

I Am the LORD Who Brought You Out of Slavery

Exodus 20:1-17 (NIV84)

¹ And God spoke all these words: ² "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 shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷ "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. ⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ¹² "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³ "You shall not murder. ¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ "You shall not steal. ¹⁶ "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. ¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

The mountain was covered in a black storm cloud. Lighting flashed all around and thunder shook the ground. A voice came from the cloud summoning Moses to the top while telling the rest of people not to approach. The voice then spoke these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (verse 2)

This is the LORD, the one who decimated Egypt with ten plagues, who plunged Pharaoh's chariot army into the waters of the Red Sea. He is a powerful God, but he is our God. He is the LORD, our Savior, our deliverer, who brought us out of the wretched confines of slavery. The terror begins to subside. Instead, curiosity is peaked. What does our LORD have to say to us?

We know the Ten Commandments. In fact, most people in this world have at least heard of these particular commands from God. Some see these words as nothing more than a moral code. Others look at the Ten Commandments as the key to unlocking eternal life, that if I can just do these, then I will get to go to heaven. Then there is how God wants us to view and use the Ten Commandments.

The very first thing that the LORD says sets the tone for how we view and use the Ten Commandments. God does not immediately jump in listing commandment after commandment. No, the first thing he says is a description of him, a reminder of what he has already done for the Israelites. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (verse 2) People descended from Israel, I am your deliverer. I rescued you, saved you, from a life of slavery.

God has brought not just the Israelites out of a land of slavery, but us as well. We talked about it in our second lesson today from Romans chapter 8. As we are born into this world with a sinful nature, we are held captive to that nature. "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." (Romans 8:7) Because we are sinners, people who have not perfectly obeyed God's Ten Commandments, we are controlled by our sinful nature. It does whatever it wants to do regardless of how many rules or laws God puts in front of us.

But then God changed our situation. "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." (Romans 8:2-3) Jesus as true God and true Man met the full righteous requirements of the law, the Ten Commandments, for us. Because he offered up himself and kept every single one of the commandments throughout his whole life, he freed us from the law of sin. We are no longer controlled by the sinful nature, but by the Holy Spirit. God began to dwell in us when he brought us to believe in him, whether by hearing this sweet message of Jesus' sacrifice and perfection given in our place or through that same message given in the holy waters of baptism which washed us clean from all sins. We no longer belong to sin. The LORD brought us out of the slavery to sin. He released us from the chains of sin which wanted to drag us down to hell. The LORD has freed us.

But now what? Probably the most famous line that JFK ever uttered was, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." God basically said the same thing as he introduced the Ten Commandments. He told us first what he had

done for his people – he freed them and brought them out from the land of slavery. Knowing that God has done that for us as well when it comes to sin, the Ten Commandments are an opportunity to show our thankfulness to our LORD who freed us.

“You shall have no other gods before me.” (verse 3) The LORD gave up his one and only Son that you and I could be freed from the slavery of sin. He wants us to serve him as our only God and no one else. We can show our appreciation to God by making him a priority in our lives, to choose him first and foremost no matter how many other pressing needs come into our lives. We honor God when we make him first in all that we do.

“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.” (verse 7) So many, including ourselves, tend to cast God’s name out like a candy wrapper into a garbage can. We use his name as an exclamation point more than invoking the name of the mighty Creator. God has given us his name so that we can praise him, that we can tell people exactly who it is that has saved me from the slavery of sin. It is the LORD, the God of the Bible, the one who keeps his promises, who rescues me in every trouble. He has given me his name so that I can call upon him in the day of trouble, and he answers me. This is how we can properly use his powerful name.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” (verse 8) The Sabbath literally means “rest.” The Israelites were meant to take one day of rest every week - rest not just in the physical sense, but rest also in the spiritual sense. This was the day set aside for people to gather around and hear God’s Word, to meditate on it, and have God give them spiritual rest knowing that he had rescued them from physical and spiritual slavery. For us, honoring the Sabbath is not about stopping all work on a Saturday like the Israelites did, or just checking off attendance at church as if it’s on our to-do list. Instead, it’s about being in the Word of God, hearing about all the marvelous things that he has done for us to give us rest right now in the way of the forgiveness of our sins, and rest as we think about our eternity secured for us by Jesus. When we worship God, we can leave the chains of sin at the door because Jesus has paid for our sins. We are at peace with God. We can worship at home with daily devotions, here at church, anywhere we meditate on what he has done for us.

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” (verse 12) Whether you are young or old, God wants you to show honor to your parents. When we show them honor and respect, we are at the same time showing honor and respect to our heavenly Father. He gave us our parents. They are his representatives on this earth for us. In how we treat our parents, we can bring honor to God.

“You shall not murder.” (verse 13) This is not just referring to the action of viciously taking a life. God tells us that anyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer. This commandment is an opportunity for us to let go of our anger, to not hold it against people, just as God himself let go of his anger after he punished Jesus for our sins. Instead of hate, I can practice forgiveness with the people around me. I can help them, be a friend to them.

“You shall not commit adultery.” (verse 14) Again, this is not just a command that spouses should keep their hands to themselves and don’t commit the physical act of adultery, but God goes further in talking about the attitude of our hearts. If anyone looks at someone lustfully, they have already committed adultery in their hearts, he says. For us, being freed from the slavery of sin, we can help protect this God-given gift of marriage for all people, that we would honor the gift of marriage and keep it pure in how we talk about sex, how we look at others, that we would save ourselves for marriage. Answer the question, “What can we do to protect God’s institution of one man and one woman becoming one flesh?”

“You shall not steal.” (verse 15) Knowing that I don’t have to give in to greed because God has freed me from my slavery to sin, I can instead look at my neighbor’s property and think about how I can help them protect it. Instead of thinking how I can benefit from it, I strive to deal with them fairly, look out for them if someone is trying to swindle them. God gave them their property and because I love God, I want to help my fellow person protect what God has given them.

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” (verse 16) In our speech, God wants us to defend people, defend their reputations. I have opportunity to serve God when my conversations about people are guided by the thought: “Does this build up the person I am talking about? Is this helpful and beneficial for them?” And when people say things about others, we defend when needed to, and we take their words and actions in the kindest possible way, putting the best construction on what they say.

Finally, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (verse 17) Thoughts need to be guided just as much as actions. Although others may be more blessed than we are and the grass may look greener on the other side, I can be content with what God has given me. Being I am freed from the slavery of sin, I can show God my gratefulness for what I have instead of pining over what I don’t have.

When we examine the Ten Commandments, we continue to see room where we could improve, and we will all our lives. Instead of letting our examination of God’s commands end only with the thought of how I have not measured up, remember that God has

freed us from the slavery of sin. By Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord, we are made perfect already and are free to serve God. The Ten Commandments guide me in that freedom.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, challenge yourself with the Ten Commandments. Instead of just skimming the surface of their meaning and application in our lives, take these home. Meditate on them. Find an opportunity for you to show how thankful you are to God for having freed you from the slavery of sin. He is the LORD our God, who brought us out of the land of slavery – slavery to sin - by the substitution and sacrifice of his one and only Son. How will I show him my thankfulness for my freedom? Amen.

March 8, 2015

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