

Two!

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[0 : 0 0] I would like us to go back this evening to Exodus. We read John's Gospel, the story of Jesus with the Samaritan woman to which I will refer. But also we are going to look at the second commandment. This is the second in our series of looking through the 10 commandments and it is Exodus chapter 20 from verse 4 to verse 6. But I will just read from the beginning again. Last week we looked at the first commandment, I am the Lord your God.

God spoke these words, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt out of the land of slavery. And the first commandment, you shall have no other gods before me. And then the second commandment is this, you shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or in the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them for I, the Lord your God, I am a jealous God punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Okay, so we are going to spend just a few minutes looking at this commandment this evening. And in many ways the first two commandments are two sides of one coin. You kind of need both of them together and they are quite similar but there are also distinctive truths and emphasis about them. The first commandment is really about making sure that we worship the only God. There is, there is only one God and we worship Him and we recognise Him as worthy of our worship and we cannot put anything before God and we saw that last week.

And this is more about the importance of not worshiping the right God the wrong way. So if the first commandment is the fact that there is a God and we worship Him and we worship Him because He is worthy, then this command is more about making sure that we do worship this right God but that we don't worship Him the wrong way because it is possible to worship the right God the wrong way. And so He wants us to make sure that we are worshiping the right way. It matters in other words how we worship God. It matters how you live your life and worship to God. It matters how we worship God when we gather together. It matters that we understand the God that we worship so we worship Him the right way. This command is all about God not being misrepresented. We don't like that do we? Thankfully none of us are famous. Some of you might be famous I don't know. But none of you are in the press very much. And it must be really difficult for people in the press, in the media because they are constantly being misrepresented. And if you have ever been quoted in a paper or quoted on the television or anything and they get it wrong. And they get your character wrong and they get your motives wrong and they get your thinking wrong and you well up with a degree of rights as indignation because they don't know me and they are not saying the right things about me. And they really got a wrong end of the stick when it comes to me. And that must be what it is like for so many people in the public eye when cheap things are said or things are said quickly or carelessly about them. And that can happen to us not just when we are famous it can happen to us with friends when we hear something and maybe it's gossip and we pass it on and then it gets back to us and say well that's not right, that's not fair, that's not what I was thinking, that's not why I did that.

And people misrepresent us sometimes deliberately sometimes completely innocently. But really this command is very much about God not being misrepresented. He's a real God. He's a significant God. He's an important God. He's a person. We're to be in a relationship with them and we're not to misrepresent him by worshiping him the wrong way. By following him, by serving him in a way that he doesn't want us to do. We saw last week really that our hearts are all our sinful hearts have this tendency to displace God all the time with other objects of worship. G.K. Chesterton is reputed to have said, there's me saying he is, he did say, not just reputed to have said. When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything. And that is often the case, isn't it, that anything goes when God is taking out the picture, putting first anything but God where our desires dictate what we regard as important and what we put first. And Calvin said that sinful tendency is for our heart to be a perpetual factory of idols. And we kind of looked at that a little bit last week. But also what this command speaks about and recognises with regard to our own hearts is the tendency we have to distort God. We might believe in God and we might believe there is a God but we distort the God that there is. We believe in God but we believe the wrong things about God. Now that might come in a very obvious form for us in the form of false religion, which would say that many paths lead to God, that God is a kind of amalgam of lots of different esoteric thinking and religious observance, whether it's Muslims seek Hindu or Mormon gods, it doesn't matter, all paths lead back to him.

[6 : 18] And it doesn't really matter what we believe as long as we believe in some kind of higher power. But that does stand very much against the exclusivity of the Bible's claims and the exclusivity of Jesus claims himself, which we saw this morning when we were talking about going home. And Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life to our way, the truth of life. No man comes to the Father but by me. And so he makes these exclusive claims.

We can't make them ourselves. We don't dictate them ourselves but they come from Jesus and their followers of him. So we recognize and see that there is false religion. There must be if there is truth, there is falseness. And we stand humbly and respectfully on the platform of truth and the truth that God is revealed in Jesus Christ. And we recognize that that is crucial because God isn't simply a plasticine person that we can mould any way we want.

But he's a real being and he is a real character and truth is known about him and falsehood can be passed on about him. So there's false worship but there's also false ideas about God. And doing what God doesn't want us to do. Now this command that we're given here is primarily not so much speaking about idolatry in the sense of the kind of idolatry that the Egyptians engaged in when Israel was freed from. They had lots of different gods, hundreds of gods, gods for everything. And they had images made of wood and stone that they worshipped.

It wasn't so much that that is what God is speaking about here, not about false gods with false idols. He's speaking about using idols to worship the true God. Now do you see the difference? The difference is what the Israelites did when Moses came down from the mountain. And when he came down the people had created a golden calf, hadn't they? And it wasn't an idol in and of itself, it was to be a representation of God, the God who'd freed them from slavery. So it was the God they were wanting to worship but it was in the form of an idol. And God did not want that to happen. It happens at different points in the Old Testament where the Israelites kind of got mixed up and used visual representations to bow down to to worship God. It was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob they were worshipping but they were worshipping an idolatrous form of him and God doesn't want that to happen in their worship because God is Spirit and those who worship him worship him is Spirit and Truth. So the idols, the Israelites had false ideas of worshipping the true God. Now we are far too sophisticated to do that aren't we? But there's other ways in which we can worship what we think to be the true God because we believe in God the wrong way. We can do so by mental idolatry. You know when you hear a sentence that starts with I think God is like, it usually leads to idolatry. I think God is like this, I think God is like that.

I don't believe that God can be like this, I don't think God is like that. I can't believe in that kind of God as is revealed in the Bible. Anything that stems from our own ideas of what God is like, what we would maybe, what we would love him to be maybe, what we think he ought to be that is in contradiction to how he reveals himself in his word is mental idolatry and we hear all the time don't we? And we think about it all the time and we are in danger of being idolatrous all the time ourselves where we think well I don't really like that kind of revelation of God. I would much rather a God who is like this or like that, much more like me, much more like whoever and it's easy for us to be increased in mental idolatry and it's easy at the same time for us to remold God at that level in our own thinking. We see all the time, we see all the time in religion where people have decided that the Bible isn't the revelation of God or the final revelation of God so they change God all the time, they change morality and they change thinking and they change ideas about who God is and a society which has rejected the idea of divine authority as ours has at Law of Authority and specifically has rejected the idea of exclusivity will remold

[11 : 39] God in their own thinking. A God that must be tolerant of everything because we live in a tolerant society. Jay John who has written a really good commentary or book on the Ten Commandments talks about society today and says that we are tolerant of everything except blood sports, fur coats, new bypasses and traditional Christianity and that's very true in many ways, it's the tolerance of intolerance and the whole idea of re-typing setting God to meet this tolerant society that is tolerant of everything but the truth is a danger that would make us idolatrous in our understanding of God and of course we can be idolatrous by replacing God in a religious way where we can focus our attention on our religion and on our own form of religion and of our own obedience to that religion or of attendance at the church of that religion or we can be idolatrous towards the denomination that we belong to or even theology and reform thinking and Calvin and a particular frame of worship or certain truths that we regard as being the absolute exclusive revelation of the nature and character of God beyond what scripture allows us to do. Satan will always often come as an angel of light and so we don't put our faith and our trust in any of these things but we recognise that God must be allowed to be worshipped for who he is and that we don't misrepresent him and make him a God that we simply want and we like. I think that's why it's one of the reasons there are so many divisions in the church, it's one of the reasons there are so many different brands because everyone thinks that their version of God is the right one. There's a lot of fundamental truths about God that we must stick to but there is also a lot that is not revealed and there's a lot that we are allowed to have different opinions of in terms of behaviour and action and understanding.

So how do we interpret and understand this command which reminds us of the nature and character of God? Well we are required to go to the New Testament, we are required to recognise the reality that the commands expose our need of a saviour and expose our need of the light of Christ to lighten up our darkness and to remind us and show us who God is and how he wants to be worshipped. Of course we see who God is in the person of Jesus Christ and he tells us very specifically in that passage we read in John chapter 4 which is not dissimilar in terms of the background to the kind of problems that the Jewish people were having when Jesus speaks with the Samaritan women and there's division between the Samaritans and the Jews and Samaritans think they have got God right and they know how to worship him and the Jews think they have got God right and they know how to worship him and the two never meet and they hate one another and there's great division between them and God in speaking to this woman, Jesus speaking to this woman says you know those who worship me must worship me in spirit and in truth John 24. When true worshipers worship the Father in spirit and in truth for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seek. God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. That's a hugely significant factor of our understanding of the commandment that we can't worship him in and of ourselves, that we need to be spiritually reborn, it's key, we need a change in our hearts and we need to be reborn so we can understand and worship him and worship him through the prism again as we look again at the cross because he is spirit. So we can't form him into anything either in the heavens above in the sky or the earth, the water below. Now that's kind of creation language isn't it? It's the same kind of language that's in Genesis 1 to 3 and he says you can't worship

God as something that's like us because he's not like us because he's a spirit and he's eternal and he is unchangeable and he is separate from us unless we come to him through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We are made for relationship with God through Jesus Christ and we worship him in Jesus name and through Jesus and that is the only way that we can truly worship him. The only image that God, that God gives a stamp of approval to is us, that we are made in God's image. That's the only image he allows. It's a broken image by sin but it's an image that's renewed in Christ and we recognize the significance and the value of who we are because he has given his spirit to redeem us so that we become like God and like Jesus Christ to renew us, to forgive us and to bring us closer to himself.

So when we gather in worship for example, public worship that's what we always, we often talk about, gather together, we worship in spirit. That is genuine worship is in the name of Jesus and it's in his strength and it is having come forgiven and cleansed and renewed by his spirit and it's coming dependent on him. It's not about great music, great preaching, great company, these things are all there in the mix as it were but the important reality is that we come in the name and in the reliance on Jesus Christ and his spirit.

You can't worship him by just dragging yourself into his presence and kind of hoping that something nice will happen. We don't worship him by the ritual of coming. We don't worship him just by being here. Worship requires that we are dependent on his spirit genuinely and in reality and that we are spiritual beings as people who are living in relationship with him and along with that our worship must be in spirit and in truth and that of course not goes not just for our public worship here, it goes for our lives. That's very important.

[19:17] Romans 12, 1 speaks about us being living sacrifices, living worshipers, holy and acceptable to God, our whole lives are to be based on truth. That's a really significant fact here.

Jesus, God doesn't want to be misrepresented. How is he not going to be misrepresented when we worship him in truth, when we understand who he is. He has revealed himself. The word is really, really important. So much so that we've talked about it a lot here recently is that Jesus calls himself the word. The word incarnate is the communication. He's talking about who God is through himself. It's a revelation of God. The word matters, scripture matters, the Bible matters because it speaks about who God is. All of it speaks about who God is. We saw these bits this morning that you thought were boring and irresistible.

Irrelevant and insignificant about all the details of the Tabernacle and it all speaks about God. It all speaks about his nature and his character and it all points forward to Jesus and we will always be learning about God in the word and it's to be our guide and it's to be the focus. That's why this thing here is in the middle of the church, the pulpit because the word of God matters when we gather together. That's why that was up there like that. It wasn't so it would be 10 feet above contradiction. It would be so that everyone in the galleries when there was no microphone system would hear it and it was central. The word was central. Not any kind of image, not any crucifix, nothing else but the word. The living, growing, blossoming word of God and so the truth matters tremendously to us. You know that passage in Romans chapter 12 that I mentioned there at the end of the 11 chapters of hugely deep and magnificent theology, therefore I urge you brothers Romans 12, in view of God's mercy offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to

God. This is your spiritual act of worship and it says do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world or as JB Phillips translates it, do not let the world squeeze you into its mould. It says do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed walk by, by dance, by singing, by meals together. No, by the renewing of your mind. He says it's by the renewing of our mind. It's because truth matters and again to a greater or lesser degree I'm not making any judgments on these other things that I mentioned although we will not be doing any dancing here very shortly. But it is the truth, God's revelation that is absolutely significant to our understanding of God and keeping this commandment. We will not make an idol of the living God when we know him in truth and we will only know him in truth when we are opening our minds to his word and that is hugely significant.

Hugely important, can I just stress that to the young people that you will make the Bible really important in your life because it's the truth that reveals the character of God and it's beautiful and it's life changing because it reveals a living God, a living Savior and one of great magnitude. And so we recognise that worship is to be greatly, is to be spiritual and it's to be through Jesus Christ and it is, this commandment is also an expression of the nature of God's love for us which we see in Jesus Christ of course but here it's maybe described differently as he says you know worship me, don't bow down to them the wrong way for I the Lord your God, I'm a jealous God. Now we've kind of, it's a pejorative term, jealousy for us for the most part, it's not a positive word, it's a negative word generally. We think of someone who's jealous as being someone who's insane or possessive or insecure, they're really jealous. But there's a real positive side to jealousy as well, it's about protection and there's a goodness obviously in God, there's a goodness, you know if a husband has a picture of another woman in his wallet and his wife has every right to be jealous about that, that he is looking at and keeping close to him this picture of somebody else that he is not with, that he's not married to. There's a right, you can see that, can't you? A right jealousy that that person's possessive, there's an exclusivity in that relationship that doesn't bear somebody else's picture being in the wallet. And that's partly what is being spoken of here is this idea that maybe less romantically a mother or a father's love for their child, a possessive, protective of love, that wouldn't just give them away or wouldn't allow others to take them. And

[25 : 09] God is like that, He has a jealous love, it's shown to us on the cross and that must always be for us the prism through which we look at this command and this characteristic of jealousy, the inestimable cost that we've seen before of His great love for us, this exclusive love that when we come to Him He says, you are mine, you're my precious, precious people, you're mine and it's a love that bears no rivals. So He says to you, you can't share your heart with other gods or with other things that put me further down the line. God isn't just, He's never an added extra, He's never just a lifestyle choice, He is the king of kings and He is the Lord of lords and He has done everything to set you free and to pour out His grace on you so that death does not have a grip on your life, you have joy and happiness and blessing and that demands His exclusivity of you, not just a bit, it demands that exclusivity, He's a jealous God at that level, He says, I don't want you to be, look warm with me, I don't want you to play hard and fast with my love, I want your submission,

I want your trust because there is no other way and I don't want you to just have me as an added extra because He is the living God and we worship Him in our lives by giving Him that rightful place because there's a reminder here and it's a very difficult section with us we finish, speaks about the Lord being a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of their fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me but showing love to thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments and there's a reality there that God is a God of justice that we mentioned and we saw and spoke about this morning and that there is a day of reckoning and salvation is not an optional extra and that our obedience is hugely significant. Now I'm not going to go into this in great depth because I'm not sure if I truly understand this passage, this section in all its detail but there's a very real sense in which God is saying here at least that even as believers our behaviour has repercussions, covenantal repercussions. This was written into very much a family covenantal, much less individualistic than our day is today and generally a family would, one family, three or four generations would represent one family as it were and he's reminding us that sinful behaviour has consequences and he's not saying that children are going to be punished for the sins of their fathers because they're innocent, speaking about this recognition that those who have rebelled against God, that rebellion passes down quite often through generations and there is judgement on that. Our lives affect the generations after us. That's a solemnising thought in this very individualistic age which says I don't care what anyone else thinks or how my behaviour affects anyone, I'm just going to do what I want. Our behaviour has covenantal responsibility particularly for the heads of homes, for dads, for fathers, I believe but generally leaders in churches, those who have influence, the way they live their Christian lives affects not just them but those around them and God's justice recognises that but also that His grace goes far beyond justice. His justice is contained within that family unit to those who have rebelled against them and hate him and the consequences within that. Then His grace goes to a thousand generations.

It is incomparable at one level to His justice. It is remarkably wide and beautiful and gracious and we are asked to keep His commandments. How do we do that? Is that legalistic or is that moralistic? You always watch against being moralistic in church to say well just keep the commandments and you'll be okay because what do the commandments remind us?

None of us can keep the commandments. That's what they remind us. But what is the commandment of God? The commandment is to go to the cross. The commandment of God is that we need a redeemer.

The command of God is to repent and faith and the command of God is to be obeyed because we have new life and the Holy Spirit that enables us to obey Him. Repentance and faith.

[31 : 07] Then we become living sacrifices. Then we are living in His image and that's what He wants from us. So the recognition is always to remember spiritual dependency. If you're not praying for the Spirit, if you're not needing the Spirit then I think you're worshipping an idol. I think you're breaking this command. We worship in spirit but also in truth. If we don't get up in the morning and say well I think my God isn't like that anymore, I don't think God does such and such. I don't think He's like how He's portrayed in the Bible. If there's things in the Bible we struggle with with God and all of us struggle with different characteristics that are revealed. Often we will find that for 2,000 years people have struggled with them and we can learn from others writing and others who have studied it and others who have grappled with it and others who have gone through these issues.

But also we need to remember that we are sinners before a holy God and that there will be times when we are simply asked to trust Him. And I know that's not acceptable to some but it was good enough for Job in that revelation and I think there are times when we are simply on the, through the prism of the cross, asked to trust Him and that one day we might understand more. But let us seek to worship Him in spirit and in truth and not make for ourselves idols and not be disobedient and not drag Him into the gutter of our disobedience, of our sinfulness and of our rebellion. And may we remind ourselves that our lives affect people around us. And can I just say how important that is in a church context? That the way we live you can drag Christ down in the eyes of others by the way you live and I can do that by the way we speak, by the way we speak about one another or we speak about the church or the way we deal with one another in our lives. May it be that we recognise the importance of living grace filled lives together and apart. That's our heads and pray. Lord God we ask and pray that you would teach us more about yourself, that we would understand grace, that we would understand the commandments, that you have this amazing revelation of yourself as a person, as a spirit who can't be contained in imagery and can't be bowed down to and worshipped through that imagery or through that mental image that we make of God. May we seek always to worship you through truth and in the spirit of God with that gentle dependence upon Jesus Christ. And we thank you that the commands are such that they are like our teachers that lead us to Jesus. And may they remind us of how far short we fall of your glory, how unable we are truly to ever think that we can obey these 10 words without forgiveness, without renewal and without Christ. So bless us Lord we pray and may we worship Christ more when we think of his absolute perfect ability to obey these commands. For Jesus' sake, Amen.