

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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John Crosby
Moses: The Ten Commandments | Exodus 19-33**

Sometimes after you have experienced loss you need to be reminded of that (referring to the song just sung in the service – “You’re Gonna Be OK” by Jenn Johnson, Jeremy Riddle, Sam Mosley), and some days it’s just something that never quite gets all the way to your heart. You may believe it in your mind, but in your heart you’re wondering if things will ever be okay again. This is one of those days in our community where we acknowledge that, and we want to say that we come here without easy answers, without a way to fix things, but we want to sit with the people who grieve and learn with the people who question, and reach out to one another with the small bits of God’s grace we have received. Let me pray for us.

Lord, this feels like the deep end of the pool. The water is high. We talk about life and death, yet this is when it matters the most—I pray that if You are going to speak to us, our ears would be unplugged and our hearts would be open. That it wouldn’t feel like religion but it would feel like You speaking to our hearts. Help us to hear. In Your great name. Amen.

As you came in through the Great Room, you may have seen on the wall up on the balcony level all of these images. They follow this series on Moses...the escape from Egypt and the plagues and the splitting of the Red Sea...and now we are in the fifth week of this series, and the image is of two tablets of stone, because it is not possible to talk about Moses without thinking of Moses as the law giver. Michelangelo represented him sitting on the seat of justice with the law under his arm. That was a popular Jewish view of Moses—the dispenser of the law. Jesus says in Matthew, “The scribes and Pharisees sit in the seat of Moses.” [Matthew 23:2] And the Ten Commandments survive into our day. They are often acknowledged; sometimes they are even fought over. We have had in our country a contest about whether they should be put near the courthouse or not, whether there should be one law for the country and one law for God’s people. But the fascinating thing about the Ten Commandments is that everybody knows about them, but nobody knows them. I wanted to give you a little example of what not knowing them might look like. This came from some of the kids, students, and adults in our Wednesday night community. It’s about a minute and a half long.

[Video shown of people being asked what they know about the Ten Commandments]

And that was the advanced class! I’m saying that because this was a group of people in a church that is half way through a series on Moses. If we had gone to the Galleria,

most people would only be able to name two of the Ten Commandments, and often would name wrong ones...like “God helps those who help themselves” or “love your neighbor.” Neither of those is in there folks. The best commandment keepers could get to four, and those almost always would be “Don’t steal,” “Don’t kill,” “Don’t commit adultery,” “Don’t lie.” Fewer than 10% would have any idea that the Ten Commandments came from Moses. That’s sort of been lost in our culture. Even when you try to teach the Ten Commandments, people always catch it through their own filter. A little boy is in a Sunday School class and the teacher is teaching the Ten Commandments and she says, “Now this one is really important. This is the fifth commandment and it’s the first one with a promise. It is ‘Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land.’ Now that means that we should honor our moms and our dads. What would the commandment be to honor your brother and sister?” And the little boy says, “Thou shall not kill!”

So what I would like us to do remedially is to go through the Ten Commandments. I know you could do this without them appearing on the screen, but we will show them just to help your neighbor who doesn’t know them as well. The Ten Commandments are given twice, right? They are written down in Exodus chapter 20 and in Deuteronomy 5—they’re the same list but they are given twice. Remember why? Moses goes up and gets them, he comes down and people are already messing up. He breaks them. He goes back up and gets 2.0...same thing. I will start, and why don’t you respond with the parts in the bold print. The Ten Commandments:

² And God spoke all these words: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

³ **“You shall have no other gods before me.**

⁴ “You will not make for yourself a false image of God...

⁷ **“You will not misuse the name of the Lord your God...**

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

¹² **“Honor your father and your mother...**

¹³ “You will not murder.

¹⁴ **“You will not commit adultery.**

¹⁵ “You will not steal.

¹⁶ **“You will not lie.**

¹⁷ “You will not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor...

[Exodus 20:1-17]

Now I find it helpful to see them all in one place, so we put them right here. Look at the list; look at the whole list. Think of the one that you most often forget. Think of the one that you most often *want* to forget.

This is an interesting day for us to come to this part of the story of Moses—the Ten Commandments—because this is the month where we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation. Five hundred years ago, Luther and a bunch of other people tried to reclaim what they felt was the original message of the early church, and it ended up being a split. This week in the church year is also when we celebrate three special feast days. The common name for the first one is Halloween—which was last Tuesday. Halloween is called All Hallows Eve and it was a feast that was designed so that followers of Jesus would no longer fear all the spirits that rose from the dead. It was followed the next day, Wednesday, by celebrating the feast of All Saints Day, giving reassurance to those believers who had lost people they loved that the saints were in heaven...all the saints. And then Thursday in the Christian Church is called All Souls Day to remind everybody here that each of you are eternal beings now. That each of us has an eternal soul and an eternal destiny. So, the Protestant Reformation, five hundred years ago...if it were condensed into one sentence, it would probably be something like: *It doesn't matter what the priest says; it doesn't matter what the Pope says. The Bible says that you are saved by grace alone, by faith. Not by working hard so that anybody can boast.* And ever since, Protestant Christians and now Catholic Christians argue that salvation is by grace, through faith alone. But you come in here all the time, right? And you hear pastors argue that if a person isn't at least trying, if they're not consistently keeping the law of God, then are they really Christians? If you don't have any desire to do what God wants, are you really a Christian? They say that keeping the law is sort of a proof of salvation by grace, and that real Christians obey the law, or the laws, at least most of the time. So on a day when we wonder about the people that have died, where does that leave us? The Bible is filled with "shalls"...thou shall, thou shall, thou shall not. But the Bible also talks an awful lot about this idea of grace. Moses came down with the law...what's the purpose of the law?

Well now, some people would say that they know what the law is all about because they have seen that great theologian in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Anybody see *Pirates of the Caribbean*? Remember the first *Pirates of the Caribbean*...the young woman is kidnapped by the pirates and she is being tortured and forced to give up a secret, and the pirate says, "It's in the code. If you tell the truth, the pirate code says I can't kill you." She tells the truth and the pirate says, "Great. Kill her!" And she says, "What are you doing? You just told me it's in the pirate code." And the pirate says, "Oh, they're more like guidelines." That's the way a lot of people look at the law. They are guidelines that make sense out of life. They are guidelines that help our society function together. They are standards of the day, and when the day changes, maybe the guidelines should change, and so we rationalize...*this used to be wrong, but this isn't really a lie*... And we

make ourselves feel better by thinking that we follow the guidelines better than other people do. I don't think the Ten Commandments are multiple choice; I don't think they are guidelines. Some people would say that laws are guidelines, other people would say that the law is a gateway—that Moses came down with the Ten Commandments and that they are the gate that we have to go through to get to God. It's something that becomes a boundary marker—you go through the commandments to get to God. They are sort of the minimum entrance requirements. And I'm sitting here thinking *well, I went to school for about 27 years. Is seven out of ten passing or not? And the wrong answers...are they weighted good or bad?* And the idea that if you get through the gateway, what happens to all those who got six out of ten and don't get through the gateway? I think the Ten Commandments are crucial but I don't think they are the gateway to get into heaven. So if they aren't guidelines and they aren't gateways, what are they? A word that Laura and I have been using lately is that the law itself is a guardrail. The laws are given by God—they aren't optional—and they are there to protect us, the way that you would protect someone you love by saying *do not touch the stove, do not walk out into traffic*. And they also are there to direct us to become a certain kind of person—a person that doesn't lie, a person that doesn't steal, a person that doesn't covet—a person who is content. They protect and they direct. They keep us from danger. And they are a template; they give a picture of what a life that would please God would look like. So, are you saved by grace or are you saved by living that kind of life through the Ten Commandments?

I was deeply affected this week by reading something Andy Stanley wrote about the commandments. Andy said this: "The problem is, with the Ten Commandments, nobody ever remembers the first four. Everybody jumps straight to the 'thou shall nots' and that is so sad because it produces a myth about God that obedience gets you in and disobedience keeps you out. We forget all the commands about how we are to love God and we get right to the 'thou shall nots' and we believe that God's approval is reserved for people who follow the rules. But, if you look at the whole story, nothing could be further from the truth." Instead, I believe that God's rules are very important because God's rules show God's values. They show what's important to God. They show what God looks like. You want to know what somebody is like, look at what they value.

So, what have the Jews seen so far? They've been saved from slavery, they've seen the miracles, they go across the Red Sea, they see all the Egyptians get wiped out, they are still breathing hard, they come to the edge of the mountain...what do they know about God? Well, they know that this God is more powerful than the Egyptian gods, but *what will this God be like going forward? Can we trust this God?* Then, Moses comes down with the first words from God that show his nature. See, the Egyptian gods, like the Greek gods later, are capricious and often cruel. What does this show about the God of Abraham? The Ten Commandments are there to show the Israelites that this God is not only powerful, this God is good. Not just good, as in a good person, but there

is good and there is evil, and this God is on the side of the good. Any of you that have read C.S. Lewis' Narnia Chronicles to your kids probably remember in the very first one that this young woman is terrified of meeting the lion who is the Christ figure, the God figure, in Narnia. She is terrified to meet the lion and she turns to Mr. Beaver and she says, "What will he do? Will he eat me? Is he a tame lion?" And the beaver laughs and says, "No. He's not tame at all, but he is good. You can count on him being good." That's the first thing that the commandments are for—they not only show that God can be trusted and that God is powerful, but God is on the side of good.

Now, the key to the sermon is found right before the Ten Commandments. Look at this—it's verse two of Exodus 20. If you want to understand the character of God, you have heard that the commandments show that He is good, but verse two shows something else.

² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

I am the Lord **your** God. I am not God, I am not the God above all gods, I am the Lord **your** God. It's a huge word. For God to say to Moses and to the people of Israel, I am your God declares that God has a relationship with Israel. They are in some ways loved by God specially. Now the Israelites were slaves, they were nobodies. They had nothing to offer. They didn't even know how to please God. But when He says, "I am the Lord your God" it shows that God is already saying—out in the wilderness to people far from home and far from the Promised Land—*You're in. You made it. You're My people.* That's how you understand the Ten Commandments...that the first thing that God says to you is, *I am your God. You can count on Me. I am your God. I'll save you again. I am your God and I know everything wrong that you have done and I love you. I am your God.* Let that sink in. First comes the relationship with God, and then come the family rules. Family rules are important; they show the values of God. It's important. Do not take seconds before everybody gets something to eat. That's a good house rule that shows what this house is like. God starts the relationship before God gives the rules. And then God gives house rules. God knows something that parents learn. You know, parents learn when they have kids that rules without a relationship leads to rebellion. Rules without relationship leads to rebellion. *If I don't know why, if I don't know that you love me, I'm not going to do it—at least as long as I'm not afraid of you.* God's law never establishes a relationship; God's laws are meant to confirm a relationship. God's laws express love, even when it doesn't feel like it. God loves you when He gives you a law.

Sometimes an analogy helps. How many of you have pets? We didn't have many pets; I had none growing up and it wasn't until I was a father of two that we had our first dog, Sally. [Shows picture] This is Sally in a more typical moment. [Shows picture with Sally's head stuck in a box of Milk Bone treats] So this is where we start: when did we take Sally home and train her inside our yard? Was it before she became ours or was it after

she became ours? It was after. Sally did not become ours just by sitting inside our fence; she is inside the fence because we already love her as our pet. She became our dog when we purchased her. God does not throw fences around you, does not put laws around you to make you His. God gives us fences to show that we already belong to Him and we are safe. Now from time to time, Sally would take off to visit neighbors, and when that happened I would almost always get a call and never once in the thirteen years we had her, never once did I try to say *Oh no, that can't be our dog. No, our dog is in our back yard. If the dog is not in our back yard, then it's not our dog. Our dog obeys all the rules.* No. She was our dog whether she was in the back yard or she was lost. Second rule: obedience does not determine relationship. Our daughters were our daughters whether they were getting A's in school or breaking our hearts. They were still ours. God loves you on your best day and on your worst day. In the same way our family chose to purchase Sally, God chose to purchase you. God purchased us from being separated from Him by sin through the sacrifice of Jesus. Sally didn't earn her way into our back yard; you and I don't earn our way into God's back yard. We come in by faith. We accept God's love and forgiveness, and only then—only when we are safe in the back yard—does God start to talk to us about the family rules, the house rules. *Don't steal from people, it hurts them. Don't lie, then I can't trust you. I want you to learn to be content and not covet what other people have.* Whether it's a dog loved by owners or people who are bought by God, love is at the core.

As you learn these Ten Commandments, and I hope you will, remember that what was true of Israel is true of you. These are divinely inspired instructions. They are not multiple choice. They are not advice. They are hard wired into the laws of the universe. They are not guidelines. The Ten Commandments are not a gateway to make God love you; they are not how you get in. The Ten Commandments are guardrails to protect you and direct you to help you become the kind of person that God already sees you being, and He loves you whether you are doing well or poorly.

Now, the problem for the Jews was they took these Ten Commandments and said well, if the Ten Commandments are good, then twenty commandments are better. And the book of Deuteronomy turns into eighty-five laws, and you add in the book of Leviticus and it's one hundred and seventy-five laws...we must be doubly loved by God. And by the time Jesus is born, the Jews have created six hundred and twenty-nine different laws that govern the day, from sunrise to sunset. And the people who obeyed eleven of them looked down on the people that obeyed only four of them. And they came to Jesus and they said *what's up?* And Jesus was asked, *"All these laws...what is the most important law? What do I have to get right to make sure that I get in?"* Remember what Jesus said? *Just one counts: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, strength and mind. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.* All the

laws, all the prophets revolve around these two. It's not the number of laws that we keep, it's the love we receive and the love we share.

Often people who have lost kids or parents or relatives ask me...*is Billy in heaven?* Well, I don't know. I know God is a lot more merciful than anyone on this planet, and I know that God wants all His children to come and be with Him. But what I know most of all is that when Jesus came to earth, He went to the ends of the earth to look for the people farthest from Him and He brought them home.

We're going to spend about three minutes looking at the pictures of those in our community who have died this year because we want you to grieve with those who grieve; we want you to have hope with the people clinging to hope. But as you look at them, think of them coming around this table. Think of them coming around this banquet table, set not here but in heaven. And Jesus is not saying *did you get a four or a nine on the test?* Jesus is saying to His prodigal daughters and His prodigal sons, "You're home at last. Dinner is served."

Let us watch. [Pictures shown]

Lord Jesus, I thank You for each one of those faces, and for all those that we know that weren't up there that we grieve. I ask You to reassure us that Your love reached out to them; that You, our savior, came to rescue all who would turn to You. That we didn't have to be good enough, we just had to turn to You and ask to be loved. Reassure us that they are at a table a lot better than this. When they walked through the door the crowds of angels erupted in applause and You—the king—came and brought them to the banquet feast. You said to them, "This is my body, broken for you. This wine is the blood that forgave your sins. Eat and drink." And they see Him face to face and they are made whole, and there is great joy.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.