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Eastminster Worship Services

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Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

Top Ten List

Exodus 20:1-21

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What do we make of the Christmas Day terrorist bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, on Northwest flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit; corporate fraud; the Israeli and Palestinian conflict; child abductions; and amoral spirituality? Humanity was not created with these ends in mind. No, the human race was planned for God's pleasure, formed to be God's family, created to become like Jesus, shaped for serving God and made for a mission. Sin has distorted God's intent. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, came to restore humanity to God the Father's intent.

Exodus 20 is about God the Father's intent. It is a top ten list like no other. Rick Dees and Ryan Seacrest will never have a better list. The top ten in Exodus 20 will always be the top ten. Why? Lordship! To claim the lordship of Jesus Christ means to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the creator and sustainer of heaven and earth. He is omnipotent, that is, the all-powerful God. The word Lord in Hebrew is the word *YHWH*, the personal name of the omnipotent God. In the New Testament, the Greek word *kyrios* is usually used to refer to Christ. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, *kyrios* is used to translate the Hebrew *YHWH*. Since Jesus Christ is the incarnation of God the Father, then Jesus as *kyrios* is the full manifestation of *YHWH*, the personal name of the omnipotent God.

Exodus 20 contains the Ten Commandments; the top ten list. The first four focus on our relationship with God; the last six on our relationship with one another. The context in which the Ten Commandments were given is Israel's worship. Israel's worship was the primary life setting for the commandments. Eight of the commandments are negatively formulated. As such, they open up life rather than close it down; that is, they focus on the outer limits of conduct rather than specific behaviors. The negative formulation indicates that the primary

concern is not to create the human community but to protect it from behaviors that have the potential of destroying it.

The first commandment, verses 1-3, depicts how we are to have a right relationship with God. God is the focus of this commandment. He is also the speaker. The lawgiver places his law in the environment of grace, for it was his gracious act of redemption and deliverance from Egypt that revealed his name, “the Lord.” In Exodus 3:14 and 6:2, God ties the promise of his deliverance of Israel from Egypt with his name. The promise had become reality. All that the Lord is, says and does is embodied in this one affirmation: “I am the Lord.” The Lord is the only true God.

The second commandment, verses 4-6, discusses the mode rather than the object of worship. In the Old Testament, idols are referred to as gods of silver or gods of gold. Idols also include images carved from stone or wood. None are to be made with the intention to worship it. Artistic talent was not to be stifled. But, idols were not to become improper substitutes that would steal hearts away from the true worship of God. God is a jealous God and does not want the hearts of his people attached to anything or anyone besides him. Idolatry raises up competitors or rivals to the honor and glory due to God alone. Idolatry excites God’s zealously for the consistency of his own character and being. God demands exclusive devotion and directs his anger against all who oppose him.

The third commandment, verse 7, makes us cognizant of the ways we misuse the Lord’s name. The name of God stands for so much more than the mere pronouncing of his title of address. God’s name includes his nature, being and very person (Psalm 20:1, Luke 24:47 and John 1:12). His name also includes his teaching and doctrine (Psalm 22:22, John 17:6 and 26). To “take up” the name of the Lord “in vain” means to misuse it. I am amazed at the number of Christians who say “Oh God” as a form of exclamation. For example at the first hearing of some tragedy a person says, “Oh God.” The context does not warrant such a naming. The same is true when we say “Oh God” or “Jesus Christ” as expressions of disgust. A context of disgust does not warrant such a naming. Not wrongfully using the name of God commends the praise of God.

The fourth commandment, verses 8-11, commands us to “Remember the Sabbath Day.” It refers back to

Genesis 2:1-3, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” The Sabbath rest was a memorial to what God had done at creation, but even more importantly, it was a day made for women and men to worship God, find strength for their weariness (Amos 8:5) and take delight in the Lord (Isaiah 58:13).

With the fifth commandment to honor your father and your mother, verse 12, begins the commandments related to our relationships with one another. To honor your father and your mother means that you understand the authority and importance of that authority for everyday living. This fundamental principle of “honor” is the foundation of social order and peace. To honor means to respect and to adhere to what is right. To honor means to be holy.

Commandments six through ten, verses 13-17, are most familiar to humanity. They are the “should not’s.” The “should not’s” of murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness against another and coveting another’s property are ordinances to safeguard marriage, property and one’s neighbor. The “should not’s” are very practical. I will briefly examine the secondary meanings of these commandments through the words of Jesus himself. The reason for doing this is to take away any smugness that we might have when we casually sit back and say, “we haven’t committed murder, adultery, stealing, false witness or covetousness.” Perhaps we haven’t committed the “should not’s” of the letter of the law. But what about committing the “should not’s” of the intent of the law? Let’s look at the words of Jesus Christ himself.

First, murder: read Matthew 5:21-22. Second, adultery: read Matthew 5:27-28. Third, stealing: read Matthew 6:24. Fourth, bearing false witness: read Matthew 7:12. And fifth, covetousness: read Matthew 5:28. These five “should not’s” form the foundation of our relational faith. It is when we are in everyday relationships that our fundamental faith commitments are most readily known and experienced. It is the gossipy conversations over the phone. It is the moments of wandering eyes at public venues. It is those thoughts of jealousy or envy about another’s possessions. It is that harbored anger and bitterness. Not bearing false witness invites speaking

well of one's neighbor. Not killing suggests efforts to preserve life.

The reason that God gave the commandments was to test the people and put the fear of God upon them so that they would not sin. The one should is that the people of God should not be afraid of God, but trust him to help them live as he intended them to live. As the people of God, they were to listen to God, trust God and know that God loved them and would take care of them. They had wandered in the wilderness for forty years and God provided for them. As they trusted God, he would provide.

The Ten Commandments, the top ten list, speak to the human condition. Being a follower of Jesus Christ is a matter of the heart. Jesus says in Mark 7:21-23, "For it is within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." These are strong and accurate words.

Only in God can we be the people he intends us to be. That is the point of the Ten Commandments. It is in and through God that true motivation comes to live the life that he has for us. Our motivation to respond to God's will cannot be from anywhere else or we confuse grace with law and love with fear. We grow in our relationship with God through worship, study, fellowship and service.

Hendrikus Berkhof writes this about the Ten Commandments, "Confidently, God's people are to wait upon him. Israel must give up all her own securities, listen to him, and follow his voice (*Christian Faith*, 1973; 232)." The key to living in the power of God's lordship is being obedient to God's commandments, by faith in Jesus Christ. As we are obedient to God's commandments, we will honor God. Through obedience to Jesus, he will live the commandments in us. We will be under his lordship.

In worship, study, fellowship and service, you will more clearly realize that you were created to become like Jesus. Trust Jesus! Experience his lordship. Have answers and purpose in the midst of the Christmas Day terrorist bomber, corporate fraud, the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, child abductions and amoral spirituality.

God is doing something in the heart of this congregation and the individual hearts of each person here. Being a follower of Jesus is about change; change that only Jesus can do. Exodus 20 contains a top ten list like no other. Rick Dees and Ryan Seacrest will never have a better list. Why? Lordship! Look at the Table. Hear Jesus

say to you, “This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you.” Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. Let us pray!

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