

Exodus 20:1-17 and Hebrews 8:1-13

“The better covenant part 2”

The ten commandments always seem to make it into the news. I remember well back in the early 2000's when there was a political battle over whether they were required to be in certain government buildings or not, or even allowed in those buildings. The culture wars in which we live makes it easy for us to think we have to choose sides. When I hear the 10 commandments that's not what I think about, I think about our preschool because I teach them to all of the pre-K kids and I know I've told you this before, but I don't believe I've ever taught you the Pastor Bob version of the 10 commandments.

Okay, you have to shake off your hands because you have to use them and they have to be warm: 1. There is only one God. 2. No idols. 3. Say nice things. 4. Obey the Sabbath. 5. Love your mom and dad. 6. Do not kill. 7. Be happy with what you have. 8. Do not steal. 9. Do not lie. 10. Don't want what other people have. You got it, well done! This past week I had a conversation about the role of these commandments in the life of those who call themselves followers of Jesus. Because the assumption is that as Jesus followers these commandments are vital and crucial to our relationship with Jesus.

But we are about to read in Hebrews that the Old Covenant, of which these 10 commandments were an integral part is not only old and obsolete, but the words he uses is that it will disappear, or it will no longer be needed. Jesus came to fulfill the law, and he did, and he now commands his disciples to not follow a list of rules other than loving God and loving neighbor. So many of us come from traditions that make us think that if we are just good people then that is all that is needed in being a disciple of Jesus. I say to you, it has nothing to do with being good people. It has to do with living a life of loving the one who created you, died for you, and rose again for you, and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus has a more excellent ministry than the stagnant commandments that don't bring life, but rather bring death. Let's see how the author of Hebrews approaches it.

READ

So if the title of the sermon is the better covenant part 2, then that means what? There was a part 1. That's right, if you missed it is because it was at the beginning of the month and then we had Michael, Walter, and then Pentecost in between. The better covenant part 1 is directly from Hebrews where the author states that the new covenant that was created when Jesus was on earth is better than the old one, the one with the 10 commandments, because it provides a

direct relationship with God and we no longer need an intermediary like a priest in order to be able to have a relationship with God. God is the one who directs and guides our steps personally. This means that we all need to have a personal relationship with Jesus, something that in the Old Covenant was not possible.

Part 2 is less about accessibility to God, and more about what our life looks like here on this earth while we are in that relationship with God. No longer, we are told, do we live under the old law, where legalism and following rules is the norm, but rather abundant life marked with mercy and forgiveness. For some of you this is a really hard mountain to climb because so much of what you think is religion, and being a Christian, is doing the right thing. I tell you that is not what being a follower of Jesus is, that is not what a Christian is. A Christian, this is part 2, is one who lives their life as a response to the salvation that Jesus provides not by following rules, but by rejoicing the opportunities that God gives before us.

Let me give you an example. Raising kids is hard work. It is really, really hard work and you are always second guessing yourself if you are doing it right or wrong. One of the primary struggles that Stacy and I faced was around the topic of freedom. How much freedom and how little freedom do you give the kids. As you can imagine which one of those two do you think I am? That freedom guy, right? Rachel was riding the subway in Moscow by herself by the time she was in 8th grade. I came across an article this week of me being interviewed after a bombing in the subways system and describing what it was like and how our soup kitchens and people of color were affected by that bombing. It was right after that when we decided to give Rachel a cell phone.

How much freedom you give your kids has a tremendous impact on who they grow up to be and how comfortable they feel in their own skin. But too much freedom and there is a risk that they can get hurt and make a mistake that will impact them the rest of their lives. But expectations were set and punishments were given when disobedience occurred. But God sees us as His children and he does not want us to be in lock step in the classroom only repeating what he tells us with no opportunity to explore his creation in ways that give him joy.

Instead of children in lock step in the classroom, he wants us to be those children in the playground who feel completely free to play to their hearts content without being told how to play or how not to play. That's the image and the understanding that I want us to have as we live

out our Christian life. But life is hard, Bob. People die, cancer strikes, children are hurt, wars are taking place.

The difference between the Old Covenant and the New covenant is that under the Old Covenant while these things were taking place we were under condemnation because the commandments were the only way we could be judged. So life was strict under a set of rules. With Jesus, we see in vs.12, our life is marked by mercy and forgiveness while the old is marked by the laws and punishment.

Look at vs.1 of our Scripture where the author states, okay, this is the main point. It is nice to read that because then we know that we are close to what the main point is and so we better pay attention. The main point is the greatness of Jesus over and above the old covenant. Simply put, the greatness of Jesus is the umbrella under which we ought to live our lives, which is not prescriptive, but rather provides the freedom we've been talking about. We read on this Trinity Sunday, a Sunday that we recognize that which unites all Christian Churches, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is the main point that unites us. But Jesus is seen in majesty with the Trinity in the person of the Son. This is why this is a better covenant, simply put, because of Jesus.

We read that he then quotes Jeremiah which we saw that first week which states that we have a personal relationship with God because he wrote his presence and his law upon our hearts and it is no longer something we have to learn or be anxious about, or wonder if God is going to come down hard on us for not obeying. In Galatians 3:24 we read: "Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith." If being a disciple simply means following the 10 commandments and doing good then we are wretched creatures. There is more to this better covenant, and it is a life that is full and that is free in Jesus.

I am guessing that many of you are still living lives where you think that all there is in what we do is make sure that we do the right thing. No, that is not our faith, that is not what we believe. Even back in Exodus 24 when the commandments are given the people promise and say: All the words that the Lord has said we will do, and we will be obedient. That was the crux of the old covenant, doing, only doing what God has told us to do. But this was a recipe for disaster because we fail. We sin, we fall short of the glory of God as Paul tells us in Romans. Jesus as our Savior provides a new way of life here on this earth. Not just in eternal life. So

many of us are only living for the next life and not for this life. When that happens then we inevitably try to live as those children in the classroom. Just tell me what to do.

But Jesus wants us to live as children on the playground, free, loving him, taking full advantage of that mercy and forgiveness, and then great things will take place. This is such a different approach than what many churches who focus on rules and regulations take. It is not just Roman Catholic, by the way. Many evangelical churches will make assumptions that if you are follower of Jesus then you are going to believe certain things about social issues and politics, and I say that is not the way that Jesus has laid out before us.

Jesus is so great that he creates a new covenant which not only provides salvation and life eternal for him. Don't stop there, there is more to what this more excellent and better covenant provides. That was part 1, don't stop there. Right now, here and now, we have the freedom to live with him not based upon rules, but based upon mercy and forgiveness. Our salvation is not based on our obedience, but obey we must, but rather on mercy and forgiveness. Thanks be to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.