoration. It's foundational.

Really, it's foundational for a child of the king, reverencing him. We talked about how Israel there at Mount Sinai was sort of like a child, just learning, needing to grow up a little bit.

[21 : 03] So what does God do? He lays this foundation for them of reverence, building that foundation there at Sinai.

He descended on the mountain to reveal himself to them. He also went ahead and he started revealing his will to them.

So in addition to giving them a glimpse of himself, what he does is he gives them these two stone tablets, right, containing his will. And there's many more instructions that he gives beyond the Ten Commandments themselves, too.

But let's start by thinking about that teaching, that instruction, and specifically the Ten Commandments, for a moment. What's their purpose? Why put down?

Why put down in stone all these expectations? Was it to make us feel bad? I mean, sometimes when we hear the Ten Commandments, that's kind of how we receive it, kind of what it feels like.

[22:08] Maybe it's to make us kind of feel bad. It's sort of like, you know, waving the finger, bad dog, bad dog, times ten, right?

Thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not. But that's not what God wants, right? To make us feel bad? That couldn't be, right?

Well, yes and no. At the end of the day, he's not trying to make us feel bad, but he is wanting us to see the truth about ourselves. And he does want us to feel bad about our sin.

We've got to see sin as sin and see the truth about ourselves, that we're sinners in need of a Savior. In order to see that, we need a standard.

In order to see what's not the way it's supposed to be, we need to have a standard that reveals to us the way it is supposed to be. And who better to do that than the one who made us, our maker, our creator.

[23:15] He knows how life goes best because he designed it. He made it and he wrote the book on it. He did. And the truth is, he has every right to tell us how to live it because it's his.

We're his. This life, our world, it's all his. We're kind of like fish swimming in a pond that's polluted and the pollution, it's just all through us.

We've always lived in this polluted planet. It's all through us. It's part of us. But we don't know it. We don't know it because that polluted pond and that polluted condition is all we've ever known and experienced.

So what does God's law do? God's law comes along and helps us to see the truth about the situation and to help with that diagnosis piece. And God's law helps us to see what could be.

And we'd never even imagine what could be, how things were actually meant to go. It shows us what's wrong and it shows us what's right. It's the truth that God uses to help set us free.

[24:24] Bottom line, the law of God is both a stern warning and a good guide for us. It shows us our sin so that we'll see our need for a savior.

And it shows us God's blueprint for life so that we can start to really live it. God's instruction, the law, it's a good gift that God has given to us.

The psalmist in Psalm 119, he just kind of gushes. He goes on and on about God's revelation to us and his word to us and his will to us, his law. And he says, Oh, how I love thy law.

How I love your law. I meditate on it all day long, oh Lord. How I love your law. I don't know that many of us go around saying that very often, but maybe we should.

Maybe we should make it a matter of prayer. Lord, help me to come to the place where I actually love your law. And to go with that prayer this morning, let me give you four words.

[25:32] Four words that I want to leave you with this morning. And these four words, they sort of encapsulate for us what God's law is all about. And the first one is life.

And when I say life here in this context, I'm not talking about mere survival. Just keeping your ticker ticking. I'm also not really talking about eternal life either.

I'm more talking about that John 10, 10 life, right? Life to the full. Jesus in John 10, 10, he said, I have come, this is the good shepherd chapter, right?

And he says, I have come that you may have life and have it to the full. It's life that has this fullness to it because it fits with God's design and with God's vision for us.

And just like a good blueprint helps you to build a good building, so God's law helps you to build a good life. Not necessarily of riches, not of success necessarily, but truly good.

[26:37] And I love what it says in Psalm 19. So Psalm 19, the first half is all about the wonder of creation, right? And then the second half is all about the wonder of God's law, his word to us.

And it says, so in the second half, it says the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving. That's life language, right? Reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

So you have this picture of being revived and made wise and filled with joy and light coming into your being, light into your darkness.

God's law leads to this, to life. That's the testimony of Psalm 19. And others experience the wonder of God's law brings life.

[27 : 37] The second word is love. God's law is also a blueprint for us that helps to build a life of love. So Jesus, when he was asked about God's law, well, what did he say?

He said, love the Lord your God, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commands.

Love God, love your neighbor. According to Jesus, really, the law as a whole is about love.

According to Paul, too, right?

Apostle Paul, he said, love is the fulfillment of the law. Love is our calling. And God's law teaches us how to do it.

[28 : 37] You could call the Ten Commandments love times ten. That's kind of what it is. How to love God, how to love others. Instructions for us. The third word is need.

The law leads us into life. Shows us how to love. And points out our need. We talked about that huge display on Mount Sinai, right?

The dark smoke, the fire, the thunder, the lightning, all of it came together to really testify to God's transcendence, his holiness. God descended on that mountain.

God, in all his glory, he came very close to his people. And when he did, it became very abundantly clear. You've got a very holy God and you've got a very unholy people.

This contrast. And we read on from there and we read about the whole purification process that the people had to go through before approaching the mountain.

[29 : 39] They had to do all this stuff or they died. Just coming back close to a holy God. How holy our God is, unholy we are. There's this contrast that's highlighted. And that's kind of where the law of God, too, comes in.

The Bible says God's law is perfect. When stacked up next to us, God's perfect law shows how imperfect we are.

It shows how far we fall short. It shows our sin and our need for a savior. And what Jesus did is he kept the law.

Right? Fully. He lived a life we could not live. He kept the law fully. He lived a fully righteous human life before us. And then he went on and he offered himself as the perfect sacrifice on our behalf.

To make atonement for all of our sins. For how unholy we are. So the law comes along. And it shows us our need for atonement.

[30 : 45] And it leads us to Jesus. And finally, one more word. And that's the word gratitude. So often what we do is we just kind of take the Ten Commandments out of context.

Right? We just lift them out of the Bible. We just kind of ignore the context. We just maybe recite the commandments by themselves. Kind of by rote. Or we want them hung on the walls of classrooms.

And just hoping they'll hang there and do some good without any context. But that can be a problem. It can be a problem because the context is what gives the commandments their life.

The context is what gives the commandments their power. And it helps us to receive the commandments in the way that God would want us to receive his commandments.

And the nice thing for us here at Covenant is that we've been walking through the book of Exodus.

And so we know the context. We know what the context is about Israel and how they were slaves in Egypt and how God stepped in.

[31 : 54] And he took out Pharaoh. And he saved them and ushered them into life. They had no hope, no future, no purpose, no freedom. They were held there by a madman.

And God stepped in and he rescued them and he braced them and he set them free. That's why the commandments start the way they do. Sometimes we just kind of rush right by this first line.

But it's so key. It sets the context. It reminds us of everything that's come before. Of this context. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. I'm the one giving you these commandments.

The one who brought you out of Egypt. Out of the land of slavery. So the context is salvation.

Right? Deliverance. When you're a goner and somebody comes along and saves you, that has an effect.

Right? It changes you. You're filled with gratitude and you have this bond to the one who saved you. And you might even come away different. You might even come to approach life as a whole

differently.

[33:00] That's the context of the commandments. You've been saved and you get a new start in a new life. And now you're getting direction for that new life that you've been given.

Instead of fear. Instead of slavery to this or that. It's love. This new life. It's marked by love. Loving God. Loving others. And we get this specific guidance for how to live this new free life.

This life of love. What does it look like? They're not rules we keep in order to get saved. Or to get in on God's good side. Getting in with God.

No. That's happened already. That's happened already by grace. That's the context. Grace. Grace. God's law comes to us as a guide for what's next.

For gratitude. For how to respond. And now walk in relationship with this gracious God. Who's also holy.

[33:58] Live with him. This God who saves. And who teaches. He's a divine friend. And the awesome Lord of all.

He shows us our need. And provides for us a savior. He gives us instruction. And he gives us himself. That's the wonder of it all.

And in response to this news. And God's word to us this morning. What I want to do is take a moment to go back through the commandments. Go back through the commandments. We've kind of been working through them week by week.

We read them this morning. And now we're going to use a litany. That helps us to kind of get into the right posture. Kind of that Psalm 19 posture. With relation to the commandments.

So I'll put that up. And invite you to join me on the highlighted responses. Hero people of God.

[34:58] Hero people of God.

The law which the Lord speaks in your hearing this day. That you may know his statutes. And walk according to his ordinances. The God who saved us in Jesus Christ.

Gave this law saying. I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image of anything.

To worship it. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord.

You shall observe the Sabbath by keeping it holy. For in six days you shall labor and do all your work. You shall not make for yourself an image of anything. The first part of the law is this great commandment.

[36:33] The second part of the law is similar to the first. You shall honor your father and mother. That you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving to 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 anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Thus we must love our neighbor as ourselves.

[illegible]