

Exodus Chapter 20 (The 10 Commandments) - John Karmelich

It is time for one of the most important passages in the bible, "The 10 Commandments". We all know of them but most of us can't recite them in order off the top of our head. That's not a requirement to get in heaven! Still there are a lot of good questions to ponder as we study them, so with no further delay, let's get at "The Big 10":

If God would speak to us audibly what's the first thing He'd want to tell us? As I love to state, "God is God" meaning He can speak to us wherever, however and by what method that He chooses. No one is able to force God to speak just because we want to. In this text we get God speaking to all the Israelites "The 10 Commandments" that should be titled "The Ten Statements". I'll get into all the specifics in a bit. Before I do that, let's consider where and why He gave this message and what it means to us!

Consider that God gave the Commandments after the Israelites left Egypt. It wasn't like God said, "I'm about to rescue you from Egypt, so pay attention to Me!" The point is God reaches out to us after He's gotten our attention. The next thing to notice is God gave them these commandments effectively in the middle of "nowhere" as opposed to when they actually got to Israel. That way none of the 12 tribes can claim they're the most important as God talked audibly to us in "our territory"! The other implied thing we get is what God wants to say is for everyone (who wants to separate their lives for God). The point is the "10" isn't just for them!

To state another obvious fact: Christians are only saved because we believe Jesus is God. It is based on the idea that God's perfect and to be with Him for eternity requires being 100% forgiven for every time we've sinned. That means salvation requires I never sin once or I can accept that God Himself paid the price for my sins. If that's true how do these "10 Statements" apply to us? The issue isn't salvation it is about being a good witness for Jesus! It should be our desire to live as He desires as that's the best way to live life. We must realize God didn't create the world as a place for us to say, "Hey everyone, I made this for you, I'll let you be and don't mess it up!" We were created to glorify God with our lives. We're in effect a "bridal gift" for Him so He can express His love upon us for all of eternity. Whether we like it or not that's God's game plan, so we should just accept and use our lives for His glory.

All of that leads me the 10 Commandments (or suggestions, you get the idea) itself. As we go through them, ponder what God requires of us why He stated all of these audibly so all of those Israelites could hear God. The reason God doesn't do that audibly to all generations is because those words have past-down for us to hear.

One more small thing before I begin. Judaism counts the 10 slightly differently than Christians do. It's the exact same wording, just divided differently between religions. Because all that God wants to state is stated here, in effect it's a non-issue to me as it's about where to divide words, and that's that!

OK enough stalling, let's get to them. The first thing God says audibly to all the Israelites is to tell them He is the entity that rescued them from slavery. He didn't say "I'm the one who created everything that you touch, see or is beyond your comprehension" even though that is true. By starting with the fact He states that He rescued them from slavery is a reminder that God not only exists, but cares for us! We're only alive because God provided well, air, gravity, a watering system (rain, etc.) so life can exist. Over and above the fact the Israelites were rescued from being slaves this is proof He cares about His own!

But John, we weren't born slaves. Why should we care? I learned a long time ago that everyone has a god that they worship. Find out where people spend their spare time and their money and you find the god they worship. To turn from the world to serve the true and living God is the first step all of us take on the road to salvation. In that sense, we were all rescued from slavery, from whatever we considered to be important in life outside of God Himself!

That reminder logically leads to the second commandment to not worship any other god. Obviously we don't bow down to statues (I'm preaching to the choir here), but anything we put in front of God can be another God. I'm not anti-hobby. I'm just saying if God says to us "That thing is more important to you than Me so cut it out!" This is the first command that comes with both a promise and a warning. What it says in effect is to those who turn from me, it has a negative impact on your family as well! Ask any drug addict how it affects their families as an obvious example. At the same time, God promises that if we use our lives for His glory, it will have a positive effect on our families and benefit them as well!

Then we get the command to not take God's name in vain. This is not to say, "God, I loved this meal or something else we enjoy!" That's not a sin! Doing evil in God's name is the sin! Treating His name as one that doesn't deserve respect is the sin. Lots of examples, but you get the idea.

Next is the command to take one day off out of seven to rest. It doesn't mean to sleep in. It means that we're to use one day a week to focus on God. That would include a family meal with discussing what's in the bible as an example. This is the only commandment not stated in the New Testament. As I said, we're not more or less saved by keeping this commandment. God wants us to use our lives as a witness for Him. Not being overly obsessed with work and taking time to focus on God is a great way for us to focus upon Him.

The first command God gives in our relationship with other people is to honor our parents. It's amazing that comes before murder and stealing! It gives us an indication how important God considers we have a good family relationship! Notice that command doesn't require us to love our parents, it is just about honoring them as our parents! It refers to showing them respect and staying in touch if possible.

The next few commands are more obvious. You shall not murder, not commit adultery, don't steal and don't lie. If you think about it stealing covers all of these commandments! If you cheat on your spouse, you're stealing their relationship. Adultery and idol worship are considered to be synonyms because in both cases one is turning from the one we're committed to! As to lying it is a tough topic. For example, if it's a war situation and you're hiding spies, I think it's ok to lie that you haven't seen them. The main issue here has to do with lying in a courtroom type setting. It's to say that we are trustworthy when we give our word. In the Jewish court system, if we lie while giving testimony the person who gives false testimony has to serve that punishment! Bottom line it's about treating all people with respect.

The final comment is about "desiring" what is not ours. It's not to say wow, my neighbor got a new car or something like that. It's to desire with the thought that one would consider stealing because we want it so badly! I've always argued God isn't anti-success. If God was pro-socialist, why would stealing be a crime? Desiring is a sin if we consider stealing something that doesn't belong to us because we want it so badly. I hope that helps understand that final commandment (of the "Big Ten").

Remember the main issue here is being a good witness for God. I'd argue the only unforgivable sin (by implication #1 of the 10) is to deny Jesus is God with one's life. If we steal or cheat on our spouse there are consequences from that and we may suffer because of sin, but it's not unforgivable (if we turn from it) as far as the eternal aspect. I feel bad for those who argue they live by the 10 Commandments. That

means if one break one of them just once, one's a sinner and guilty before God. I'd rather live by saying God Himself paid for all my sins and I'm guilty as charged! Doesn't mean we're free to sin! Again the issue is being a good witness for God. When we mess up, we confess the sin, and turn from it. OK that a brief summary of the "Big Ten" in a little over two pages. As always, I'm grateful you read this.

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John