

Living As a Kingdom of Priests

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[0 : 00] Would you turn with me to Exodus chapter 20?

Exodus chapter 20, that's page 61 in the Pew Bible. As you turn there, let me pray for us. Father, indeed, we are in awe and wonder at your majesty.

God, you are great and you are good and you are holy and just. And above all, you are a God who loves with an unending love.

As we come now to your word, Father, would we have that same awe and majesty, knowing that it is here that you, our great God, speak to us.

Holy Spirit, make the reading and the preaching of your word this morning effective in all of our hearts, we pray. For Jesus' sake and in his name, amen.

[1 : 18] Amen. Exodus chapter 20, we're looking at the second half of the Ten Commandments, focusing on verses 12 through 17. But we're going to start in verse 1 to get the context.

So let me read this for us. Verse 1. 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. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

[2 : 33] On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant, your livestock or the sojourner who is within your gates.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that is your neighbor's.

And we'll end there. So I ran across a quote recently that went like this.

[3 : 41] Those who hear not the music think the dancers mad. Those who hear not the music think the dancers mad.

It's a great picture, isn't it? There you are. You're watching a room full of people spinning and gyrating and twisting and turning. And yet, without the music, they all seem, well, a little crazy. Right? Imagine if someone walked in this morning and just saw us all kind of spinning and bopping around in utter silence. But, turn the music on and suddenly what seemed like chaos is actually shown to be choreography.

As I've said, we're looking at the second half of the Ten Commandments this morning or the ten words as they're later called in Deuteronomy, the Decalogue, which is just Greek for ten words. Matt preached on the first half, commands one through four last week, and we're picking up from there.

And believe it or not, what we have in the Ten Commandments is just that. It's choreography. But the trouble is, we don't hear the music.

[5 : 06] And so we don't see much of a dance here. We just see, well, rules. And rules that increasingly seem more like madness than beauty.

They seem more and more like restriction than freedom. And that's not just the case broadly, culturally. I think that's the case in the church, too.

Of course, many cultural commentators would say that there's great moral fragmentation going on around us, socially, culturally, and that is certainly a cause for concern.

But I think we ought to be even more concerned about the state of the church, which Jesus said is supposed to be salt and light. And often I think we as the church aren't hearing the music and we're forgetting how to dance.

So what I want to try to do this morning is not give a six-point sermon where we go into all the details of commands six through ten.

[6 : 11] You know, point one, honor your father and mother, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. We're not going to do that this morning. There are good resources that do that. J.I. Packer wrote a great short book called Keeping the Ten Commandments, which would be one of many good places to start if you want to kind of do an initial study.

But rather than sort of analyze all the dance steps this morning, I want to try to help us hear the music. And I want to do that in three ways. I want us to consider this morning the point of the Ten Commandments.

And then we're going to look at the picture that's in the Ten Commandments. And then finally we're going to look at the end of the commandments. So the point and the picture and the end to try to hear this music.

So first let's look at the point. And to get to the point, we have to get the context here. After all, the Ten Commandments, well, I guess they do sort of come down from heaven.

But they're part of a story, right? They're buried within a story. And that story matters immensely for understanding the point of them. Go back in your Bible to chapter 19, verse 4.

[7 : 16] If you've got the pew Bible open, it's just like literally right on the other page. Look at chapter 19, verse 4. This is God talking to Moses after the Exodus at the foot of Mount Sinai. That's where we're at in the story.

And God says this, These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

And then right after that, God gives them the Ten Commandments. You see, God rescued Israel from slavery to be a kingdom of priests, he says.

In other words, they had a calling. They had a purpose. They had a mission in the world. And on the one hand, that mission was to be a kingdom.

That is, to be rulers. To be stewards of God's creation. To be bringers of justice and peace in the world. Under God's lordship, they were meant to be agents of God's rule, of God's kingdom.

[8 : 41] But they were also meant to be priests. That is, they were meant to be the ones who directed the praise and the prayer of the creation back to its creator.

Mediating the presence of God and the praise of creation. A kingdom of priests. Friend, why are you here?

What's your purpose? Get fit. Make a lot of money. Grow old.

Die. And in three generations or so, be basically forgotten. Is that what human life is for?

Ever thought about that? Chances are, your great-grandchildren, certainly your great-great-grandchildren, will not remember you. And that's your own family.

[9 : 41] Let alone everybody else. Is that all that we're here for? To make money? Exercise? Take care of ourselves? And die and be forgotten?

Friends, God has a much grander vision for your life. The apostle Peter, in our reading from earlier in the service, says that the church, all those who are united to Christ in faith, now are carrying forward this vocation of Israel.

Listen again to what Peter says. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. That sounds familiar, right?

It's Exodus 19. Peter says, that's you, church. That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people.

Once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. What if our life was about being a kingdom of priests with an eternal aim to see creation glorify its creator and to pray with

Jesus our Lord that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[11:04] And to be in our life together under the guidance of the Spirit, the advanced foretaste of that reality in our life together. Sure. Or we can just go back to getting fit and making money and die and being forgotten.

I'll take the former. But to do that, to be this kingdom of priests, Israel needed to know what God required of them.

They needed to know what sort of actions would appropriately embody their new life as the people of the Lord. Because they didn't know this on their own. Think about it.

They couldn't look to their own culture around them. Or they couldn't look back to their own history. And they couldn't sort of dig down into their own reason to try to figure this out.

They needed God's revelation to know how to live in a way that was fitting as the redeemed creatures of God that they were. And that's the same for us too.

[12:08] We need God's revelation to. Because we don't know how to live how we're supposed to live merely by looking back at history.

Whose history? Which history? Whose story? Which story? Or looking out to our culture? Which culture? Or looking into our reason alone?

Friends, we need God to tell us how to be God's people. How to live into this thrilling calling as his rulers and priests.

And part of that revelation that God graciously gives us is the Ten Commandments. And so you see the Ten Commandments aren't sort of these arbitrary rules.

Or these sort of free floating moral maxims. Or this sort of hammer that's supposed to come down and sort of shape up the pagan society. No. One commentator put it this way.

[13:11] He said, And part of what that means is that it's a life of freedom.

Look back at the beginning of chapter 20. God spoke all these words saying, I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

God's saying to them and to us, You're no longer slaves. So how then do we live in the freedom that God has given us?

Are we going to live like we learned to live in Egypt, in slavery? Or are we going to live in the real, true freedom of God? And the Ten Commandments show us what real freedom is.

Think about the Ten Commandments in turn. What are they saying? It's freedom from. Tick through them, false gods. Freedom from false worship.

[14:18] Freedom from irreverence. Freedom from endless work and generational strife. Freedom from murder and hate and adultery and theft and slander and coveting.

Freedom from all those things. And freedom for knowing the living and true God. And enjoying true worship.

And deep reverence and awe. Freedom for rest. And familial peace. And life and love and generosity and truth.

And to crown it all off joyful contentment. It's freedom. And what's more, if the Ten Commandments are part of the covenant, the binding agreement that the great king, the Lord, makes with his people, then what we're talking about here is the image of God, is the kingdom of God.

The rule of God. And what we know is that the life of the kingdom is the life of God's new creation. After all, Israel has come through the waters.

[15:33] They're headed to the promised land. God's going to dwell in their midst. They are a foretaste, a pointer of what it means to be a new creation people. And they're meant to be a people living out on earth what is true in heaven.

After all, friends, imagine a world. Imagine a world with absolutely no murder. And no adultery. Imagine a world with no theft.

And no false witnessing. Imagine a world with no coveting. Wouldn't that be heaven on earth? Or at least a foretaste of it.

Now, there are many things in the law of Moses that no longer apply to New Testament Christians. There were civil laws that regulated Israel's life as a nation state, as a political entity. We'll get into some of those in the next couple of weeks in chapters 21 and 22 of Exodus.

And there were ceremonial laws that regulated Israel's worship and that distinguished them visibly from the surrounding nations of the time. Things like clean and unclean foods and circumcision.

[16:46] But when we come to the New Testament, we see that those civil and those ceremonial laws are no longer in force. Why? Well, the answer that is given again and again in the New Testament is because Christ has come.

And he has fulfilled the ceremonies through his death and resurrection. And he has transformed the people of God from being a particular nation state into now an international spiritual family made up of people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

It's a transnational movement, the church. You see, the civil and ceremonial laws were sort of like flashlights shining on the path, pointing the way forward.

But then the dawn broke and the sun came up. And when the sun comes up, you can turn off your flashlight because you don't need it anymore.

But there's a moral law that God gives. And these laws teach us God's unchanging character and what it means to love God and love our neighbor as ourself.

[17:53] And these laws, we find, are actually reaffirmed in the New Testament. And they're still an abiding guide for the church as we live into our renewed calling to be a kingdom of priests in the world.

To proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light, as the Apostle Peter puts it. Now, next Sunday, Pastor Greg's going to teach a Sunday school class at 9 a.m.

all about interpreting the Old Testament laws. So, if you want to do a deeper dive into some of the nuances of understanding all the varied parts of the Old Testament law today, come to Sunday school next week at 9 o'clock.

And, in fact, that class is going to kick off a whole summer course that we're doing on reading and understanding the Old Testament and especially reading and understanding the Bible with Christ at the center. And Alex Sherman is going to be back from seminary and he's going to be teaching that class.

So, make a point to come to Sunday school next week at 9. Got it? Good. Okay. Commercial break over. Back to the Ten Commandments. What's the point?

[18:56] Here's the point. That these commandments that we're so familiar with, honor your father and mother, don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't covenant.

They're part of a story for us. The point is that they are ways in which we live out our calling to display God's glory in the world. To be kings and priests of the new creation right in the midst of the old.

To be the on earth as it is in heaven people as Jesus taught us to pray. So, you see, these Ten Commandments aren't the way that we win God's favor.

No, God's already done that. He's already given us his favor by his grace. I've taken you out of slavery already, God says in verse 2. Now, here's how you live into that freedom.

Here's how you take up that mission in the world that I have for you. So, you're starting to hear the music just a little bit. The point of the Ten Commandments is to direct the life of the redeemed people of God to display the glory of God in the world that he has made.

[20:06] They're the script. They're the marching orders. They're the sheet music for the kingdom of priests that we are as the church, as the people of God. But there's more.

How exactly do the commands help us fulfill that vocation and that mission? And to hear that further part of the music, we have to consider not just the point of the Ten Commandments, but we have to look at the picture in the Ten Commandments.

Now, I know I'm changing metaphors here, but imagine the Ten Commandments now as ten brushstrokes on a canvas or ten lines across a page. Now, it's often said that the first four commandments focus on our relationship to God, and the next six commandments focus on our relationship to one another, to our neighbor.

We're to love God in commands one through four, tell us basically how to do that. And we're to love our neighbor as ourself in commands five through ten, tell us how to do that. And Jesus himself said that the whole law could be summarized in those two commands, to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself.

But as we take these Ten Commandments, these ten brushstrokes painted across the canvas, whose picture do we see?

[21 : 26] The picture is ultimately the picture not of us, but of God. You see, these commandments flow out from the very nature of God, from who God is.

And that's why God is glorified as we live them out. That's why God is seen and known as the great God that he is when we live our lives this way, because the commands all picture God's own beauty and glory.

So think about the fifth commandment. Honor your father and mother. It's about respecting the rightful authorities in your life. And there are lots of tricky issues that come up as we become adults about what it means to honor our parents, even if we don't necessarily obey them anymore, etc., etc.

And that's a good question to parse out with godly friends and mentors if you're facing it. But what shines through this commandment is ultimately God's own authority as our heavenly and good Father.

His authority which is always good and always just. And it's an authority that brings flourishing to those under it. The Apostle Paul points out that this is the first commandment with a promise, he says.

[22 : 42] Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. Now, that's not a promise of individual long life in return for treating your parents well.

Rather, it's a promise to the people as a whole that they will dwell in the promised land for generations and generations as they honor their parents and the other rightful authorities in their lives.

And this promise is a sign of God's own good authority that brings eternal flourishing to those who are under it. So in the fifth commandment, we see a picture of God's own good authority.

How about the sixth commandment? You shall not murder. This commandment forbids taking innocent human life. And ultimately, it's a picture of God who is the Lord and the giver of life, is it not?

He decides when life will begin and end. He creates and sustains and determines the end. He's sovereign over life and death. In fact, God is life himself. The seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery.

[23 : 47] It's a command for fidelity within marriage. More broadly, it's a command for us to order our sexual lives according to God's will and not our own. But ultimately, is it not a picture of God's own faithfulness?

That when God makes a covenant, he does not break it. That he is ever trustworthy, ever committed. That God will never turn his back on his own.

That he'll never shame or exchange his people, his bride, his spouse for another. The eighth commandment, you shall not steal. A command to respect and uphold what rightfully belongs to others and not to take it for oneself.

It's a picture of God's rightful ownership of everything. Everything belongs to God. And this command also, if you look at it the right way, is also a picture of God's generosity.

That he gives us everything that we have and need. God is our provider. He will take care of us. So we need not take what isn't ours. The ninth commandment, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

[24 : 57] Specifically, this commandment forbids misrepresenting the facts in a court case. More broadly, it upholds the importance of truth speaking, of not deceiving or flattering one another.

But it's a picture of God's own utter truthfulness. Psalm 13 says, The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.

All that God is and says and does is utterly reliable, utterly true. There's not a speck of deceit in God.

And last, the tenth commandment. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. This commandment is really all about contentment, isn't it? Don't desire, don't want what belongs to someone else.

Longing and grasping out at it in your heart as if that is what will make your life whole or better.

Rather, be content. And is that not a picture of God who is utterly sufficient in himself?

[26 : 08] Have you considered, friends, that God has no lack and no need and no what we would call craving for something he doesn't have?

God doesn't create the world because he's lonely. God creates and redeems in an overflow of his sufficiency and fullness and love.

God is a God of wholeness and peace. But above all, God is a God of joy. God is a God of joy. It is impossible for God to covet. Because God is the fullness of joy in and of himself.

And so take a step back from the canvas. Look at those brush strokes all together. Authority and life. Faithfulness and generosity.

Truthfulness and joy. The Ten Commandments are a picture of the character and nature of God. And they're meant to be the means whereby we hold up that picture to one another and to the world.

[27 : 17] So it's not just about following rules. It's certainly not about earning God's salvation. It's about fulfilling the mission God's given us to display his glory.

But still, it can all still seem a little mad.

Can't it? Are we really to stay faithful in a marriage even when we've completely fallen out of love? And even if we've mutually agreed and consented to be open to seeing other people, what is the harm in that?

Are we really expected to be truthful all of the time? I mean, that can be quite costly, you know. I could lose a friendship.

I could lose a promotion. The music still isn't playing loud enough yet. We need to see more than just the point and the picture of the Ten Commandments.

[28 : 24] We have to see the end to really get it. So what is the end of the law? Well, I think to get there, let's start with that last commandment.

You shall not covet. You know, I think it's easy to tick through the commandments and feel as if we're doing pretty good. Have I murdered anyone today?

Nope. Have I committed adultery today? Also no. Have I stolen anything? No. Have I given false witness against my neighbor?

Also no. Hey, I'm doing pretty good. How about you? How about you? Pretty good. Last one.

How about coveting? Things get a little different here, don't they? Now we're talking about not just external actions and behaviors.

[29 : 24] We're talking about the desires of the heart. Have I ever wanted something someone else has? Their house?

Their job? Their reputation? Their physique? Their humor? Their intellect? Their kids? Their life?

Their life? Their life? It's very interesting. In Romans chapter 7, Paul quotes this commandment as the one that woke him up to the depth of what was really going on in his own heart.

And to the depth of the nature of sin. You see, friends, the law exposes us, doesn't it?

Yes, it sets before us a glorious calling. It invites us to bear God's image in the world. But when we get to the end, we are at the same time exposed as lawbreakers who need forgiveness.

[30 : 32] After all, the command not to murder, Jesus says, isn't just about murder. That's also about your heart too. Do you harbor hatred and bitterness towards others?

That's a breach of the sixth command. And the command not to commit adultery. That one also points to a deeper heart problem, Jesus says. Do you look lustfully at other people who aren't your spouse?

No, we might not be murderers or adulterers or thieves or perpetual liars, but our hearts still aren't right. And face to face with that tenth commandment, we see that we want and we want and we want and we covet and we covet and we covet and we covet.

And even if we get it, we're never satisfied. So what is the end of the law?

Is it merely exposure? Is it merely showing us that we're guilty failures in this great mission that God has given us? Is there any good news for lawbreakers who've taken God's mission and treated it poorly and gone to smash?

[31 : 50] In Matthew 5, in the same chapter where Jesus says that the sixth commandment about murder also applies to bitterness and anger, and the seventh commandment about adultery also applies to lust, in that same chapter Jesus says, do not think that I've come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. You see, Jesus doesn't relax any of God's commands.

In fact, he does just the opposite. He intensifies them. And yet, he also fulfills them. You see, there was only one human being in all of history who honored his father and mother his entire life. There was only one who never spoke a word from unjust anger, and never one, and only one who never looked at another person with lust in his heart, who never stole, who never lied, and who never coveted.

And that one human was the God-man, Jesus Christ, who didn't merely keep the law for his own sake, but did it for our sake, for his people's sake, for the sake of lawbreakers.

[33 : 17] And his obedience on our behalf, his persistence in the mission that God had given him, ultimately led him not to public acclaim and favor, but to the worst that these Ten Commandments picture.

His faithfulness to the mission of his father led him to scorn, and hatred, and arrest, and false accusation, to scourging, and to crucifixion.

You know, as we've been walking through the book of Exodus, it can sometimes seem like the Exodus from Egypt didn't seem so costly, did it? I mean, God just lifted his hand, as it were, and the plagues came, and the waters parted, and the manna appeared, and the mountains smoked with fire.

But looking at the cross, friends, do you see what it cost God to set you free from your sin, from your lawbreaking? In love, Jesus died under the law's curse so that you could come under the Father's blessing.

Jesus made a new covenant with us, and God provided in Christ, God supplied in Christ what he had demanded in Moses, righteousness.

[34 : 38] And on the third day, Jesus rose in power to show that the law had been satisfied, and to give a new status, and a new life to everyone who believes. So why do we keep the law?

Why do we participate in this madness? Because it's not madness, you see. Listen to the music of the gospel that's playing, that Christ has died for you to meet the law's demands, and to free you from the penalty of sin.

How could you not trust that same Jesus to lead you in the way of real freedom? How could we not take up our cross and follow such a one? You see, friends, at the end of the day, grace is the music, and these commands become the dance steps.

And yes, with each step, we realize afresh that our sins are great. But with each step, we remember that Christ is an even greater Savior. And so in obedience to God's commands, we aren't just displaying God's character.

We're showing how great and how worthy Jesus is. How do you show the world you love someone?

[36 : 01] Usually people do all sorts of costly and crazy things, don't they? They spray paint names on bridges. Ever wondered how they do that? Do they hang upside down? Are they really good at spray painting upside down?

Do they have a really big ladder in the middle of the night when no one's driving on the road?

People get tattoos on their arms. That's serious. I mean, when you're dating someone and you get a tattoo on your arm of that person's name, like that is, that's serious.

What if you break up? That's a lot of commitment. People buy lavish gifts. People do all sorts of crazy and costly things when you love someone.

Jesus says in the Gospel of John, if you love me, keep my commandments. Come follow me. It might be hard at times, yes, but trust me, the Lord says, this way of the cross is also the way of glory.

The glory of being my kingdom of priests, my image bearers, my new creation. Jesus is saying, come join the dance with me. And let's show this world what our God is like, what I'm like.

[37 : 17] Let's pray. Let's pause just a moment together and think through these commandments we've considered this morning and their call to love our neighbor as ourself.

And let's take a moment in the quiet of our hearts to confess to God that we've fallen so far short of the heart of these commands. Our Father, we thank you that you do show us what it means to live for you.

But more than that, you show us what you're like and you've given us a savior to forgive us and to equip us and empower us for being your people in the world. Oh Lord, would we run in the path of your commands because you have set our hearts free as the psalmist says.

Be with us this week, Lord. May we do that in the strength that you provide arm in arm with one another as your church. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well friends, as we've been saying the Ten Commandments are about displaying the glory of Christ, so why don't we stand together and let's sing and praise God for his greatness.