

07.09.2017

Intro to the Ten Commandments
Exodus 20; John 8:31-36

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Jimmy opened his eyes to a brand new day. The morning sun came streaming in through the window. He took a deep breath and let out a sigh—ah, this is freedom, he thought. I've got a roof over my head without ever having to pay rent. I get three square meals a day and never have to pay the bill. And my time is all mine; I never have to punch a clock. Putting his hands behind his head, Jimmy said, "Yup, this is the life."

See, Jimmy had always done things his way. He refused to take orders from anyone. He was his own man, and if he got the idea to do something then there wasn't anything that was gonna stand in his way. And it was just that sort of free-thinking that got him where he was today.

You and I, we're a lot like Jimmy, aren't we? For us, freedom is doing things our way. Freedom is not taking any guff from anybody. Freedom is never having to say you're sorry. For most of us in this room, true freedom is just doing whatever it is we wanna do. Period. That's freedom, right!

So today, as we start our series on the Ten Commandments—all those "*Thou shalt's*" and "*Thou shalt not's*"—maybe we feel like we're kissing every single one of our freedoms goodbye. After all, God's laws aren't much fun. They cramp our style, they rain on our parade. To us, they sound more like prison than freedom. Is that how the Commandments sound to you?

Well, getting back to Jimmy—just then, the whistle blew. His cell door opened. He sat up in his bunk. Here we go, Jimmy thought, heading to the mess hall for breakfast.

As it turns out, Jimmy's lifestyle—doing things *his* way and nobody else's—landed him in the slammer. Sure, he doesn't have to pay rent, but he doesn't have a choice which neighborhood either. He might never have to worry about going hungry, but his menu options are pretty limited. His time might be his, but he also can't spend it any way he'd like. We come to find out, that what we might sometimes call "freedom"—doing what we like, when we like, wherever we like—is really no freedom at all. So, what happened? At first, it sounded like Jimmy had it made. But then, we get the rest of the story.

Could that be our problem this morning? Is our lack of background, lack of setting, lack of *Introduction* is that what's causing us to think that sin = freedom and Commandments = slavery? Commandments = imprisonment? Commandments = no freedom at all? Are we thinking only about the "*Thou shalt's*" and "*Thou shalt not's*," not really understanding what any of it is about?

Well, let me give you that Introduction. Before inscribing a single commandment on any tablet of stone, God has this to say, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Now, does that opening line sound like the type of guy who wants to cancel the party and spoil your fun?

You see, back in those days, if a person had a god, then that means *they* were the ones who'd made the choice to worship that god. But here, God says, "I am the Lord your God." In other words, God's doing everything backwards, *He's* the one choosing *them*, adopting *them*, making them *His* special people. Not sure if you realize it, but that's pretty *huge*! After all, *who* are *they*? They were a bunch of slaves doing the Egyptians' dirty work. They're a bunch of losers, zeros, nobodies, and out of anybody on the planet God makes *them* His chosen people!

Now, *they* couldn't have struck it richer since God's not just any god, but He's *the* God—the one and only God—and if anybody can help them, *He* can! And help He did—calling them out of Egypt, out of slavery; clearing a path through the Red Sea for them to escape and then wiping out their enemies' chariots; when their tummies rumbled, He was the one who rained down manna from heaven and covered their camp with quail; when their throats felt bone-dry, it was He who quenched their thirst with water from a rock; and all the while He was leading them to their promised digs, a land so great it was said to be flowing with milk and honey. That's their God, the One who's done nothing but adopt them, care for them, give them a home, and now He's gonna lay down the house rules. God up to that point had been nothing

but loving and kind and generous, so why wouldn't we expect His Commandments to be good too? So, that's the rest of the story, the *Introduction* to what comes next, God's commandments—all ten of them. And I hope we're beginning to see what's going on here.

You can also look at it another way—every new member class, I start off with this little exercise. I draw two columns, titling the first Eden and the second Earth. And I ask the class to tell me all the things that made Eden great. They'll say stuff like, "No pain," "No death," "No lack"—mostly stuff that's all in the negative: no this-no that. Which makes it kinda easy then when we move into the Earth column, when we talk about all the things that make our world absolutely no picnic. "So, what should we put under *this* column?" I'll ask. And they'll say, "Pain," "Death," "Lack." Finally, after filling in both columns we'll wrap up with one last question—"What's the difference between this column and that column, between Eden and Earth?" Do *you* know the answer? (If you're a new member keep your hand down). The answer is *sin*. Sin is what keeps this place from being Paradise. Sin is what makes our planet a living hell sometimes. So then, which sounds more like freedom—sin which leads to hell on earth, or God's Commandments which brings about a sort of heaven on earth? Maybe now, after this Introduction, sin just doesn't have the same ring to it.

So, tell me, are you thinking what I'm thinking—do you also have sin on the brain? Of course, I don't mean the allure, the excitement of sin; but the regret of every wrong we've ever done? I mean, am I the only one who's reflecting now on all the ways we've broken God's commandments, every last one of them? Are you, like me, getting ready to enter your jail cell, as if God's gonna lock us up and throw away the key?

Well, if so, as the door to our cell slides open—*rattle, rattle*—and as we take our first step into that cold, dark, solitary box, all of a sudden—out of nowhere—someone slips past and slams the door on us. Who was it, we wonder? It happened in such a flash, did you catch who that was? As we peer through the bars we can sorta make out a familiar face. It's a man, smiling at us, eyes full of compassion. And there He is, jingling the keys in His hand, purposely locking Himself into our cell from the inside. Why, it's Jesus we discover! Innocent, blameless, wouldn't-hurt-a-fly Jesus. But what's He doing—that cell is for us, not Him!

We hear Him speak from the inside familiar words to us, ones we heard earlier in the Gospel this morning. "Sure," He says, "truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin[—a prisoner of sin.]" Immediately, our web of lies and deception comes to mind; our servitude to vices and slavery to addictions, our feeling trapped inside the lives we've created for ourselves, that all enters our heads. But Jesus isn't done with us yet, and what He goes on to say to us makes all the difference. "But[—*but!*—He says,] "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Then He gestures to us, motioning for us to go—you and I, we are free. The Son has set us free—we are free indeed.

Two thousand years ago, in a place called Jerusalem, Jesus did just this. He was an innocent man—never did anything wrong in His life—but when He was arrested, He willingly went along, peacefully.

"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth;

he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not speak."

Jesus stepped into our place, did time for us, even faced the death penalty for you and me, all so that everybody in this room could walk away a free man and a free woman.

See, "the LORD has laid on *him* the iniquity of us all.

he was pierced for our transgressions; *he* was crushed for our iniquities;

upon *him* was the chastisement that brought us peace,

and with his wounds we are healed[—we are set free!]"

Again, "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Just moments ago, at the beginning of the service, this actually happened for you again today. You confessed your sins, you handed them over to Jesus, you laid them all on Him. And with Holy Absolution, the liberating Gospel—Christ's

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death and resurrection—was applied to you once more. The Office of the keys stuck Jesus, the Key of David, into those sins of yours that had you all locked up and bound tight. And *click* those sins have been unloosed, undone, they have fallen off and have no more hold on you. No wonder the Greek word for forgiveness is also translated *freedom* and *release*!

So, how will you spend today, the first day of the rest of your life? I say, live it up! Enjoy your newfound freedom! Forget the slavery and imprisonment of sin—you have been freed up to live as God intended. His Commandments remind you of your relationship with a good, and gracious, and forgiving God, who has adopted someone like you, chosen you, unexpectedly and unconditionally made you *His*. And with those Commandments, you get to experience a little slice of heaven here and now—you get to see what life was like back in Eden. Remember, “Because the Son has set you free, you are free indeed.”

Jimmy opened his eyes to a brand new day. The morning sun came streaming in through the window. He took a deep breath and let out a sigh—what was that, he wondered! Stuck in jail! Forced to eat prison food! Having to just sit there, watching the time tick away. Putting his hands behind his head, Jimmy said, “Good thing it was all just a dream.”

Just then, he looked over at the cross hanging on his wall. It reminded him how he had been released from his own personal prison, from having to do things his way—the wrong way—all the time. He said a quick prayer, thanking God that he’d been shown a *better* way, and thanking Jesus that he was given yet another fresh start. Here we go, Jimmy thought, sitting up in bed and heading for the door. On his way out, a Bible verse popped into his mind, it was John 8:36—“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

You and I, we’re a lot like Jimmy, aren’t we—a lot like Jimmy!