

Eight!

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Date: 12 November 2023

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0:00] Okay, I ask you to turn back. If you have a church Bible, there's Bibles at the back if you want to take a Bible, but we're going to, I'm just going to read from Exodus, chapter 20 and verse 15. If you're visiting with us tonight, we're going through the Ten Commandments in our evening worship. And this evening is, You Shall Not Steal. And please remember also the reading from John, chapter 10. So I'm going to ask you a question. How's your heart tonight? And I don't mean your ticker. Okay, my old boss in Ruskin, Kenny McDonald, told me a story of visiting an old man and he was asking, How's your heart? And he was meaning spiritually. And the old man said, Well, I got it checked out last week and it's as good as ever. He had no idea that he was meaning spiritual, but I'm not meaning your ticker.

I'm not meaning your physical heart, obviously, spiritually. How are you spiritually? All of you. Ask yourself that question. You know, because it's the key to your life, isn't it?

It's the key to everything that you do. It's the focus. It will be that you will focus on what you love in your lives, because what you love will inform your mind and it will drive your will and will be what prioritizes all that you will do. And I think when you come to church, when we come to church, that should be a question that every single, each one of us should ask as we come to church. How's our heart today, before God, as we come under Him in His living Word? You know, Corey and I were just talking about preaching last week. And have you ever asked yourself what you think preaching, why preaching is part of worship? And what is the intention of this half hour of preaching? It's really declaring the good news of Jesus. That's what we're doing with authority and in the power of the Holy Spirit to enliven our hearts. That's what it is about. It's about enlivening our hearts, who warm them, to challenge them, and to lead to transformation. So each time we come, we should really come and we should leave with a view to being, if not actually being transformed in the evening. As we apply God's Word to our lives, we should see it transforming our hearts and our lives. So I'm asking several questions this evening by way of a long introduction. As you consider in the last month, or even the last week in your Christian life, can I ask if there's anything that you specifically pray for regularly?

What would maybe be, if you would, I'm not going to ask anyone, obviously, saying, but what would be the two things that you regularly, maybe daily, consistently pray for? Or maybe that question exposes the fact that you don't really pray very much at all as a Christian and you can't think the last time you prayed. Well, intentionally, if you can't think of anything specific, can I ask you to consider praying two prayers every single day? Lord Jesus, help me to love you better. And Lord Jesus, help me to love other people better.

You can make two prayers, intentional prayers every day. You're really saying, Lord, please change my heart. I want you to change my heart. Why? Why is that such an important prayer?

[3:43] Because it sums up everything God demands of us. It sums up all the law and the prophets. It sums up life actually to the full. Really? Like life to the full? Yeah, loving God and loving one another. John 10 describes as life to the full, to the brim is when we know and recognize that in our lives. And I'm asking that we pray that because it highlights God's law, the Ten Commandments, highlights everything we aren't. And it drives us towards Jesus, everything He is and what He has done for us. And it alone enables us to receive His redeeming and transforming love. So for us, it needs to be a measurable reality in our lives when we live as Christians. We can't allow ourselves to week to week be static, unchanging Christians. That's really insulting to God. It's a real denial of His love. It's a real denial of His promises. It's because I'm okay. I'm fine. I don't need any more.

And when I speak about love, it's nothing to do with sentimentality or softness. It's the meaning of everything in our lives. It makes us complete. It enables us to live life to the full. And from the very beginning, Satan's work has been as the enemy, as John 10, 10 reminds us, to steal and to destroy that life in us. He is the ultimate thief.

He is the one who stole humanity's innocence in the very beginning. And we've been complicit with Him ever since. Complicit with Him ever since. So I guess in a sense, preaching, when we talk about preaching, preaching is about presenting the big picture. It's about recognizing and trying to remind ourselves when we get hung up on just what's right in front of our eyes every day. Sometimes the minutiae that just fills up our lives as if it's massively important. And I guess preaching is there to remind us that some of these things, many of these things will one day mean absolutely nothing. And it's so important to be reaching out to God in Christ and recognizing what life to the full is through Him.

So I'm going to ask another question and try and answer it honestly just in your own heart as we're here this evening. If you're not a Christian, it's a really big question.

And if you are a Christian, it's probably an even bigger question because you know the right answer, and I know the right answer, but I struggle with it. It is, what does life to the full look like for you? If anyone is to ask you this evening, how would you describe what life to the full is for you? How would you answer that? Is it a comfortable life?

[6:49] Is it a conflict-free life? Is it just having lots of friends in your life? Often think of friends of the series, and the very sad reality of Matthew Perry's death this week, kind of shattered the image and the dream of eternal youth and the friendship that it spoke about in so many disordered ways, didn't it? It attracted in so many ways but disordered ways of friendship and security and family and laughter and love, searching, but searching in the wrong places. What would describe fullness of life? Passing your exams, success and work, pleasure, there's lots of different things. I wonder how many of us would say, knowing Jesus better in Christ, knowing God better through Christ and knowing His love in a more deep way. Okay, lots of questions thrown out just to make us consider this eighth commandment. So I'm going to make a statement now, rather than ask a question, because stealing in God's eyes is all about the wrong priorities. It's about having the wrong priorities. And that's really what the Ten Commandments do. They expose the fact that in so many ways we love but our loves are disordered and they're in the wrong way facing the wrong direction to the wrong people and they're broken and self-centered. The Ten Commandments expose us. That's what they're intended to do. They tell us about the level of love that God requires, which is perfect love for God and perfect love for one another. And it reminds us that we fail and we fall miserably short of His standards. The Old Testament people is a great testimony to that record of failure. But we're no different. Naturally, we're no different from that whatsoever in our lives. On the scales of God's justice, we are failed lovers.

That's what we are, what it matters. And maybe you think, well, the eighth commandment, I'm not okay with that one. I don't steal. I'm not a thief. And we kind of brush over it and think it's probably not that significant a one, but I would beg to differ on that.

Because the sobering reality that God reveals in His commandments and this one also, to put it differently, is that we're all thieves. We're a gang of thieves. Naturally, humanity is a company of thieves and beggars. That's what we are. Because we've stolen from God His rightful place. And we've put self at the center instead of God being at the center.

We have stolen His Lordship and we've taken... And there's quite a lot of dovetailing between me and Kory tonight. And I promise we didn't speak to one another to share our sermon.

But there is that reality that at a human level, sin has made us either put ourselves or material things or something else above God and above other people. And what does it look like? Well, it looks like that we take God's gifts, as we were reminded this morning, as of right. And we use them without reference to Him at all, humanly speaking. Our talents, our health, our time, our opportunities. We take them. We take them. We take them at the expense of a relationship with God and a relationship with others. And we see it all the time in the society in which we live, don't we? At all kinds of different levels, as employers, as employees, as from the government or by the government. We see it with goods and services. We see it with shoplifting, with armed robberies, with property theft, with contracts and politics and business. We see it between nations as they steal land off one another, shoot at insurance scams and online abuse, identity theft, copyright, bribery and hypocrisy of scale. Sometimes it's the little thieves that seem to be exposed, but theft on a grand scale seems to be okay politically or governmentally or economically.

[11:19] There's a fantastic... One of my favorite lines of all time in music is from Bob Dylan in the great album *Infidels*, *Sweet Heart Like You*. And he says, steal a little and they throw you in jail. Steal a lot and they make you king. And that's such a great summary of some of the perverse and hypocritical thinking we have around if thievery. And the Bible makes clear that it's actually a spiritual issue. It's a heart issue. Not primarily a material one where we maybe steal something from somebody else, although that obviously is part of it. It's saying God is not worth obeying. God's not worth making Lord. God is not worth giving the glory to Him. We do not respect Him or love others enough to not steal from them. It's about believing a lie. It's about choosing to believe the lie. And every day we are prayerless. Every day you go into work without praying. Every day you live your life without praying to God as a Christian. Every time we harbor a grudge against a fellow believer. Every time we accept a culture of stealing in the workplace or treating an unbeliever with disdain or sit in the throne of judgment, we're stealing from God. We're stealing from God. Prayerless Christian life is the life of a thief. We're saying that we don't need Him. And we are lords of our own lives, and we're not dependent on Him.

So what is God calling you and me to do this evening in the light of that great command? Well, in the first place He's encouraging us to see Christ in a new light. I want you to see Christ as a despised thief. We're told in Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 12 that He was numbered with the transgressors, numbered with the thieves. Now it's not insignificant that it was a thief that was on either side of Jesus Christ, and He was numbered with them. Martin Luther said there was three thieves on Calvary Hill. It was the two thieves, and there was Christ who became, as it were, a thief, who took all the thieving from God symbolized in sin and took it upon Himself. God in the flesh became numbered with the transgressors. And that's a powerful recognition of His association with us in our guilty humanity.

And it pierces the very heart of Satan and his thieving destruction, because Jesus takes on Himself the human consequences of all that we have done in rebelling against God, and all the thieving that was involved in that, all the stealing of the glory of God and taking it from Him. He receives it. Our death and the hell we deserve, the selfishness and the thieving mentality, He carried them. Isaiah 53 says He was crushed by them. He was wounded.

He was punished. But He rose again to offer life and peace with God, and the ability to have a new heart of love for Him and for one another that dissolves this motive of thieving and taking from God His glory and His right. So we see Christ in a new light as the commands all point us towards Christ in His finished work and also the way and the burden that He took. But also to pray with a new perspective, to pray with that perspective of wanting to live life to the full. I wonder if you're praying a prayer about living life to the full, what that would look like for you? What is the... If loving God and loving one another is not the focus of your prayers, what is the focus of your prayers? If we believe prayers, God answers prayers for us because He loves us. Do we treat Him like the genie in a lamp? Are our prayers based on our material lives or our circumstantial lives? You know, Lord, change what's happening around me. Make it better or make my own life better materially.

[16:11] None of these things are wrong. But let's pray with that perspective of saying, Lord, Jesus, help me to love You better and love my fellow believer better in church, not in church, not in the building. I just mean in community. Awkward, the difficult, the struggling, the needy to love them better and to love my enemy. God's Jesus' great extension of the Ten Commandments that we love our enemy in a remarkable way because that's the whole law and that's life to the full. That's where we enjoy life to the full. It's the best.

That will always involve confession and renewal. It must. That's why prayer is so significant because it does mold us and transform us and change us because we need in our sanctification to become more like Jesus. Lord, help me to listen to the right voices of the true shepherd.

Don't listen to the lies, the destruction, the thieving of the false shepherd that's spoken about in John 10, but the true shepherd. So pray with a different perspective. See Jesus in a different perspective who becomes dirty and a thief on your behalf to make you clean and to make you one who loves God and loves your neighbor. And then lastly, I think the practical implication is, as we love with the love of Christ in us, we will practice honesty. We will practice honesty in the workplace. As an employer, you give your employees a proper wage, not steal from them in our great capitalistic way. We're not to use dishonest scales as Hosea 12 or 7 says. Remember, the laborer is worthy of his wages for Timothy 5, 18. Employee. Many of your employees, some of your employers, probably many more of your employees, don't steal from your employer. Don't be lazy in the workplace. Don't steal time. Don't steal your expenses. Don't steal property that belongs to your employer. Remember, these are the small practical things that trigger people to say, what is the reason for the hope that's within you? Why do you live like that? Why don't you just do what everyone else does and steal from the employer because they're doing all the time anyway to you in the workplace as a citizen in the society. Go away from here and recognize our responsibility as bladders to stand up against corruption, against dishonesty, against the oppression of the poor. Don't support policies or practices that take advantage of the poor or encourage corruption. Pay the taxes that you're due. Don't avoid or evade because it's just acceptable. Stand against fraud. These are the kind of ordinary everyday things that we might be challenged within a very difficult work environment. I'm not suggesting any of these things are easy. In practice, generosity. We see that, don't we, as a practical outworking of the way Jesus transforms Zacchaeus' heart, who had stolen from the people all the time, didn't he, to make himself rich? What was the response of

Zacchaeus when he was overwhelmed by the generosity of Jesus? He gave it all out. He gave it back. It didn't mean anything to him. He didn't hoard wealth anymore. And that's the command of God through Paul in Ephesians 4. 28, when he talks about the Christians in the church, he said, if you've been stealing, don't steal anymore. Don't break any of the other second table of the law commands, but change. Be transformed, he says. Once you are like that, but you're not like that anymore, he says, work. Don't be lazy. Do these things as you can. Be generous. Recognizing that all that we have is a gift from God. And not stealing it from Him as if it's a right and hoarding it to ourselves. When we keep all that we earn, when we keep all the gifts that we've been given, we're robbing God. Malachi makes that clear. We're robbing God, because it's all from Him anyway. And lastly, I think, a broad practical application, think about your use of time. Think about how you use your time. Time's God's precious gift. Precious gift from us. We never get it back. We can't repeat it. It's limited. It's the one thing we can't buy back. And those of us who are getting old or know and recognize that even more than most, you will never be in the context you are in ever again. It's only a short time you're in the workplace with the colleagues you have. It's only a short time you're in the neighborhood. You only have a short time with your family before they've grown up and they're away. Short time, God gives it to us.

And He gives it to us to live life to the full in Him. Loving Him by loving one. That's the priority. Living His way for the short time. Giving Him the glory. Growing and being transformed because it will not happen anywhere else but here. Are we stealing the time that God gives us with relentless scrolling, with mindless pleasure, with a careless, reveling and hurtful tittle-tattle, or simply for selfish ambition? To build bigger barns. What are we doing with our time which is God's greatest gift to us in many ways other than His love, of course. And I just want to finish by reading some words from Romans chapter 13, which I think helped sum up what I've been trying to say this evening in many ways. Oh, no one anything except to love each other. For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

[23 : 08] For the commandments you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet. And any other commandment are summed up in this word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor therefore. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Can't finish with better words than that. Let's pray. Father, God help us to understand you, to understand your love and to understand that it's not an insignificant thing, it's not a soft and a sentimental thing. It is what transforms us at the very core of our being that motivates and transforms our will and our mind. And we pray and ask that we would see each of these commandments not simply as separate individual commands, but we would see them as a whole. And we see how they are interlinked. The first table of the early commandments reminding us of how we, in Christ can love you and only in Christ and reminding us that only in Christ can we love one another as we're called to.

So keep us Lord from being thieves. Keep us from stealing the time that is yours for our own selfish ends. Keep us from enthroning ourselves as Lords of our own lives. Make us humble, we pray, and gentle and respectful and with great serving hearts to love you and to love one another. And transform us, we pray, as we pray every day that you would teach us to love you better, to love one another and to be forgiven and to repent of when that is simply and clearly not the case. We ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.