

An Exclusive Marriage

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[0 : 0 0] skill skill If you're turning your Bibles to Exodus chapter 20, Exodus chapter 20, we are continuing in our series called Into the Wilderness as we've been studying our way verse by verse, chapter by chapter through the book of Exodus. And last we looked at Exodus in chapter 19, we were introduced to a wedding where God enters into a covenant with Israel here at Mount Sinai. We looked specifically at the language of covenant that's used in Exodus 19, how God lays out his vows and Israel replies by saying, we do. This is a wedding. This is a covenant between God and the people of Israel.

It is a covenant that is established on his grace. He bore them on eagle's wings. It's a covenant that expects obedience. We're now coming into the section where God gives Israel the law. And it's a covenant that can only be entered into through a mediator. You notice how God speaks and then Moses tells Israel and then Israel replies and Moses tells the Lord. He's the officiant of this covenant of this wedding. Well, now here in Exodus chapter 20, we come to what's maybe one of the most famous sections, not just in the book of Exodus, but in the entire Bible. It's the part we know as the Ten Commandments.

Now, even though we're very familiar with this section of scripture, some people have them memorized. A lot of Christians still don't really know what to do with the Ten Commandments. Do we hang them on our wall? Do we keep them? Are they just outdated rules that no longer apply to us? What do they have to do with us? We're going to talk about that as we look here at Exodus chapter 19 or Exodus chapter 20.

And we're just going to cover the first three verses. And so if you are able to stand, I'm going to ask you to please do that as we honor the reading of God's word. Exodus chapter 20, and look at verses 1 through 3. And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. This is God's word.

Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for this time now to study your word, to be under its authority. You know, and throughout this study in the book of Exodus, we have seen so many things that are relevant to our daily life. And once again, we come to this passage, and I pray, God, you would show us how this relates to our own heart, our own every day, and that you would, as you command us here, give us the strength and the grace to have no other gods before you. Come and talk to us now, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Winona Banks had survived a lot in her life, including cancer.

[4 : 1 1] And she never thought that a simple move from Indiana to Florida would be what would ultimately do her in. Winona and her husband were retiring. They were at that age, and they had retired, and they decided to move closer to their son, who lived in Florida. Unfortunately, they would end up living with their son in Florida. You see, the Banks family contacted a company called Safe Ship to help them move. But what they didn't realize is this actually wasn't a moving company. It was a broker company, kind of a middleman, if you will. They didn't actually do the moving. That company contacted another company called Lifetime Movers out of New Jersey. And this was a company with a long list of complaints and had an F rating. Now, Winona and her husband did not know any of this. So they prepared for their move. And they watched as all their possessions, their family heirlooms, their photo albums, all got loaded onto the moving truck, not realizing they would never see their things again.

You see, because they could not move into their home right away, the moving company put all of their stuff in a storage unit. Well, that was fine with them. And the Banks family just continued to pay the moving company the fee for the storage facility every single month. However, the moving company wasn't paying the storage company. Well, when the bills went unpaid, the storage

company auctioned off all of their belongings without them even knowing. Winona said, quote, they wouldn't even tell me who it was auctioned to. We have no idea where our things are. After being married for 33 years, we've gone through a lot of ups and downs. But to see everything you have gone, these are things you can't replace.

It feels like a bad dream, close quote. What about James Montever? James is a 70-year-old man who was living in southern Alaska. He was relaxing one early Sunday evening on his couch when he heard a loud roar and a bright flash of light. The next thing he knew, he was literally flying in the air.

You see, James was thrown to the ceiling as the structure of his home collapsed. He suffered four fractured ribs, a dislocated shoulder, somehow escaped with his life. He was one of several victims of an 1100 foot landslide in southern Alaska. James survived, but he lost everything.

What about Sophia and Philip Pacheco? They were a couple in San Antonio. They were at one of the most exciting times in their life. They were expecting their first child in just a few weeks.

[7 : 45] That's when a barbecue grill ignited an apartment next door and burned their apartment down, leaving them only with the clothes on their back. Sophia told the local news, quote, one minute we were fine. The next, everything we had was gone. Baby items, personal items, family heirlooms, wedding rings, everything gone. And then there's the couple I've told you about this before of Tanner Broadwell and Nikki Walsh. They were the couple from Colorado. They dreamed of leaving everything behind to sail the Caribbean. They sold everything they had, their belongings, their clothes, anything that had any value at all, and they bought their dream boat. Two days into their lifelong dream, their sailboat struck something under the water. Tanner and Nikki survived. Their boat did not. And when the Tampa Bay Times interviewed them, Tanner said, everything I worked for in all my life, everything I'd owned since I was a child was in that boat, and we had to watch it all sink. Now, Faith and Wee, why do I share those four stories with you?

What do those four stories illustrate for us? That they actually illustrate something that every single one of you has experienced in one way or another, and it's this. Temporary things eventually sink. You know that. Temporary things eventually sink. Now, maybe for you, it was not all your possessions.

Maybe it wasn't your entire home that you lost. Maybe it wasn't your dream boat that sank. But you've experienced this. Maybe for you, you put all your hopes into a relationship, and it ended. You put all of your security in an investment, and you lost it. You put all of your time into a career, and it was taken from you. You put all of your identity into a reputation, and it vanished. You see, at some point in life, every single one of us has come to this reality.

Temporary things eventually sink. And why is that important for us to understand? What does that really mean for us? And why is that significant to Exodus chapter 20? We'll notice this on the screen.

It doesn't make them bad things. It doesn't make them bad things. It makes them bad gods. It doesn't make them bad things, boats and homes and possessions in this world, but it sure makes them bad gods.

[10 : 58] And faith family, that is exactly why. It's exactly why here in Exodus chapter 20, for our own good, God demands and God commands that we love Him above all. Notice again what the text says here in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 1. God spoke all these words saying, I am Yahweh. I am your God.

I am the one that brought you out of the land of Egypt. I brought you out of the house of slavery. And you shall, that thou shalt not, if you like the old King James Version, you shall have no other gods before me. Now notice, first of all, the exclusivity of this first command. Now, for us to understand this, as I always say, you've got to know the context. The context is king. And it's important for us to know the context to understand this command. Because again, a lot of Christians, they don't know what to do with the Ten Commandments. It's like random rules in the Old Testament. And we don't really know exactly how to understand them all. But you'll remember last week, as I talked about even just a few moments ago, Exodus 20 is coming right off the heels of Exodus 19. And Exodus 19 is all about entering into a covenant, entering into a marriage with Yahweh. Also, you need to keep this in mind that Israel has been a slave. They've been in slavery to Egypt. I brought you up out of slavery for 430 years prior to this in Egypt. Meaning, when Egypt was a polytheistic nation, that is, they worshiped, and we've talked about this before, they worshiped all kinds of gods. And Israel joined in. Israel worshiped the Egyptian gods as well. In fact,

you'll remember, I don't know, probably seven years ago, back when I was preaching in Exodus chapter 7. It kind of feels that long ago. But when we were back in Exodus 7, and the chapters following that with the plagues, I showed you how the ten plagues were actually individual judgments on the Egyptian gods. This gets specifically mentioned in Exodus chapter 12 and verse 12. Notice this verse. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And notice this phrase.

And on all the gods of Egypt, I will execute judgments. I am Yahweh. I am the Lord. And I'm not going to go back through all of them, but you remember this. Like there was a god of the Nile, and then you have the plague that turns the river into blood. There's the god and goddess of medicine. And one of the plagues is the plague of boils and sores. There's a goddess of the sky, and you have fire that rains down. There's the sun god, Ra, and darkness comes over the land.

Even Pharaoh was considered to be divine. He was considered to be a god. And you have the death of the firstborn. And here's why I'm bringing that up, right, faith family? Listen, the plagues demonstrated what God is now demanding. Listen, the plagues demonstrated what God is now demanding, namely, there are no other gods before Yahweh. The plagues demonstrated that, and now God demands, as you live in marriage with me, as you live in covenant with me, you are to have no other gods but me. You see, Israel had this tendency, both in captivity in Egypt, but even before Egypt, to kind of adapt to her surrounding and worship the gods of that culture. If you go back even to

[15 : 25] Genesis chapter 35 and verse 2, you'll notice this, Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, put away the foreign gods that are among you. Purify yourselves and change your garments.

In other words, stop with all that false worship. Stop with worshipping all of the idols and the gods of the culture you're in. Israel tended to blend into her surroundings. She was a spiritual chameleon. She would start off by sticking out. She was to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, but she would eventually slowly blend in and look like the nation around her. So God, as he's entering into this covenant, is saying, listen, notice this on the screen, if you're going to be in relationship with God, you can't have other gods. If you're going to be married to Yahweh, you are to have no other gods in your life. Now, there's some debate around this particular passage or the phrase, you shall have no other gods before me. And some of the debate is over the Hebrew meaning of the phrase. Some people will translate it, you're to have no gods next to me. Some will say no gods except me. Some will say no gods over me. Some will say no gods in front of me or no gods brought before my face. And so my best guess is this. Yes, it's every one of them. You're not to have any gods next to him, except him, over him, in front of him, or brought before his face. You're to have no other gods but Yahweh. That is what God is commanding in this first commandment. He wants your worship to be for him and him alone. He is, and I know people don't fully understand how to take this. He is a jealous God. He wants exclusivity. He wants your worship to himself. There's a lot of people who don't like this. Even people that you may know.

For example, in a parade magazine interview, Brad Pitt, and I get confused with him all the time. But anyways, they ask actor Brad Pitt, who grew up Southern Baptist, shockingly. He grew up as a Southern Baptist and he rejected, as he got older, the God of the Bible. And they ask him, why did you come to reject the God of the Bible? And here's what Brad Pitt said, quote, I didn't understand the idea of a God who says, you have to acknowledge me. You have to say that I'm the best and then I'll give you eternal happiness. And if you won't, then you don't get it. It seemed to me about ego. I can't see God operating from ego. So it made no sense to me. Another journalist by the name of Eric Reese, he's a journalist, teaches journalism, actually also the author of an American gospel. He did an interview with NPR and he described why he rejected his Christian background. And he referred to a passage in Matthew chapter 10, verse 37 and following, where Jesus says, whoever loves mother or loves father or son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Jesus said that. Anybody that loves their father or mother or their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And Reese goes on to say, quote, what an egomaniac. Who is this historical stranger speaking 2,000 years ago saying that we should love him more than father or son? Love me more than anybody in the world or you're not worthy of me?

That is an egomaniac talking, close quote. And it might be easy to pick on, which is not my intention at all to pick on them, but just to use them as illustrations is why people often react to this particular command. But it might be easy to isolate them out because they're not believers.

[20 : 01] But even C.S. Lewis, our own C.S. Lewis, in his reflection on the Psalms, said that one of his greatest obstacles in coming to faith was God's constant demanding of praise. He said it was like God was like a, quote, vain woman needing compliments, close quote. And to be honest, the first commandment that you shall have no other gods before me on the surface does kind of make God look like this. Okay, see this palace? Everyone in it is at my command. Check this out. Butler, chef, theme song guy. Oh yeah! He's the sovereign lord of the nation. He's the hippest cat in creation. He's the alpha, the omega, a to z.

And this perfect world will spin around his every little whim. Cause this perfect world begins and ends with me. What's his name?

Who's gone? That's his name. He's the king of the world. He's the hippo, what? He's the star. Yeah! Ow! You threw off my groove. I'm sorry, but you've thrown off the emperor's groove. Sorry!

You were saying? That's kind of, again, on the surface how it makes God look like he's some, you know, egomaniac and just trying to make everything about himself. But if you really take a deeper dive on this and go beyond the surface, you begin to realize that this commandment not only makes sense logically, it's certainly true theologically, it also makes sense practically. Let me give you three reasons why God must command exclusivity. Why he must say, you are not to have any other gods before me. Here's the first reason. The first reason is that God commands exclusivity for a God reason. For a God reason.

[22 : 22] The reason he commands no other gods above him is because there are no other gods above him. There's a reason here. Now, there are other gods. We've talked about this. We talked about this in the spiritual realm class. We've talked about this earlier in Exodus. Other gods exist in terms of divine beings. I've referenced many times how Satan is called the small g, God of this world in the New Testament. But listen, all of those spiritual beings, all of those Elohim, all of those gods, listen, are created. In other words, there is only one eternal creator God, meaning there are no other gods higher than him. He is hallowed. He is in a class all by himself because he is the only eternal creator God.

So, of course, God has to command that there is no other gods before him because there are no other gods before him. Here's a second reason why God gives this first command is that God commands exclusivity for a good reason. Not just a God reason, but also a good reason. What you're going to discover and we'll look at in the next few weeks is that all of the rest of the nine commandments in the ten commandments flow out of the first one. They come out of it. Let me give you just a few examples of how they connect and we'll get it more in detail in future weeks. For example, if possessions is your functional God, you look to possessions to be what gives you comfort and security and that's what you really long for in life. Rather than God, you're going to be tempted to steal.

If success is your God rather than the one true God, you're going to be tempted to never rest and just work, work, work, work, work all the time. If self-exaltation is your God, you're going to be tempted to not want to submit to the authority that God has placed in your life like honor your father and mother.

In other words, all of these things lead to when you get the first one wrong, the first commandment wrong, it's going to lead to breaking all the others to a life that is disordered. Your relationships, your pattern of rest, your desires are going to be out of alignment because you're going to functionally have other gods. Let me summarize what I'm saying by saying this. Notice it on the screen.

When God is not your true north, then all of life goes the wrong direction. When you don't get the first commandment right, it impacts all the other ones. When God is not your center, everything else is out of balance. So God commands this for a good reason, for your good, for a God reason. There are no other gods before him for a good reason because this is good for your life. And thirdly, God commands exclusivity for a grace reason, a God reason, a good reason, and a grace reason. For God to command that you worship only him or for God to command that you not worship anything but him is the greatest gift he could give you. Because to say to you, it's okay for you to worship whatever you want to worship, it's okay to exalt whatever God you want to exalt. Would equate to divine hatred. Listen, God loves you so much, he commands that you not chase after things that are going to be detrimental to your soul. He commands what your soul most needs, which is to delight in God alone or above all. God loves you so much, he wants the very best for your life and there's nothing better for your soul than God. So what would it say, Brad Pitt, Eric Reese,

[27 : 02] C.S. Lewis, before we came to faith, what would it say about God if he withheld from you or didn't command you the very thing that your soul most needs? This is a gift of grace. The first commandment is not meant to limit you. It's meant to reveal how much you're loved. God is saying, I love you so much, I want you to exclusively worship the one your soul ultimately needs. How could God not command this?

For a God reason, for a good reason, and for a grace reason. Now, how do you think Israel did at keeping this command? This is the very first command in this marriage covenant. How do you think Israel did?

You know the answer to that, but let me show you it in Exodus chapter 32 and verse 1. Exodus 32 and verse 1. So when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves to Aaron and said to him, up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. And so Aaron said to them, well, take off the rings of gold that are in your ears and your wives and sons and daughters and bring them to me. And all the people took off the rings of gold and were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. They received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, these are your gods, O Israel. And notice the insanity of this next phrase.

This is crazy. These golden calves that we've just created are who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. That is insanity. I mean, literally they fashioned these golden idols, these golden calves, and they say, you are the ones that deliver us from Pharaoh and out of the hand of the Egyptians. Faith family, as you know, Israel could not go but a few days, probably a few seconds without breaking the first commandment. Because, and here's why, because the commandment was written on stones.

[29 : 40] Their heart was not a changed heart. You see, commandments that are written on stone can't change a heart of stone. That is why you'll discover in the New Testament that the Apostle Paul actually says that the law was given. One of the primary reasons that the law was given was to show our inability to keep it. Our inability to live up to God's standard, to live up to the things that he's commanded us to.

Notice this on the screen. That is commanding exclusivity actually reveals our inability. And you know it, and I know it, we all are just like Israel. We all do the exact same thing. We love created things more than we love our Creator, Romans chapter 1. Just like Israel, we want someone, or we want something to rescue us from our slavery. And this happens every day in so many practical ways.

Maybe, for example, you're enslaved to a bad day, and you look to the God of sports to just get you out of that Egypt. You're enslaved to an economic situation, and so you look to money to get you out of that Egypt. You're enslaved to a social situation, and you think, maybe if I could just be more attractive, and you look to the God of beauty, and maybe that would get you out of your Egypt. Here's the reality. Let's face it, Faith family. Notice it on the screen. We're all trying to get out of an Egypt. We're all trying to get out of some type of bondage or slavery, and we will chase, or we will worship any idol that promises freedom. We are just like Israel. We violate and break the first commandment all the time. I would ask you, and I would ask you to give this some real serious thought.

What Egypt are you trying to get out of? What is your bondage? What is your slavery? It could be loneliness, or regret, or unfair expectations. It could be grief. It could be poverty. It could be mediocrity. It could be abusive past. It could be a dead-end job. It could be hopelessness. It could be some type of human authority, but everybody's trying to get out of an Egypt, and not only that, but secondly, what God are you trusting in to deliver you, to get you out? Is it your spouse, your kids, money, education, appearance, friends, music, a boat so that you can just leave all your troubles behind?

Everybody's in an Egypt, and everybody's looking to a God to get them out. So how do we find the ultimate solution to this dilemma? The dilemma is God has commanded exclusivity, and we are not able to return that. Just like Israel. God demands exclusivity, and that reveals our inability. So what do we do?

[32 : 51] What do we do? How do you get out? And the answer, of course, is you need another exodus. You need another exodus. I have reminded you over and over again, almost every week on purpose, that this exodus, in this book of Exodus in the Old Testament, this exodus is pointing

us to and preparing us for a bigger exodus. That is the exodus of the gospel. Remember what this exodus is ultimately about. I'll take you back to Exodus chapter 3 and verse 7. This is when the Lord said, Yahweh says to Israel, I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their suffering. And notice this language, I have come down.

And why have I come down? I've come down to deliver them out of their bondage, out of the hand of the Egyptians, to bring them up out of the land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So what are the elements of this first exodus? Well, you have God, the great I am, sees his people in captivity and bondage. And what does he do? He comes down. He comes down to meet them. He sees their suffering and he comes to them. That is, he acts on their behalf. He graciously intervenes. And how does he do that? By sending a deliverer. In the book of Exodus, it's Moses. You're the one I'm raising up to go and deliver my people from the Egyptians. But this exodus is incomplete because as I've just shown with the first commandment, this exodus is incomplete because the problem of sin has not been solved. Israel, like us, we're not able to fulfill the very commands that God has placed upon us. So we need another exodus. And the good news of the gospel, faith family, is we have one. Notice how Exodus 3 compares to John chapter 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and he was in the beginning with God. And then verse 14, and the Word came down. That is, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father. In other words, in those verses, what we see is that God sees the captivity, the bondage of his people, and he acts on their behalf. He graciously comes down by sending a deliverer. Except this deliverer is not Moses. This deliverer is Jesus.

And notice that Jesus brings something different when he comes down. Moses comes down from the mountain with something for Israel, and Jesus comes down from heaven with something for us. Notice it, John chapter 1 verse 17. This is good news. For the law was given through Moses. When he came down, he brought the law, Exodus 20. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Oh my, oh man. When Moses came down, again, notice God sees their bondage. He acts on their behalf, and he sends down a deliverer. His name is Moses, but what does he bring? The law. And that law proves that we cannot keep the commands of God.

So God acts in a second Exodus by sending down a deliverer. His name is Jesus, and he does not bring with him the law. He brings with him grace and truth. Oh man, that's the good news of the gospel. You see, Jesus didn't bring the law to expose sin. Jesus brought grace to forgive sin. All the sin that was exposed through our breaking of the law. Jesus brings grace to that. Moses brought the law on a tablet of stone.

The gospel is that Jesus brought salvation by rolling away the stone. Therefore, the first commandment, faith family is not meant to destroy you with guilt. It is meant to drive you to grace. To drive you to the grace of your heavenly Father who waits for you with open arms. So question, how do you obey the first commandment? How do you obey the first commandment? What do we do with this? Do we hang it on a wall?

[38 : 17] Do we keep it? What do we do with it? Here's how we should answer it. You come to God exclusively through Jesus Christ by faith. You come to God exclusively through Jesus Christ by faith. It's the only way you're ever going to obey the first commandment. You see, the exclusivity of the first commandment requires the exclusivity of the gospel. That is, there is no other name by which you can be saved. Do you believe that faith family? Say amen. There is no other name by which you can be saved.

There's no other way to God. There is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. And you shall have no other ways of salvation but through Him. That's how Jesus points us to the fulfillment of this first command. So I ask you, faith family, what Egypt, what Egypt are you trying to get out of? What slavery, what bondage, what is it that you're trying to get freedom from? But more specifically, what God are you looking to to get you out? Is it your boat? Is it your possessions? Is it your family and friends? Is it your money? Like what's going to get you out of that Egypt? And ultimately, what this is preaching and proclaiming to you is that you need to look to Jesus exclusively. He's the only way into a marriage with God, to a covenant with God that is actually fulfilled. Because in Christ, He fulfills this commandment for us. That's the best news in the world.

That's the good news of the gospel. You know, all those stories I shared at the beginning of this message, they're heartbreaking. They're really, really heartbreaking. You think about Wynonna, who lost all of her possessions. James, who lost his entire home and everything. Sophia and Philip, that lost everything they had in their apartment. And Nick and Tanner, that lost everything they had in a boat. They all lost everything. And as I thought about those stories, as I thought about those real life examples, it reminded me of Matthew chapter 13. Do you remember when Jesus said this? The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy, he sells all that he has and buys that field. Listen to me very closely, Faith Family. Listen to me. The greatest fear in life is not that one day you may lose everything.

[41 : 27] The greatest fear in life is that you might lose everything for something that sinks. Instead, what you ought to do is be willing to lose everything for a life that is built on the solid rock of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Because as the old hymn says, all other ground is sinking sand.

And all God's people said, amen. Let's pray together. Lord, thank you for this first commandment. Thank you for the opportunity to study it in context. To not only see why you command exclusivity, why you command no other gods above you, but to also see why that's good for our soul, why that's important for us, that you actually love us so much, you only want for us the very best.

And you know, as we know, that everything in this world, all these temporary things eventually sink. They eventually pass. They can be gone in a moment because those gods can't save. Only you can save.

You are our true and ultimate deliverer. And we come to you through Jesus Christ. And we pray this in his name and all God's people said, amen.

Amen.