

March 3, 2024

Exodus 20:1-17

If you watched the Super Bowl, you may remember the “He Gets Us” commercial. It’s caused quite a controversy among Christians and non-Christians alike. It shows a series of computer-made images of people washing each other’s feet in front of an abortion clinic, a drug-addict’s house, a group of immigrants, and other images that are meant to cause controversy. The commercial ended by saying, “Jesus didn’t teach hate. He washed feet.” The point, according to the makers of the commercial, is this: *“Our hope is that our latest commercials will stimulate both societal discussion and individual self-reflection about ‘who is my neighbor?’ and how each of us can love our neighbor even as we have differences and serve one another with more kindness and respect.”*

That’s admirable. And if this commercial gets even one person to consider coming to church and hearing more about Jesus, and they get saved, God be praised! But there are a lot of people, both Christian and non-Christian, who really don’t like this ad. Every non-Christian news article that you’d perhaps expect to like the idea of a Jesus who just washes feet and doesn’t mind how you live your life were deeply critical- calling the commercial inauthentic, pandering, and condescending- as if we poor sinners need you Christians to wash our feet. Many Christians, on the other hand, criticize this commercial because it paints a picture of Jesus that is at best incomplete, and at worst false and deceptive. They have a point. While the intentions behind this commercial are good, it gives the impression that because Jesus is all about love, he doesn’t really care about rules, as long as you love people. Biblically, nothing could be further from the truth. As we see today in Exodus, because God is so passionate about us, so loving, so caring, he also is passionate about his divine rules, or the Law. Today, as we study the first time God officially writes the Law, we see that a God of love has rules, and those rules are 1. A Curb, 2. A Mirror, and 3. A Guide.

1.A Curb. If you remember our Wednesday Bible studies back in the fall, you remember that God used Moses to save the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery and was leading them through the desert into what would be their new home- a beautiful, bountiful land. Before they get there, however, God establishes with them the rules- the 10 commandments. What’s so brilliant about the Ten Commandments is that the entirety of God’s moral code, that which is right and wrong, can be summed up in the principles laid out in the Ten Commandments. That’s why we teach them in Catechism and refer to them when we talk about what’s a sin and not a sin. Before we even take a look at them, I’d like to first talk about what God says first: “I am the LORD, *your God* who brought you out of Egypt.” What does that mean? The LORD is not simply this deity who’s “out there” watching people from afar. He’s emotionally connected to his people. He loves them. He cherishes them. He knows them because he created them! Therefore, whatever he is about to tell them is a product not of his wrath or judgment, but of his love for them. God gives rules because of his love. But it’s more than that. Pastor Tim Keller says it like this: *Here we see that the law of God is a gift of grace that is the foundation of human flourishing. It is not “busywork” assigned just to please the arbitrary whims of a capricious deity. The law of God simply shows us what human beings were built to do—to worship God alone, to love their*

*neighbors as themselves, to tell the truth, keep their promises, forgive everything, act with justice. When we move against these laws we move against our own natures and happiness. Disobedience to God sets up strains in the fabric of reality that can only lead to break down.*

This is what we mean when we call the Law of God a “curb.” It’s meant to protect you, and others, from yourself. If you are driving down the road and you get a text and you (illegally) check that text, laugh, and text that person back, your car may start to veer a little bit toward the sidewalk where Pastor Schulz, his wife, and Dot are taking their daily walk! Luckily for both of us, there’s a curb, something that guards you from harming others and harming yourself! That’s one of the functions of God’s Law! It’s not to be repressive, stopping you from having fun, but to stop you from hurting yourself! Think about this! When you were five years old, you likely thought that a busy street with traffic would be an appropriate, enjoyable place to play- but because your parents loved you, they didn’t let you play there. When you were ten years old, you likely would have thought it enjoyable and beneficial to eat McDonalds for dinner every day (I certainly did), but your parents likely didn’t let you because they love you. I wonder what things you found enjoyable when you were twenty that God told you not to do, and as you look back, you realize he was right. Thirty? Forty? Fifty? God’s rules may seem repressive, joyless, and loveless, but they are there because he knows us better than we know ourselves and loves us more than we love ourselves. He created us to know and love him and find our ultimate joy and satisfaction in him, so he commands us, don’t look for what you will only find in me in other gods- it won’t work! Don’t neglect my Word! Don’t work yourself to death. Don’t disobey others who know more than you! Don’t hurt people! Don’t cheat on your spouse! Don’t steal! Don’t lie! In fact, don’t even let your heart envy what others have! Why? Because if you do, you’ll hurt yourself and hurt others! The Law curbs us from damaging ourselves and others.

2. A Mirror. Yes, the Law is a good and powerful and helpful thing. Unfortunately, we don’t follow it! Have you noticed that? Everyone agrees that lying, gossiping, hurting people, and the like are bad things, but we all do it in our own ways, even though we are Christians! Worse yet, look at what God says about this Law. God is a passionate, jealous God, because he’s loving. He’s jealous- not of his people, but for his people. When you see people you love addicted, abused, used, and they continue to hurt themselves, you are jealous for them! You are angry that they are hurting themselves. That’s how God feels! Especially because sin doesn’t just hurt the sinner or the person being sinned against, it affects the people who come after the sinner. God’s not saying that he sends people to hell for their parent’s sins- we know that. He’s saying that sin destroys everything even after the sinner is gone, and it makes him angry because he loves us, and if he is truly good, he must punish evil. When we break God’s law, we aren’t only hurting each other, we are hurting him. There’s a debt. There’s an offense that needs to be paid for. And because God is an infinite God, and we are all infinite souls, the punishment that we suffer for our sins will therefore be infinite- Hell.

But do you notice what he also says? He’s merciful to those who love him and keep his commandments... How can that be? How can that be true about us? How can we sinners who have broken God’s Law be loved and cherished by this holy God? Only if someone were to come and

perfectly obey God's Law without any mistake, without any sin, and yet suffer the jealous wrath of God in our place, so that when we can be treated as if we have obeyed perfectly. That's Jesus- true God who obeyed his own rules perfectly, but was treated as if he committed every sin that did, so that we could be treated as if we were perfect. What I just said means nothing if we don't realize how lost we actually were. The second, and perhaps the most important reason God gives us his Law is to show us how far we've fallen. To show us how deeply we need a savior. To show us that Jesus cannot simply be an example. To show us that we cannot just, "choose to love others," that we are in our very nature unloving and therefore unlovable. Can you see the mercy in that? God loves us so much that he tells us what we don't want to hear so that we can see our deep, desperate need for a Savior who saves us just because he wants to. Often, we think that if we allow ourselves to really be destroyed by the law, to let it leave us exposed and naked and shameful, which, if you study and consider it deeply enough, it will, then our self esteem will be destroyed. But that's not true. The more you see how lost and evil you are, the more you realize how deeply and freely and tenderly Jesus loves you, if while you were still a sinner, he chose you and made you his own. The Law is a mirror. Look deeply and honestly. You'll see that your face is dirty. But don't try to use the mirror to wash your face- don't try to fix yourself by performing better. Sprint to the cross and be washed by Jesus' blood.

3. A Guide. Last week in Bible Class, one of you made a really profound, beautiful point: When we are saved, we are brought into God's family. I love that picture. It's not like God just saves you and says, "see you in Heaven." Jesus' death and resurrection brings us into an intimate, tender, beautiful relationship with him. We're God's children. What God said about Israel, that they are his and they have a relationship is even more true for us. And, like any good, functioning, family, God's family has rules. But we don't obey the rules because we are trying to get into the family, we're already in, and were brought in before we followed the rules, so our place in God's family doesn't depend on how well we follow his rules- it never has. Why do we follow his rules then? If following the rules doesn't save us, doesn't earn us extra status with God, doesn't make us better than others, why follow them? Why do we study his rules and submit ourselves to them and repent when we break them? *Because we love him.* He's our God, we are his people. When you love someone, you learn about them. You learn about what they like, what they don't like, and you learn how you can show your love for them. You aren't earning anything from them. You just want to make them happy! The Law of God is our guide for how to do that! You see what happens? If you aren't saved by grace, then God's rules are either going to make you an insufferable pharisee who looks down on others because they aren't following as well as you, while you are at the same time deeply insecure because you aren't following as well as you should be, and you'll never really know if you're saved. Or, it will make you hate God and his rules because they are just too much and they stop you from achieving the pleasure that you want in life. But if you understand what Jesus has done for you, you understand that he's pledged himself to you, made you his, brought you into his family through suffering, the Law no longer is a burden- it's a joy. It's an opportunity to make the one we love happy. And that's what God wanted in the first place- he wants those who keep his commandments to do so not out of obligation, but love and joy. Because of Jesus, we can. Amen.