

And God spoke all these words:

² *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

³ *“You shall have no other gods before me.*

⁴ *“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

⁷ *“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*

⁸ *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

¹² *“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

¹³ *“You shall not murder.*

¹⁴ *“You shall not commit adultery.*

¹⁵ *“You shall not steal.*

¹⁶ *“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*

¹⁷ *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:1-17)*

God Has Brought You Up!

Did you notice what our text for this morning is? It’s the Ten Commandments – all ten of them! Anybody that I’ve ever had in catechism class will tell you that you better settle in this morning, because we’re in for the long haul. I generally spend nine or ten lessons on the Ten Commandments in catechism class. Even in the adult class I spend at least three. So maybe you’re already wondering how a guy like me is ever going to get through all Ten in one sermon. Well, the truth is, I won’t be able to treat all Ten Commandments in one sermon. This morning, we have to take a broader view. We want to talk about more than just a list of dos and don’ts. The Ten Commandments – indeed all of God’s laws – are really about faith in action. They’re about God’s great acts of salvation and the changes they make in our lives. Rather than letting us wallow like pigs deep down in the filth of our own sin, **God has brought you up!**

I.

God has brought you up out of slavery to sin. That’s where God begins this morning. Take a moment to look at the Ten Commandments as they’re printed in the bulletin. They are not numbered, because God did not number them in the Bible. God does say there are ten. But he doesn’t tell us how to count them. People have disagreed about the numbering. Lutherans and Catholics tend to have three commandments in the first part about God and then two commandments at the end about coveting. Baptists and churches like that tend to have four commandments in the beginning about God and only one about coveting. Who’s right? It’s not really possible to say. But there is another school of thought. I personally think it makes the most sense. Jewish people start counting one verse before Christians do. Christians almost always start with verse three, **“You shall have no other gods before me.”** But the Jewish people begin with verse two. The first commandment for them is **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”**

That isn’t a commandment at all! It’s a statement of what God did to free his people. Why would God begin the Ten Commandments with this statement of grace? Because the gospel is the power to obey him. Israel was at Mt. Sinai. They were about to enter into a covenant with God. For the next 1500 years, they

would be obligated not just to the Ten Commandments, but to pages and pages of laws. God was going to tell them what they could eat, what they could wear, what they could grow in their fields. God was going to demand personal purity and sacrifices and setting aside one day a week in which farmers could do no regular work. The Old Covenant was a law code. Jewish scholars counted no less than 613 laws in that code. It would touch every area of their lives until Christ came.

But the basis for that law code was still the gospel. **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”** God said that. In fact, God spoke all the words of our text out loud. The entire nation of Israel heard the voice of God thunder from the clouds and smoke covering Mt. Sinai and they were terrified. But God pointed to the gospel. God gave them a reason to commit themselves to this code. True obedience to all those 613 laws could only come by faith.

Faith is always based on the gospel. The gospel is the story of God’s great acts of love to save his people. Saving Israel from Egypt was the greatest act in their history. They were slaves in Egypt. They were easy to dehumanize and easy to oppress. All their lives, the men and women gathered at Mt. Sinai had lived with pharaoh’s foot on their necks. Egypt at this time had the greatest military machine in the world, so revolt was out of the question.

But God intervened. Israel was his people. He had made promises to their ancestors – to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. God intended to keep those promises. So he sent ten plagues – ten disasters on Egypt. The last one, the plague of the firstborn, killed the firstborn child of every Egyptian household. Then the Egyptians drove Israel out. But at the last moment, they changed their minds. They sent their army to re-enslave them. But God opened the waters of the Red Sea and brought Israel through in safety. When the Egyptians followed, God let the waters fall on their army and destroyed it.

God redeemed Israel – he bought them out of physical slavery. That great act of salvation became the signature event of the Old Testament. God points to that physical liberation as a prophecy of the greater deliverance that he worked through Jesus. You and I are not physical slaves. We were born in a time and place where that kind of slavery is gone. But that doesn’t mean there is no slavery in America today. Just ask a person who’s addicted to drugs or alcohol. Ask a person who’s been abused and is still haunted by the past. Ask a person who’s suffered violence and post traumatic stress disorder. Those people will all tell you that slavery is still a part of our world.

It’s part of all of our lives, even if none of those terrible things have ever happened to us. Every one of us was born a slave to sin. Now, we don’t often feel like that’s true. Most of us think of ourselves as pretty good people. But being a good person is not the standard God uses. God demands that we be perfect, just as he is perfect. God demands that we love him with all that we are, that we trust in him, even when all our logic screams out that he makes no sense. God demands that we live for him in every word we speak, in every action we do, in every thought in our heads and every feeling in our hearts. And we just can’t be perfect like that. Have you ever wished you hadn’t said something that you did say? Have you ever felt guilty about something you did to someone else? I have. We can’t keep from feeling anger or lust or greed. We can’t help but doubt God sometimes. Every action that we do, every word we speak, every thought and feeling in our hearts and minds is corrupted by sin. Not one of them is good enough for God.

So we were born as slaves doomed to hell. But God looked down from heaven and it grieved him that we slaves were going to live our lives here in pain and sorrow and then die and go to hell forever. So he rescued us. He sent his Son into this world to be perfect for us. To think and feel, to speak and act exactly the way God wants us to. Jesus did that. Then Jesus offered his life on the cross to pay for us. Jesus suffered everything that we deserve. He died and then he rose. When he came out of the grave, he set all mankind free. He broke our slavery. And when he came to us personally in the gospel, he unlocked our chains. You and I trust our Savior. We will live with him forever. God has lifted us up from death and hell and the power of sin.

II.

At Mt. Sinai, God gave Israel a covenant. He obligated himself to love them and care for them and protect them. And God looked for them to love and serve him. That’s why he gave them the Ten Commandments. Unfortunately, the Old Covenant failed. There was nothing wrong with what God did. His love was perfect. His law was perfect. But the people didn’t follow it because they didn’t believe. Oh, even in the most unfaithful times, there was still a remnant of Israel that believed and lived for God. But the nation rebelled over and over again until Christ came. Then they rebelled permanently and God ended their covenant.

But already in the Old Testament, God promised a new covenant of grace. Christ is that New Covenant. You and I are the new people whom God has claimed under that covenant. We live under the gospel. Through that gospel God makes a revolutionary change in us. My friends, **God has lifted you up into a new life under Christ.**

God made you a part of his people. How did someone become a part of God's Old Testament people? They were born into it. That's how we became a part of his New Testament people, too. We were born again of water and the Spirit in baptism. God comes in the gospel and he awakens faith in our hearts. That new birth changes who we are. All Christians want to live for God. As we grow in our faith, we grow in living for him.

The Ten Commandments serve as a guide to show us what living for him really means. Now, the way they're written, the Ten Commandments are part of the Old Covenant. They command worship on Saturday and forbid working on that day. God canceled the Old Covenant, so those restrictions no longer apply. But the Ten Commandments do provide a summary of the will of God for his people. When we examine them in the light of all that God says in his word, they do teach us the kind of life God wants us to live.

The Christian life begins with our relationship to God. He comes first. We are not to worship any idols. Certainly no carved idols, but is bowing down to a piece of wood the real threat today? The idols of our lives are work and money and possessions. They're our families and our interests. In our day, all these things come between us and God. So God says to us, **"You shall have no other gods before me."**

God calls us to hold his name in reverence. Cursing and swearing and all the casual ways we throw God's name around – all the "Oh my God's" are unfit for the people of God. God's name is holy and his people know that. God calls us to make coming to church a priority. God's people gather regularly to hear his Word. God expects us to hold that Word as sacred and to take the time to study it and to teach it to our own children. And you haven't discharged that responsibility just because your kids go to a Lutheran school. God calls us parents to explore that Word with our families.

Reverence for God means reverence for his representatives in our homes. God calls parents just as surely as he calls pastors. God tells children to obey their parents as people who represent him. Of course, that puts an enormous responsibility on us parents to love and discipline and teach our children as God's chosen representatives.

God protects the people around us. He protects their body and life. **"You shall not murder"** places all our neighbor's personal wellbeing under God's protection. God calls us to protect marriage, his institution. Not just our own marriages, but the marriages of the people around us. God protects the property and the means of income of our neighbor. God protects his reputation. God's commands extend far beyond just what we do and say. God calls us to keep our hearts pure from lust and greed and coveting. God calls us to free ourselves from all desires for revenge and from all hatred. God himself summarizes these laws by saying that we should love God with all our heart, soul and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves.

God calls us to do all this because we belong to him. We are his people, set free from the power of sin and given a new covenant that promises eternal life. My friends, do live that way? In all that we do and say, in all that we think and feel, do we love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves? Do we love God with all that we are? Or do we have to admit that we are selfish at heart? That we come ahead of those around us, ahead even of God?

We live in danger of falling away just like God's Old Testament people did. But Jesus is still our Savior. He died and rose for us. He has wiped our sins away. Day in and day out, he allows us to stand before him and confess our sins and plead for his mercy. Over and over again, he assures us that we are forgiven. That baptism that happened to you so many years ago is still valid. You still are washed and forgiven. That communion that we'll celebrate in just a few minutes still gives us the body and blood Christ. It still forgives your sins. The announcement I made at the beginning of the service and which I repeat now is still just as valid as if Christ himself said it: I forgive you all your sins.

In that forgiveness, God changes us. He renews our faith. He comforts us. And he rededicates us to living for him. My friends, God has brought you up out of slavery to sin. You are free from death and hell and you will be free from all the terrible things that happen in this life. God has brought you up into a new life under Christ, a life in which it is a joy and a privilege to serve him, a life in which all our power comes from Christ. Live now for him! Amen.