

“Ten Commandments: Who’s First?”

Joshua 24:14-24 • Mark 10:17-27

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • January 19, 2020

I want you to think for a moment about what’s really important to you in your life. What is it that you really love? Is it your family? Your career? Your health? Your home? If I asked you to make a list of the most important things in your life I bet at least one of those would be on everyone’s list. Then there are those things that you wouldn’t be willing to admit to, like approval from other people or being considered attractive, or wanting to be wealthy.

Maybe you haven’t really thought about it much. But if you want to know what the most important things are in your life just look at how you spend your time and money, look at what you think about the most, and consider where you put your trust. That will give you a pretty good idea of what you really value as opposed to what you think or say you value. For example, if you say you value your family but rarely attend one of your child’s ball games because you’re busy working, chances are you value money more than family.

Last week we kicked off a new series looking at the Ten Commandments. When Jesus was asked what he thought the most important commandment was he instead gave a summary of all of the commandments. He said that all of the commandments could be summed up by loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loving other people at least as much as you love yourself. The first four of the Ten Commandments show us how to love God and the other six show us how to love others. But of all of them, the first commandment is the most important because it’s the foundation for the rest.

The story of God giving Moses the Ten Commandments is one of the most dramatic in the Old Testament. God has miraculously rescued the Jews from their harsh slavery in Egypt and he has led them to Mount Sinai in the wilderness. Exodus 19 describes how God

came down on the mountain with dark clouds, thunder and lightning, fire and smoke, earthquakes, and the sound of trumpets. In fact, the people were so terrified that they told Moses, “you go talk to God and then come tell us what he said.”

Out of this that God speaks. He says, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Scholars have noted that the Ten Commandments closely follows the pattern of ancient treaties between a powerful king and a weaker state. It’s like a treaty between God and us, where God promises to take care of his people if they will obey him. This first part is kind of like the preamble. It sets the stage for the specific commandments.

What this preamble tells us is that the commandments that follow have authority. They are to be obeyed because of who is commanding them. God reminds them of his right to command. He reminds them of who He is and who they are in relation to Him.

First, we’re told that it is God himself who spoke these words. Who is God? He tells them the same thing he told Moses years before, his personal name “I AM.” Just before this in chapter 19 God reminds them that he is the creator. He says, “all the earth is mine.” The fire and smoke and lightning all prove God is who he says he is by demonstrating his power over creation.

God then tells the Israelites who they are in relation to him. He says, “I am the LORD *your* God.” He desires a personal relationship with his people. In Exodus 19:5 he calls them his “treasured possession.” In fact, he loves them so much that we see another aspect of who God is – he is their redeemer. God reminds the people what he has done for them. He says, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Again, God has proven his identity through the

plagues, the Passover where all those with the lamb's blood over their door were saved, and then with the parting of the Red Sea and sending the manna and quail in the wilderness. God redeemed them from their captivity and he's done the same for you.

All of us are in slavery to sin until God comes to save us. He loves us so much that he came here in person so that we could have a personal relationship with him. And it's in the context of that loving relationship that God says, "You shall have no other gods before me." Now God's not suggesting that there are actually other gods. He's the only one. But often times we make gods out of other things.

It seems to me that today there are two closely-related dangers or temptations when it comes to our attitude toward God. One is to say that God doesn't really exist. Many people today, whether they have thought about it or not, reject the idea of God. If you don't believe God exists you probably aren't going to be interested in obeying His rules. The other temptation is more subtle and is one that can find it's way into even the lives of Christians. That is to worship something else in place of God. The fact is that all people worship. It's how we're wired. The question, then, is who or what are you worshipping? Both of these temptations have the same cause – worshipping something other than God and that something is ultimately the self. We end up worshipping our own desires.

In our reading from Mark 10 we heard about this man who runs up to Jesus, kneels down and says, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This story is usually called the story of the Rich Young Ruler, although only Luke tells us he was a ruler and only Matthew tells us he was young. But all three Gospels tell us he was wealthy. The man has it all by the world's standards and yet he is obviously not satisfied. So he wants to know what he can *do* to have peace with God. But there's nothing any of us can do. It's what we've done that caused the problem.

Jesus kind of baits him here. He says, "You know the commandments. Just keep them." Notice, though, that Jesus only mentions the commandments dealing with loving other people: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother." The man falls for it. You can almost hear the excitement in his voice. "Teacher! All these I have kept from my youth." Notice also that most of those are negative commands – they are things that we are *not* to do.

Mark then tells us that because Jesus loved him he said, "You lack one thing; go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When he hears this the man goes away sad. The mistake most of us make when reading this passage is to focus on Jesus' instruction for the man to give away all his money. We think, well that's not reasonable. And so we stop listening after that. But that's not the main point of this passage. That's not what the man lacked. What he lacked was Jesus. He lacked loving God first. His money and possessions prevented him from worshipping fully.

Each of us has something in our life that prevents us from putting Jesus first in our life and worshipping him fully. But God will never settle for second place. It's not an understatement to say that if you don't put Christ **FIRST** in every area of your life you're not really worshipping him at all. He doesn't just want you for an hour or so on Sunday. God wants a personal relationship with you all day every day. He wants your life to be a demonstration to others of God's amazing love.

Just like the Israelites, you need to see God for who he is – your redeemer – and who you are in relation to him – loved and forgiven. And then you need to figure out what prevents you from devoting your life fully to him. What do you think about most during the day? How do you spend your time and money? If it were illegal in this country to worship Jesus would there be enough evidence to convict you? Jesus

said, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" Love of money is one of the big idols in many peoples' lives. But you could also paraphrase that as, "How difficult it will be for those who seek power or influence or pleasure or gourmet food or sex to enter the kingdom of God." All of

those can be gods that distract us from the real God in Jesus Christ. Thankfully, he has come and died on the cross and rose again so that you don't have to live for those things any more. For all things are possible with God!

Amen.