

The Goodness of the Law

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading comes from Deuteronomy chapters 4 and 5. Please follow along on the screen. See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear these statutes, will say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

Only take care and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, unless they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children.

And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them.

[1 : 1 5] The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.

The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, while I stood between the Lord and you at that time to declare to you the word of the Lord.

For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain. He said, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

This is the word of God. Great. So, today we're starting on a new series, looking at the Ten Commandments.

And this time that we are going through is a time where rules really count at the moment. I don't know if you have looked around you. The rules are everywhere.

[2 : 1 4] Don't enter any shop without a mask. Don't gather more than four people in a place. Our experience of life is totally shaped by rules. And for some of us, that gives us comfort.

For some of us, it's just feeling very restricted at this time. And it raises a lot of questions about what does it mean to be free? What does it mean to live life well?

Well, one Greek philosopher called Epictetus, he said, is freedom anything else other than the right to live as we wish?

Nothing else. American philosopher, pitbull, rapper Pitbull, said, I'm free to do what I want and have a good time. And so, both of these people are saying to us, the absence of rules is freedom.

That's the good life. But if you've ever been to a nation where the drivers follow that principle of the absence of rules is the way to live, you know that is not the way to freedom.

[3 : 18] That's the way to chaos. But some people love rules. They love morality. You know, in Hong Kong, I think many people around the world think that Christianity is just a set of rules.

So I have met many people who have brought their kids, non-Christians, they've brought their kids to church on Sunday. They've dropped them off and I've heard them say, listen, be good, learn how to be good through these people, but don't listen to any of the religious stuff they talk about.

And, because what they think is, get the rules, but don't worry about the God part. But, I'm not sure whether people who love rules or people who hate rules will have the perception that King David in the Psalms had of the Psalm that Jeremy read to us earlier.

Let me just read a little bit of it again to you. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. That's Psalm 19.

[4 : 32] You see, have you ever read the Ten Commandments and go, that is better than making a billion dollars on the stock market, having a 50% raise in your salary?

But that's what the psalmist is saying. He's saying, if that is not our heart, God wants to change our heart, and that's what I want us to see and to get this morning, that I want us to come away going, God's commands are good for us.

Because you see, freedom and life is not doing what we want to do. It's doing what we ought to do so we become the people we were created to be.

Freedom, let me say it again, freedom is not doing what we want to do, but doing what we ought to do so we become the people we were created to be.

You know, a goldfish is most free when it's swimming in water. It is not free if it starts trying to hike up the peak. It's going to die because fish were made to swim.

[5 : 40] Well, we were made to swim in God's will, which means that you and I will learn to live well even at this time where some of us feel very restricted if we get the commands of God in Scripture.

So, we're just going to go on this journey of the next few weeks looking through the Ten Commandments and I'm going to just introduce them to you today. And so, by way of background, let me just start off by saying there are two versions of the Ten Commandments.

One of them comes in Exodus 20 where God had brought the people out of Egypt and he takes them to the Mount Sinai and he gives them the law for the first time.

But then, the people just keep disobeying and keep disobeying. They wander through the wilderness. Forty years later, most of them have died out and now, they're back on the edge of the land, of the promised land in Moab and God comes again through Moses to bring them a second time the Ten Commandments.

And Moses is like a parent who is about to send their teenage son off to boarding school and giving them a pep talk of everything you need to know for how to live well in the new land that I am taking you into.

[7 : 04] That is what the Ten Commandments are part of. They're part of this talk to the people. And by the way, the Ten Commandments are never called the Ten Commandments in the Bible.

They are called, in Hebrew, the Ten Words. Which should tell us something. It should tell us that these are not some cold, divine, impersonal government laying down the law to us.

These are the words of a personal God speaking to create a people and these are His constitution that they can be the kind of community that He wants them to be.

So what that means is the law and the commandments are not some legalistic way to try and get into heaven. They never were.

The Ten Commandments here starts off, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. before you have a single rule God reminds the people I have saved you, I have redeemed you, I have brought you to myself.

[8 : 14] God doesn't say keep these ten rules and then you can be my people. No, He is saying I have brought you to be my people, I have brought you to be free, I have brought you to know how to live, now live in the way that I want you to because that is going to be your life.

It is grace, it is not legalism. So, if you have the passage with you, I am going to dive between the two passages in Deuteronomy 4 and 5 and really learn what are the ten words all about.

And I have got four things that they are about. They are revelation, they are wisdom, they are lifestyle and they are window. Okay? Revelation, wisdom, lifestyle and window.

So, let's have a look, first one. The revelation of God. What they are doing, they are revealing His authority.

So, first of all, they reveal His authority. Mount Sinai, in Deuteronomy 5, verse 4, Moses says, the Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain out of the midst of fire.

[9 : 25] You see, at Mount Sinai, there was thunder, there was lightning, there was smoke, there was darkness. This was a multimedia spectacular with surround sound.

This wasn't God as kind of a nice grandfather in the sky speaking some words to His children. This was a terrifying thunderstorm and a forest fire combined and out of that, God speaks.

You see, His holy authority is shown. And the people, they can't even touch the mountain or come near and they go, like, how can an awesome God like this speak to us and we can still live?

Because, you know, what it's showing is that we often tame God down to kind of our level. But God is not a tame God. The God who made the galaxies, made black holes, made meteorites is not a God you can just put in a box.

You see, when God speaks, He's not making suggestions. He's speaking with authority. You know, I've been in team meetings with an older, really experienced guy there and for 45 minutes, younger people, we're all kind of talking ignorantly about a whole load of issues and we're getting nowhere.

[10 : 46] And then at the end of about 45 minutes, the older guy just says one or two sentences and suddenly everyone goes, oh, that's it.

That's settled it. You see, that's what God is doing. We humans are like ignorant people with all of our opinions but when God speaks, that settles it. His authority is complete.

So it reveals His authority but it also reveals His desire for relationship. I love this. This is great. Verse 2 of chapter 5 says, the Lord, Yahweh, made a covenant with us in Horeb at Mount Sinai.

You see, these 10 words are God's covenant. Now, we don't really talk about the word covenant a lot these days but in ancient times, a great and powerful king would make a covenant with a smaller king and basically what would happen, it was a relational agreement where the great king would call for the other person to give loyalty and taxation to him and in return what he would do, he'd give protection and maybe some provision.

You see, it was a win-win kind of situation. And so, the Deuteronomy is actually written very much like the style of an ancient treaty.

[12 : 11] You know, there's God, the great and powerful king, Israel, the smaller power except for there's just one thing that's different. God doesn't get any mutual benefit out of this.

He wasn't looking for some extra benefits just to increase his power or his wealth. God was already a powerful ruler of the world and Israel had already proved itself to be completely unfaithful in every way and yet God still comes and makes a covenant with them.

Why? Deuteronomy 7 says this, it was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord said his love and chose you.

For you are the fewest of all peoples but it is because the Lord loves you. The Ten Commandments are pure grace from an authoritative but loving God.

this is less like a treaty and more like a ridiculous marriage ceremony with God as the king who needs nothing chasing after a wretch.

[13 : 21] It's like Prince Harry chasing after a disfigured, battered, obnoxious, slum dwelling old beggar and pursuing her in marriage and then bringing her to Buckingham Palace to show everyone and he's proud of her and everyone goes what?

You're with her? Totally out of your league and yet God through the exodus is showing again and again and again his love and the Ten Words are Israel's marriage vows to be exclusively Yahweh's and to love him in this relationship.

It's all grace. It's all grace. You know in marriage the worst thing as a guy is when your wife assumes you know exactly how to love her best without ever communicating what she really wants and so you know as guys we're pretty dumb and we really don't know.

You need to spell it out to us. You know it's like okay don't buy me a car magazine subscription for my birthday. Buy me a spa treatment or something. You go oh right okay that's what we need but pagan religions always left you guessing what their gods liked and then they punish you for getting it wrong but God in his grace tells us exactly how to do a relationship with him and how it can flourish.

He doesn't leave you wondering. That's grace. That's the Ten Words. So he shows us his authority. He shows us his desire for relationship and he also reveals his character.

[14 : 59] You know in Deuteronomy God keeps telling the people walk in my ways which means image me do what I do.

You know every commandment which is here reveals something of God's character to us. You know when Jesus he summarized the commandments he said you can summarize them in two ways.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. What he was saying is the commandments are all about love. Why? Because God is love.

You see if you want to know what love is look at the commands. The first four are all about how to love God upwards in that direction.

The next six show us what love for our neighbors look like in very practical terms. They reveal the heart of God. Ray Ortlund a pastor says this what kind of amazing person would say to us you shall not steal only a just and generous person who can be fully trusted who would never rob us or defraud us who would never lie or cheat who would never hold out on us wrongly who is not out for himself who feels no need and no appetite but only overflowing kindness and abundance.

[16 : 29] You see in each command you will see revealed a passionate devoted faithful loving just contented God who wants us as his people to be the same.

It reveals God these commandments his authority his desire for relationship and his character. But that's not all they do. Don't just reveal God they also are wisdom for abundant living.

This is why we've actually called these series 10 words for abundant life. Have a look at what it says in chapter 4 verse 6. It says this keep these laws and do them for that will be your wisdom and understanding.

Wisdom is the ability to make good decisions which lead to flourishing and the good life. That is what wisdom is. And so throughout Deuteronomy God keeps saying keep these commands so that it's going to go well with you so that you might live well.

Deuteronomy 6.24 says this the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes to fear the Lord our God listen here it is for our good always not just sometimes for our good always that's what the command is.

[17 : 56] Commands are all about. You know every one of us wants to live the good life don't we? That's why we watch all those TED talks and buy so many self-help books.

We want wisdom because we want a flourishing life. You know in Genesis 2 and 3 God gives us this abundant garden with like a gazillion trees in it which are amazing and he tells them he gives them one command don't eat from that one tree you can eat from anything else that one tree will bring you death but just trust me with that one everything else you can have life but then the serpent comes along in Genesis 3 and he says did God really say you can't eat from any tree in the garden no he didn't he just said one tree he didn't say any tree but you see that is always the lie behind every single sin that you will ever commit it's the lie that says God is trying to restrict you God is trying to make your life miserable God is trying to take joy from you it's not really for your good that's why Satan always wants you to focus on the one thing you don't have and to miss all the things that God wants to give you and has given you already he wants to focus you on what you're going to miss out on rather than what you're going to gain by trusting

God and his word and obeying him but just imagine the kind of community that if they follow the ten words what it would be like you know you would never have to lock your door because there would be no theft you would never have to fear going out at night because there's no murder families would be in harmony because people are honouring father and mother it would be a society of justice and integrity where you can trust whatever anyone says and also there would be no workaholic bosses driving you into the ground this is a place of freedom there would be no lawyers actually and no police probably some of us may think that's a good thing some of us may not but it's a place of freedom and life any command in scripture forgive those who've hurt you don't watch porn don't sleep with your girlfriend pray share the gospel every command is for your good always do we believe that because

God wants to change our hearts so that it goes from here to here and changes us so what I want us to do now is I actually want us to stop for a minute and I want you to take a minute to reflect if you're with someone you can just discuss with the person next to you but I've got a couple of questions that we're going to show on the slide that I want you to look at how is God calling you to obey him right at this time and how do you view his commands do you view what he's calling you as something that's to give you life or restrictive why do you see that why don't you and if you're not a Christian whose words do you rely on to help you live well and then how is that working for you so if you're by yourself I encourage you to take a pen write down your answers if you're with someone take the time to reflect and discuss and we'll come back in a couple of minutes time

Thank you.

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Thank you.
Thank you.
[31 : 58] And like you and God.
And we go.
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[34 : 28] Thank you.
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