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Preacher: David Bena

[0:00] Amen. Okay, please be seated. Get my computer going here.

! I heard a kind of a crazy story which relates to our pandemic.

The priest in the parish made some adjustments due to the pandemic, and when he had finished them, he invited the bishop to come and admire his work.

And so the bishop came, and they walked through, and at the end, the bishop said, well, I like some of your changes, but some not so much. He said, the fact that you've put in theater-style seating appropriately distanced is nice, and even a little curious are the backrests that recline after the sermon is 20 minutes long.

He said, I think your senior warden may have put that in. And then, he said, and then I know people can't drink from the common cup. So giving each person a bottle of tawny port as they go through the line, that's thoughtful.

[1:25] Yeah, I guess that's okay. He said, but one thing is not, just won't do. You know that drive-through confessional you've got with the big sign blaring, toot and tell or go to hell?

That's got to go. Now, for those that didn't quite get that, you drive up to the confessional window, you toot your horn, and the priest comes to hear your confession.

Well, why do I tell that foolish little joke? Very important reason. We have, in the church today, dueling systems.

One system is, follow the commandments or go to hell. Another system is, confess your sins and let Jesus keep you from hell.

Those are two systems, and we bounce back and forth between the two. Just what is the truth? What is the system we're called upon?

[2:30] So let's look at today's readings, because they lend themselves nicely to teaching us the truth of Jesus. First of all, that Old Testament lesson, as Raymond mentioned, we heard the Ten Commandments twice already this morning.

Well, we should hear them every day, actually, because they tell us how to live a life of respect. To get the idea of how these came to be, you'll recall that the people of Israel, there may have been a million of them or so, rushed across the Red Sea from slavery to freedom.

About three months after they were wandering in the wilderness, by the way, they didn't know that this two-week journey was going to take them 40 years.

Or they may never have left. But you see, God had to change a slave people into a free people that took time. After they'd been there about three months in the wilderness, God had Moses come up to the top of the mountain.

Everybody else gathered at the base of the mountain. And he delivered to Moses, through thunder and lightning, two stone tablets. And on the two stone tablets were Ten Commandments.

[3:53] All right. Now, let's look at those Ten Commandments. We have some characteristics. One, when they were original, there was not an importance given, they were not ranked in importance.

All ten were looked on equally. Now, this blows our mind. It was just as bad to cuss in the Lord's name as it was to murder somebody.

It was just as important not to gossip, bear false witness, as to make sure you kept holy the Sabbath day.

We don't think about it that way, do we? But that's the way the Ten Commandments were originally meant to be. Equal in importance. That's the first thing.

Second thing, the commandments were not meant to be gotcha. Right? The commandments were meant to teach respect. First four, respect for God.

[5:02] Last six, respect for others. Taken together, the ten, respect for my being to live a holy life. That's what they were meant for. Okay?

We tend to look at them as do not do. Okay? So that's the second thing. The third is that those Ten Commandments had an or else quality, didn't they?

If you commit adultery and get caught, you're going to be stoned. If you commit murder, you're going to be murdered. If you violate the Sabbath, you're outside the community.

You're cast out, which was the worst punishment you could give an Israelite. You see, there was an or else quality to them. And then, the last thing, this is hard, they were impossible to keep.

It was impossible to keep these Ten Commandments. And Jesus filled them out, didn't he? He said, well, the law says you shall not commit murder.

[6:09] But I say, if you look with someone in hate, with hate in your heart, you're guilty of murder. You get it? We can't perfectly keep those Ten Commandments.

Well, the religious leaders knew that back in those days, and so they did two things. They built a hedge around the Ten Commandments, and they built a wraparound. Alright?

The hedge around those Ten Commandments were laws that they stated people had to follow.

There were about 600 of them. So that you didn't fall into breaking a Ten Commandment.

One example would be a Sabbath day's journey, right? Wanted to make sure the seventh day was holy. You worshipped God. You rested.

You didn't do work. Well, what if someone ventures into that? We need to protect them. So, alright, you're going to go walk to see a friend. How far can you walk before it's considered labor?

[7:14] Before it's considered work? So they, in their minds, put together, okay, about two hours. If you walk more than two hours, you are violating, you're getting close to breaking the Sabbath law.

You see that? So they hedged in those Ten Commandments. Then the second thing they did, they did a wraparound. Just in case you did violate the commandments, there was a way out.

What was the way out? You bring a sheep to the temple, you get its sacrifice, and that pays for your sin. Okay? They were an agricultural society.

Sheep were dominant in their economy. When you sacrificed the sheep, you were paying for your sins. To bring atonement, right?

At-one-ment. To bring you back at one with God. It was a wraparound. There was two problems. One, it didn't work.

[8:21] Two, the whole system got corrupt. Enter Jesus. Part two of this sermon, if you're keeping track. The Gospel of John, chapter two, Jesus, raging Jesus in the temple.

We don't often think of Jesus as raging. Right? We were taught in Sunday school he's meek and mild like a little child. He wasn't that day in the temple.

He walked in, he looked around, he went over to the money changers table, he dumped them over, he made a whip, he got the sheep out of the temple, he upset the sacrificial system.

He was saying this doesn't work. Now, the corruption, well, let's just say you committed a sin and you wanted to get it paid for.

You brought your sheep down from Galilee. You walked in the temple. Before you could have the sheep, the lamb, whatever, sacrificed, you had to go through an inspection.

[9:29] Because you see, the lamb had to be unblemished. Guess what? You flunked. They found a blemish in your lamb.

You can't sacrifice that lamb. Sorry about that. However, we do have a lamb that you can buy and it's without blemish because we have checked it.

And so, you say, alright, I'll buy the lamb. Oh wait, not so fast. You have Roman money. We don't use Roman money in the temple. You have to use temple money.

So go over to the money changer and change your money. Well, it was an exorbitant rate because after all, temple money is really valuable. So they ended up getting you whichever way you wanted.

And then to get the icing on the cake. Okay, the temple was large. The front part was for the Jews. The back part was for God-fearers who were not Jews but still loved the God of the Israelites.

[10:33] They were called Gentiles and the place where they could worship was the court of the Gentiles. Guess where they set up the money changers and the sheep to be sold?

In the court of the Gentiles which made it impossible for Gentiles to come and worship God. Well, was Jesus pleased?

No. No. He broke up that system. In a sense, God was saying, I'm bringing in a new system that works.

It's not based on our busting the commandments and offering a sheep. It's based on a one-time sacrifice for us following our sense of repentance.

Was the one-time sacrifice a sheep? No. It was Jesus, the sacrificial lamb. The purpose of Lent each year is to help us recall our sinful nature.

[11:45] The scriptures lend themselves to that. For us to be, what says bye-bye the first Sunday in Lent? The hallelujah.

We don't say hallelujah during Lent because that's a celebratory statement. We are into grieving in Lent.

We are repenting. So I want to talk with you a minute about this whole deal. And I hope you've got this memorized, but I want to go over it with you because it's really important.

being a Christian living in God's forgiveness. I'm going to go over some scriptures. Number one, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

That's Romans 3.23. Whether you're St. Teresa or Adolf Hitler, we all have sinned. That's the first thing. And the second is sin's penalty.

[12:46] What is sin's penalty? Romans 6.23 says, for the wages of sin is death. Eternal death.

We are all on death row. That's the second. The third though, is that God loves us so much that he makes a way for us.

Christ paid the death penalty. Romans 5.8 But God chose his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Christ suffered once for all that he might bring us to God. That's the third. Number four, you can't get there to salvation by your own quote, acts of righteousness.

What's Ephesians 2.8 and 9 says, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith. It's not your own doing. It's a gift of God, not because of your works, lest anybody should boast.

[13:55] Trying to follow faithfully those ten commandments will not bring us from death to life. So the fifth is, we need to receive Christ in a sense of repentance.

repentance. And that's really a very important part of God's plan for us. In Revelation 3.20, one of the favorite verses, behold, I stand, Jesus says, behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come into him and eat with him and he with me. Intimacy in Old Testament days was eating together.

Jesus says, I'll eat with you. Okay? Alright. And then you must receive. And then finally, the sixth part of it is, you can have assurance of salvation.

You know, often, you might be asked, are you going to go to heaven? Our answers are sometimes, well, I'm working on it, or I hope. The answer should be, yes, by golly, now pass the potatoes.

[15:07] It's not a big discussion item. You can have assurance of salvation. John 1.12 said, but to all who believed him, who received him, he gave the power to become children of God.

That's the plan of salvation. That's what it means. It's not following some commandments. Now, I get to the last point.

Does that mean we don't have to bother with the Ten Commandments? If our salvation is not based on Ten Commandments, why the heck do we follow these things? Well, that's that epistle today.

It is welcome to the dilemma. Living in two worlds. Paul's dilemma.

He said, the law is spiritual and I am of the flesh. I want to do these things, but I can't. Sin controls my life.

[16:17] What hope is there for me? He says. But praise God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Some of you have read the books by Johnny Erickson Tata.

She is in our denomination. She's a strong woman in her 70s who when she was 15 years old dove into the ocean and broke her neck.

Became a quadriplegic. She tells the story of being there in the hospital as a 15 year old lying there and the sheet falls off her body. In her modesty she wants to cover herself.

She can't no matter how hard she wants she cannot move her hand or her feet to get to that sheet. She had to sit there lie there in humility while someone helped.

Isn't that something? Now I have not that bad a story but it's still for me a bad story. I am a jogger.

I've been jogging since I was in high school and it seems not too long ago I could run a 10k that's 6 miles in 42 minutes.

[17:27] That's like 7 minutes a mile. I remember doing that. Today I cannot do that. If I can string 5 12 minute miles together I consider it a victory.

I want to run that fast. I can't. my legs won't do it. You see that's the dilemma that Paul had to deal with and Paul is all of us trying to live that perfect holy life.

We're going to fall. We can't do it. But Paul learned to live in the tension of two systems. One system follow the commandments.

Second system you can't rely on Christ. You see that tension? That's the conclusion. We live in that tension. That tension does not bring stress however.

It brings incredible joy. Paul lived with the ten and the one. Follow the ten but follow the one Jesus.

[18:42] Can you live in that tension? Follow the ten but follow the one Jesus Christ. You can still toot and tell.

Let us pray. Lord God we thank you that you have a way for us to find eternal life. Even in the midst of our sinfulness you are there in Jesus to give us hope and assurance of salvation.

We accept your gift Lord Jesus as we receive you into our hearts and minds. In Jesus Christ's name we pray Father. Amen.