



Exodus 20:1-17

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We live in a world full of signs don't we? Signs that tell us directions, signs that inform us and then there are the signs that tell us we can't do things.

KEEP OFF THE GRASS

Yes, it's the old favourite. I never like seeing this in parks because the whole idea of a park it seems to me is to provide grass you can walk on! And how many times have you seen this sign in a park and walked on it just to be rebellious?

NO BALL GAMES

A favourite on council estates this one. Wherever children can play, this sign glares at them. It's strange how these signs are ignored, defaced or just go missing.

NO ENTRY

For those of us who drive, woe betide us if we pass this sign and go the wrong way up a one-way street.

Signs are usually there for a reason, for our safety or the safety of others, for the pleasure and enjoyment of others, or to protect things that belong to the community.

But people so often don't like it when we can't do what we want. Perhaps when we were younger we thought people were killjoys if we were stopped from doing something - no parking, no smoking, no speeding - and we all ignore the rules, or at least bend them.

I know so many people who have that view of God - He's just a killjoy who only ever says THOU SHALT NOT to all the things we would like to do that are fun.

Actually, that just isn't true because God created enjoyment and fun, but He's also a God who challenges us with the need for responsibility towards each other and to ourselves. People who say to me that God is a killjoy always point me to the 10 Commandments.

TEN COMMANDMENTS

Of course there are many jokes like this one where Moses is saying "they're not going to like it". But that just isn't so because those that understood the commandments raved about how good they were. Here is a portion from Psalm 119 - the longest of the psalms by a mile - and it's just on one theme - how good God's laws are:

*I delight in following your commands
more than in having great wealth.
I study your instructions;
I examine your teachings.
I take pleasure in your laws;
your commands I will not forget.*

Psalms 119:14-16

QUESTION

What they aren't - a set of rules we must keep to if we want to keep favour with God? That's what most people think they are and if you look at the list, you'll find that you've broken most of them and actually if you look at them in their context, you've actually probably broken all of them at one time or another.

Or are they something else? Let's see what they were to the Jews. They are known as the 10 Words not the 10 Commandments. It's just that if you actually look at the first and second commandments, they are actually all the same thing. Not having idols is a consequence of having no other God but God. Instead

their first commandment is not a commandment at all, but the second verse of Exodus 20

EXODUS20:2 *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves.*” It’s a statement of grace. God in His mercy has chosen His people and rescued them from Egypt. The other 9 words or commandments are the detail of the covenant that God offered them and they accepted. He made the first move and as a loving Father to them, gave them the basic rules that govern how they related to Him and how they should relate to one another

They are like the boundaries set by a loving parent to ensure their child is safe and secure, and has good relationships to others. God is a Father who cares, like all good parents do, and who does not desire His people to fall and make a mess of their lives.

So keeping the commands didn’t make them God’s people - God in His grace decided He wanted them - what they did was to acknowledge that by agreeing to His covenant with them.

But if they did fail to keep the commandments, then their relationship with God suffered and their relationships with one another broke down. Look at all the bad episodes in the history of Israel and it usually involved their worshipping idols, trusting pagan nations, moral decline and social breakdown.

ARE THE 10 COMMANDMENTS FOR CHRISTIANS?

There is a sense that as Christians the 10 commandments aren’t our commandments because to us He’s not the Lord who brought us out of slavery from Egypt because we’re not Jewish, but before you dismiss them, look at these words of Jesus which are a quote from two verses in the OT

VERSE

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 is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matt 22:37-40

The Jews call this the Shammah. As Jesus says, this is a summary in as few words as possible that sums up the Law and the prophets. And what is the foundation of the law and the prophets? The 10 words, the 10 Commandments. Why, because they represent the foundational standards of God.

COVENANT SLIDE

Just like the Jews, we too have understood that God in His grace in Christ has rescued us and when we accepted Jesus we entered into a covenant relationship with God and our standards are summed up in the Shammah so the foundation of our faith has its foundation in the 10 commandments.

That’s why in the autumn we are going to spend 10 weeks looking at the 10 commandments and we’re going to invite others to come and join us in our study.

The Church - need to follow Christ more deeply

The Prodigals - need to come back into a proper relationship with Jesus

The “not yet” Christians - need to follow Jesus

Just 10 is for everyone, for us, for those that have been away and for those who haven’t trusted yet. In one swoop, it helps people follow Jesus whoever they are, by taking us all back to the most basic principles of our relationship with God and our relationships with one another.

The good thing about Just 10 is it’s entertaining as well as challenging. So what’s it about and where did it come from. Here’s the promotional video.

VIDEO

NATIONAL EVENT

Now I’m going to disappoint you. J. John isn’t coming here for 10 weeks - I’m afraid you’re going to get me or whoever else I book. We won’t be the only church doing it - there are thousands signed up over Britain - it will be a national campaign. When Christians unite together to do God’s work together, things happen - take Alpha for example.

It will also be something we do as a church over those weeks, not just on a Sunday morning, but there will be opportunities to study the material during the week in small groups as well as other special events.

People find Just 10 life-changing. In Norwich, J John challenged people about the commandment on stealing and asked that if people had been challenged by God about their stealing, to bring stolen goods the next night. There was enough to fill a marquee - much to the bemusement of the Police who the stuff was handed over to to find their rightful owners. Unclaimed stuff was auctioned for charity.

God wants us to be challenged and changed by Just 10 and He wants other people to be challenged and changed too

Where's the challenge for us as we contemplate this series?

LAST SLIDE

First of all, because we are helping people follow Jesus, we need to ask God who He is pointing us to who needs help.

Secondly, God may be calling you to help. How can you help.

By praying regularly for the mission and for individuals.

By offering to help in the putting the event together.

Finally there's the personal challenge - that we pray that God will challenge and change us.

*Preached by Mark Reid
7/3/10 MRBC Felixstowe
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