

JESUS AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Exodus 20:1-17

February 26, 2023

The Apostle Paul tells us this in **Galatians 3:23-25** concerning the law of Moses – the Ten Commandments, *“Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we may be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”* The law was never given to the Israelites to bring them salvation, but to help them to live in the Promised Land, to enjoy living in the land they were about to enter, helping them to live in peace and harmony with God and with each other. The law showed the people how far they had fallen in sinfulness, but it didn’t solve the problem of sin, it was only meant to point them to a coming deliverer. The law was a mirror into their sinful heart, to show them how helpless and profoundly sinful they are without God’s intervention. It’s the same for us today, unless we know how big our debt is, we have no idea how great Christ’s payment was on the cross. WE need to know our fallenness before we can know Christ as His forgiveness and grace!

Considering **Galatians 3:23-25** – since Jesus has come the question is this, *“Are the Ten Commandments still relevant to us today?”* To answer that question, we need to go back to the book of Exodus to determine why the law was given in the first place. God’s chosen people, Israel, were living in Canaan when a severe famine took place, so God sent them (the descendants of Abraham, 70 in total) to live in Egypt, so they would grow to become a great nation, as promised to Abraham. We are told they were exceedingly fruitful and multiplied greatly during those years they lived in Egypt, becoming such a threat to Pharaoh, that he enslaved them to become his workforce in making bricks out of mud and straw, building his great cities. Pharaoh made their lives bitter with harsh labour, working them ruthlessly, so the Israelites groaned and began crying out to God. God heard their cries and called a reluctant Moses to return to Egypt where he was raised by Pharaoh’s daughter and educated in the ways of the Egyptians until he fled at age 40 to Midian where he lived another 40 years until he was called by God to become their deliverer. After ten devastating plagues, Pharaoh finally lets the people go, but then changes his mind once again and ends up pursuing the Israelites with his entire army. Trapped at the Red Sea, God miraculously pushes the waters back, creating a dry highway for Israel to escape, while drowning Pharaoh’s entire

army. Safe-and-sound on the other side, Israel is now on their way to the Promised Land, but there was still a huge issue that God had to deal with. His people were not ready to enter the Promised Land!

God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, but now God had the greater challenge of taking Egypt out of the Israelites. After living in that ungodly nation for about four hundred years, God's people had become contaminated and corrupted by the Egyptian's worldly ways and hundreds of gods, so to become the holy people that He called them to be, He needed to take that ungodly world out of them. To begin that process, God called Moses to lead the people to a meeting place, the same meeting place where Moses met God earlier at a burning bush. God's holy mountain, Mt Sinai, is where God instructed Moses to bring the Israelites so they could also meet with their God and have a personal encounter with the God who brought them out of Egypt with His mighty hand. When God first spoke to Moses at the burning bush, He gave him these instructions, ***"I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain"*** (Exodus 3:12).

From the time that God first met with Moses at this holy mountain to receive his marching orders, God intended for His people to also meet their God in a holy encounter that they would never forget and receive their marching orders as well!

In Egypt, God's tenth and final plague, was the death of the firstborn of every family in Egypt, but God in His mercy provided a way of escape through the shed blood of an innocent lamb for all those who would put their hope and trust in the Lord, whether Israelite or Egyptian, because God loved the Egyptians just as much as He loved the Israelites. By taking some of the blood of a lamb and putting it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their homes, where they were to eat the roasted lambs that night, they would be protected. This was called the Lord's Passover. On that night the Lord would pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn that wasn't protected by the lamb's blood, as judgment on all the gods of Egypt but would pass over those who had placed blood on their doorframes.

"When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframes and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down" (Exodus 12:23).

And God's people were to remember God's saving act and celebrate it every year on the anniversary of that event. As Israel celebrated the feast of Passover every

year, they were reminded of what God had done for them in the past, plus helped them to understand what God had planned for them in the future. The Old Testament tells us God gave His people seven feasts or festivals they were to celebrate every year, and all seven of those Jewish feasts were “*rehearsals*” or “*appointed times*” for what God was planning for the future redemption of His people, they all point to the Messiah, both to His first and second coming. When Jesus walked this earth, as an observant Jew, He kept all seven feasts!

The Bible teaches that the feasts were shadows of things to come. The feasts were God’s way of teaching His people about Himself and His plan for salvation. A clear example of this is in the Feast of the Passover. When Jesus celebrated the Passover on the night He was betrayed, He was telling His disciples that this meal was now being fulfilled, it was all about Him, pointing to His sacrificial death as the Lamb of God. In that way, the original lamb sacrificed in Egypt at that first Passover was a “*rehearsal*” to prepare Israel for their true sacrificial Lamb, who was Christ. The Apostle Paul says it clearly in **Colossians 2:16-17**, “***Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to any religious festivals, a New Moon celebration or Sabbath day. These are a shadow of things to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.***” Jesus fulfilled the Passover festival at the cross, when He died at the exact same time as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple on that Good Friday. The four Spring Jewish holidays – Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Pentecost were all fulfilled by Christ at His first coming. The three remaining Fall Jewish Holidays – Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles – all point to the events surrounding Christ’s second coming. And because Jesus fulfilled the first four festivals on their actual days, then Jesus will fulfill the last three on their actual days as well!

At that first Passover, God physically redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage, but that wasn’t the end of God’s plan to bring His people out of bondage. God’s plan was for Israel to also meet Him at Mt Sinai, fifty days after crossing the Red Sea, where they would receive the Ten Commandments. Many Christians think of Pentecost as a New Testament holiday, as the day God birth the church according to **Acts 2**. But Pentecost is in fact an Old Testament Jewish holiday that was first celebrated fifty days after leaving Egypt. Pentecost is one of the Jewish annual pilgrim feasts, when the people would travel from all over the places they were dispersed after their exile and gather together every year in Jerusalem to celebrate the giving of the Mosaic law at Mt Sinai.

The book of Acts tells us that following Jesus resurrection, He appeared to His followers over a period of forty days instructing them on the Kingdom of God, and then the time came for Jesus to return to His heavenly Father. After instructing His followers to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives. The Apostles returned to the Upper Room in Jerusalem and spent their time in prayer for the next ten days, and then as the Jews from all over the known world were celebrating the Feast of Pentecost. God once again showed up in a personal way. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon those 120 gathered together took place exactly as God had planned, on the very day God gave Moses the Torah at the foot of Mt Sinai, about thirty-five hundred years earlier!

Today, we usually skim over the awe and power of that moment when God descended on Mt Sinai – **Exodus 19:16-20** tells us what happened that day. It's said that God spoke to the people from Mt Sinai in an audible voice, according to the Midrash (a rabbinic commentary on the Scriptures) by Rabbi Moshe Weissman. In his commentary on the very first Feast of Pentecost he writes this: *"In the occasion of the giving of the Torah, the children of Israel not only heard the Lord's voice but actually saw the sound waves as they emerged from the Lord's mouth. They visualized them as a fiery substance. Each commandment that left the Lord's mouth travelled around the entire camp and then to each Jew individually, asking him, 'Do you accept upon yourself this commandment with all the Jewish law pertaining to it?' Every Jew answered, 'Yes' after each commandment.' Finally, the fiery substance which they saw engraved itself on the tablets."* Every person at Mt. Sinai had a personal encounter with the God who brought them out of Egypt!

Here's what God said to the people that day from Mt Sinai – **Exodus 20:1-17**.

After 50 days in the desert, the children of Israel arrived at Mt Sinai. They desperately needed healing after centuries of abuse in Egypt. They were not only physically broken, but also spiritually broken. They not only needed to rebuild their relationship with God, but also needed to renew their relationship with one another. They were physically broken by the abuse of the taskmasters and the relentless severity of the hard back-breaking 24/7 workload. And then, they were also spiritually broken by the Egyptians' worship of idols. When the enslaved people of Israel arrived at Mt Sinai, they had broken bodies, minds, hearts, and spirits, and as a result of all of this baggage they were still carrying, they were grumbling and complaining to Moses and Aaron, wanting to return back to Egypt.

They were in a state of chaos and confusion as many refugees today would be fleeing war, uncertain of their future, uncertain where their next meal would come from, and where they would lay their head that night to sleep. Can you imagine millions of frightened men and women who left their homes and way of life to follow a leader they hardly knew, to go to a place they had never been. To bring healing to these distraught people, God, in His great compassion, needed to show His broken people how to love Him and love each other. How to live in peace and harmony with God and each other!

After the Ten Commandments were spoken by God to the people, He wrote them on two tablets and gave them to Moses. Jewish tradition tells us that on the first tablet were written the first four commandments, which relate to the relationship between God and mankind. And on the second tablet were written the other six commandments which relate to the relationship we have with each other. One day Jesus was asked by a Torah scholar, an expert of the law this question: ***“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ‘This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second one is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’”*** (Matthew 22:36-39). Jesus was pointing to and summarizing these Ten Commandments, telling this Torah scholar that love is the ultimate goal of all of God’s commandments. Because God is love, the only way to fulfill the spirit of the Ten Commandments is to live and love like Jesus. The power of the two tablets is love – love of God and love of others!

After spending 40 days with the Lord, Moses comes down Mt Sinai with the two tablets, and we’re told in **Exodus 32:19** that he found Israel committing adultery by worshipping a golden calf. The people had already forgotten God’s words to them, already breaking the commandments by worshipping a golden calf – ***“When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.”*** Can you imagine the anger and despair Moses felt at that moment? He’d been through so much already, putting up with all of that grumbling and complaining, and he had sacrificed so much, but the foolishness of these rebellious people must have shattered his hopeful outlook, but Moses still pleads with God that He would show these people mercy. God relents and surprisingly says to Moses, ***“Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke”*** (Exodus 34:1). This second set of tablets tells us that God was giving Israel a

second chance. God was offering them a divine do-over. Reminding them that they serve a God of second chances!

The Bible tells us that the second set of the Ten Commandments was placed in the Ark of the Covenant with a jar of manna and Aaron's staff that budded. But what happened to the first set of stone tablets that were broken? Jewish tradition tells us that the broken pieces of the first set were also placed in the ark, so that every time the ark of the covenant travelled with the people, they could hear the rumbling of the broken pieces. This was a reminder that wholeness can come through brokenness. Reminding them that brokenness, that painful experience of failure, when given to the Lord, can make us better, not bitter. The broken first tablet and the second replacement tablet reminds us that we are not to let brokenness defeat us, because the way to wholeness is often through brokenness, and we come to Jesus through brokenness!

According to Rabbi Jason Sobel in his book *"Mysteries of the Messiah"* the two sets of tablets symbolically point to the Messiah. The first set that was broken point to the first coming of the Messiah, who ended up being thrown down upon a cross and smashed like the first stone tablets, due to the sins of the people. The Messiah's body was broken so that we might experience the forgiveness of sin and receive a divine do-over. And Jesus was also broken like the unleavened bread at the Passover meal, so we might be made whole. The smashed and shattered tablets also point to the world in which we live that is in pieces, waiting for the Lord's return. On that first Pentecost at Mt Sinai, Israel's idolatry by worshipping the golden calf, brought God's judgment, God stuck the people with a plague and three thousand died that day in the desert, never receiving God's promise. Then, let's look at the contrast we find in **Acts 2:41**. At that Pentecost, the birth of the church, **"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."** With Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, He fulfilled the law. So, on that day, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, when the Jewish nation gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the giving of the law, three thousand were saved. Reminding us that the giving of the law brings death; however, the coming of the Holy Spirit brings life, eternal life. Reminding us that Jesus' brokenness leads to life, to abundant life, not death and judgment!

The broken tablet points to our brokenness, broken dreams, broken promises, and brokenness due to health issues, family issues, and financial issues. The broken

tablet calls us to pick up the broken pieces of our lives and give them to Jesus, for He is in the business of making the broken whole and turning brokenness to blessing. We serve a God of second chances, do-overs. And then, the second set of tablets points to Jesus' second coming, when He returns as the Lion of Judah, who will cause all idolatry like the sin of the golden calf incident to cease, bringing salvation and healing to this broken world, ushering in the Messianic Kingdom. That's our hope, a restored creation that was broken by sin, restored and made new, like the new stone tablets!

Like for these people leaving Egypt, far from being a burden to rob us of our joy, the Ten Commandments were meant by God to be words of life – a guidepost and guardrail to help us experience the goodness of life that God intended for us. The Ten Commandments are very rarely displayed anymore, and very few believers can name them. But it's not the public display of the Ten Commandments that is important to God. What's important to God is that these commandments would be inscribed on our hearts, understood with our minds, and lived out in our daily lives. That's what God said through Jeremiah the prophet, ***"The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah...I will put the law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people"*** (Jeremiah 31:31, 33).

Now to answer the question that I posed at the beginning of the message, *"Are the Ten Commandments still relevant to us today?"* I began this message with **Galatians 3:23-25**, where the Apostle Paul tells us that the law was our guardian until Christ came. Like our parents looked after us when we were small children, not old enough to make our own decisions was the purpose of the law, it was our guardian. Once we come to accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour we are no longer under the guardian of the law. Paul tells us in **Galatians 3:25**, ***"Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."*** For the Christian that means that the law has achieved its purpose in bringing us to Christ, showing us that we are broken and can't fix ourselves!

So, does that mean that we can now forget about the Ten Commandments and discard them? Absolutely not (as Paul would say)! The truth of the Gospel message means we no longer obey the law out of fear, but now that our hearts are filled with thankfulness and gratitude, we have this desire to please Jesus and be like Him, like our Saviour – and the way we do that is through obeying the law. For believers, law and grace work together, and now the law points us to see Christ

as He really is: our Saviour, the One who obeyed the law on our behalf when we could not keep the law, and died in our place, taking upon Himself the wrath of God upon sin, so that we might receive the promised blessing of eternal life. The law allows us to love Jesus and love each other!