

Caleb EVans (6)

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Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. So I just want to start out this morning with praise to the living God and say this.

Isn't Jesus Christ a glorious Savior? Isn't knowing Him more than enough for you and for me? More on that in a minute. I have to apologize to my brothers and my sisters. I committed a serious liturgical faux pas. Even though we're in the joy of Eastertide, here I come again with one of those sermons about God's law and our violation of it.

So yeah, I got Lent and you're Easter. Sorry about that. But the truth is that I did want to finish this series on the Ten Commandments at some point.

And Easter came early this year. So bear with me, please. We're on the Tenth Commandment this morning. You shall not covet.

[1:39] We might be tempted to wonder what the big deal is really about coveting, what belongs to our neighbor. Compared to say, I don't know, murdering your neighbor. Doesn't seem like that big of a deal, does it?

And we're also tempted to downplay it because let's be honest, as 21st century Americans, coveting is one of our favorite sins.

Now granted, you're probably not coveting your neighbor's donkey or ox. But please see me for pastoral counseling if you are. But you are either coveting something of your neighbor's or you're probably tempted to do so.

It might be the neighbor's bigger house. It might be the neighbor's BMW. It might be the neighbor's swimming pool. It might be the neighbor's new iPhone. If a society, any society, is obsessed with stuff, as ours is, we better believe that there is no shortage of opportunities to covet.

In his day, Martin Luther King Jr. explained the mindset that tempts us to covet in this way. He said, in order to be a man of distinction, you must drink this whiskey. In order to make your neighbors envious, you must drive this type of car.

[2:57] In order to be lovely, you must wear this kind of lipstick or this kind of perfume. And you know, before you know it, you're just buying that stuff. That's what Dr. King had to say about that.

It's not any better, not any easier in 2018, is it? Now, in order to make your neighbors envious, you don't simply have to have this kind of car. You also have to have this kind of smartphone.

So we get it. Coveting is easy. Lusting after stuff or people or whatever is easy. But why is it a big deal?

Well, on a practical level, let's think of it like this. How many sins begin with coveting? How many evil things start with coveting, with desiring something that we don't have, so much so that it controls us?

Where does that lead? It doesn't lead anywhere good, does it? Being possessed by the sinful desire for what we do not have never leads to any good place.

[4:10] How does steps begin? What prompts someone to steal or to kill or to fight with their brother or sister? In James 4.2, we read this.

Let's be honest.

Coveting has real-world consequences, and it hurts people. Theft starts with coveting. I want something my neighbor has, something that I don't have, so I'm going to take it.

I'm going to steal it. I want it. I'll take it. I might even kill someone to get it, if that's what it takes.

Adultery also starts with coveting.

Fornication starts with coveting. Sexual sin of all kinds begins with coveting. It begins with the desire to possess someone that we are not bound to in the covenant of marriage.

[5:10] And what happens? Again, it has real-world consequences that hurt people. Things like adultery, things like sex trafficking, things like pornography.

Coveting hurts people and damages lives. And idolatry, that basic and fundamental sin, the worship of false gods, so often begins with coveting.

I want something so bad, some earthly created thing, that I am going to make it my God. See how that works? We desire to gain stuff so much that we end up worshiping that instead of the true and living God.

And make no mistake, the true and living God is not a vending machine who lives to dispense coveted goods to us. And on some level we all know that.

Which is why we're tempted to the worship of false gods. False gods who can be manipulated.

False gods who can give us what we want and when we want it. And sometimes we can worship those false gods and call it Christianity.

[6:30] Now I'm thinking particularly of the prosperity gospel here, which is something quite popular in our day. It packs stadiums. It brings in millions of dollars of money.

It purchases private jets for the so-called preachers who are selling this nonsense. Why does it sell? Because we're sinners and sinners covet.

And those who covet love to believe in a God who will give us exactly what we want and when we want it. If that is what we are looking for and that is what we worship, our covetousness has led us right into idolatry.

And I don't mean to harp on this for too long. But as your pastor, I want to warn you. There are so many of these false prosperity preachers out there.

And so many people are getting swindled by their false gospel. Be on guard. Because you are definitely going to encounter this garbage. So idolatry, adultery, murder, theft.

[7:39] These are just a few of the paths that coveting can lead us down. You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

This commandment that at first glance might not look like such a big deal, turns out to be a big deal, doesn't it? Here's the other problem with covenant.

It shines a light on our hearts by our actions. It shows what is in our hearts and it says, I don't really believe that Jesus is enough for me.

My brothers and my sisters, do you believe that Jesus is enough? Are you satisfied in Christ and joyous in Jesus? Regardless of the circumstances of this life.

And don't get me wrong, our circumstances sometimes get really bad. Look at the Apostle Paul. Here's a short list. He's beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, ultimately killed for his Christian faith.

[8:49] But what did Paul say? I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low and how to abound in any and every circumstance.

I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Now here's a passage that we often misunderstand.

It doesn't mean, for example, that my arthritic self is going to go out and run a marathon tomorrow. Because, well, I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

It's not assuring us that we'll always accomplish our dreams and that life will be all sunshine and rainbows.

Remember, Paul is writing this from prison. But what it does mean is that no matter what happens, if I am a believer, Christ is with me.

[9:50] I am in him. And I will be victorious in Christ no matter what happens. How did Paul learn to be content?

Which is the opposite of covenant. He learned what it is to have Jesus Christ. Now, I haven't ever been shut up in prison.

But I have been a seminary student. Heard the bishop laughing.

He knows what I'm talking about. I use this as an example, though, because at that point in life, our family had a whole lot of expenses and very little income.

There were times when we wondered how we were going to afford to eat, and having a baby to care for made it even scarier. But I used to tell Elaine when it was bad, well, God has not let us starve to death yet.

[10:52] And as you can tell to this day, I still haven't starved to death. But that temptation to worry about what we're going to eat, what we're going to wear, Jesus says something about that, doesn't he?

Matthew 6. No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Let's follow the train of logic in this passage. If we are dominated by fear and anxiety about our lives, what we're going to eat or drink, if that anxiety controls us, we might find ourselves servants of money.

And if we are serving money, if we are worshiping it, if we are obsessing over it, we are not serving God. So the answer is to seek the kingdom of God, to pursue a closer walk with Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, to seek to grow in Christian maturity, and then trust that God will care for us and give us the grace to be content with what we have.

[12:21] So we read in Romans 8, If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?

That doesn't necessarily mean that God is going to give us the sports car we're coveting. It doesn't mean that God is necessarily going to give us the financial prosperity we would like to have.

It doesn't even mean that we're guaranteed never to face hardship or earthly deprivation. Plenty of Christians have lost every earthly thing they have and have been killed for their Christian faith through the centuries.

But what it does mean to the Christian is this. God loved you so much that He gave His Son to die for your sins, to pay your debt.

He gave His own Son out of love for you. And because you were in Christ, because Christ died for you, your eternal good is guaranteed.

[13:26] That puts things in perspective, doesn't it? God loved you so much as to give His only Son for you.

He is going to follow through in caring for you, not just today, but forever, because you have been purchased by the blood of Christ. Your greatest enemies, your greatest adversities, sin, death, and the devil, have been defeated by Christ forever, and you belong to Him.

The hardships of this life, they look a lot different when we realize that God is on His throne, that He is sovereign, and that Jesus is with us always.

So we don't have to covet. We don't have to lust after what we don't have. Why? Because if we have Jesus, we have the greatest treasure possible.

If we have salvation in His name, we have a treasure that nothing in this world can match. That's why, in our epistle reading from Hebrews chapter 13, we read, Keep your life free from love of money and be content with what you have.

[14:53] For He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?

He will never leave us or forsake us, no matter what comes. So we can say confidently, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What if it seems like I don't have enough?

The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What if I'm not sure how I'm going to afford to eat? The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What if I have lost my job?

The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What if I have lost all my earthly goods? The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What if, as some of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world have found?

What if, our Christian testimony might cost us our very lives? The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. What can man do to me?

[16:08] What if I am facing death? The Lord is my helper, I will not fear. He will never leave me nor forsake me. Praise God.

So what if I am guilty of coveting and sinning against a holy God by doing that? What if I haven't had this proper attitude and have been serving earthly things instead of God?

Well, welcome to the club. We've all been there. As I referenced earlier in the series, we keep going back to it.

1 John 1, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Because let's be real, only one person has ever kept God's commandments perfectly. That person isn't me. Isn't you. It is the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17:14] All the rest of us need the forgiveness that is found in Christ, in His perfect life, and in His atoning death. I've referred to the Heidelberg Catechism a few times in this series because I think that it handles the Ten Commandments really well.

It does so in a deeply biblical way. I'll close this sermon in this series with a quote from it. Question. Since no one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly, why does God want them preached so pointedly?

Answer. First, so that the longer we live, the more we may come to know our sinfulness, and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness.

Second, so that we may never stop striving and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit could be renewed more and more after God's image until after this life we reach our goal, perfection.

every one of us needs to know our sinfulness so that we more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness and look to Him for His perfect righteousness.

[18:30] We need to remember we are sinners who need a Savior. And we need to remember that there is salvation in Jesus and that there is salvation in no one else.

You and I have failed to keep God's law. And again, I'm not saying this to judge you. We're all in the same boat here. We all need the free and full forgiveness found in Christ.

Without it, we would be rightly condemned for our sins when we stand before the judgment seat of God. We need to be reminded that we are sinners because we need to be reminded that there is a Savior for sinners.

And this is true at every stage in the Christian life. The basic message of law and gospel, of sin and redemption, isn't merely for the purpose of evangelizing unbelievers.

We always need the law of God to show us our sin, even if that's not a particularly fun exercise.

Because we are tempted, aren't we, to get self-righteous?

[19:39] We are tempted to get self-sufficient. And if we happen to stumble, we're tempted then to forget that there is a Savior for sinners. So we need to remember we never outgrow the gospel.

we always need to look more and more eagerly to Christ. And that's not all. As Christians, we need to hear the Ten Commandments so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can grow in holiness and obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit to do that, not to earn our salvation, that has already been done.

It has already been won for us by Christ. But because we are grateful for the gift of salvation and we desire, don't we, to become more and more like Christ until that day when by God's grace we are fully free from sin and we see our Lord face to face.

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.