

Eight!

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[0 : 0 0] Now just for a little while this evening I want to look at the eighth commandment which is the shortest one, you shall not steal and you're all looking around at each other saying do I think there's any thieves in here but we've said that with all the commands haven't we that we can kind of tick them off at various points and think that maybe they don't apply to us but I hope that we can maybe unravel a little bit of this commandment and see what it means not just for ourselves but also for society. Now we maybe don't spend that, I maybe don't spend a lot of time, I think most of my preaching would be to the individual and a lot of the New Testament is written to the individual but I think there's also a sense in which we see the commands broadening out and having a real important effect on the kind of society we live in or the kind of society we probably don't live in to be honest now, I want to finish with a little bit of that so I'm not going to get political, well maybe a little bit but we see the commands are kind of, they're split aren't they into two, the commandments of God at the first half, at least the first four are kind of vertically oriented towards our relationship with God about how we think of Him, how we speak of Him, how we worship Him and it exposes that we fail so much and so there's an element that the commands are there to point us to Jesus to save us and rescue us from our own inability to keep the commands and that's very much part of the role that they play so I think there's someone actually who's sitting in this building who the first time

I preached these commandments here, I thought yeah I know this, this and this and as we went through them he recognized that actually he needed a saviour and became a Christian and that's part of the role of the commandments is to do that but also when we become Christians and when we've got the power of God in our lives then we find that they are guidelines and the parameters for our Christian living and so we've got the first section that look at God and our relationship with God and then we've got the second table of the lofty, you can call it that which is more about our horizontal relationships so how you relate to the person next to you in the pew, how you relate to your husband or wife, how you relate to your neighbour or your colleague, how we relate to one another and so there about a protection of a relationship with God and also the protection of our relationships with one another so the commandment, the latter commandments highlight basic human rights and the protection of life, the protection of marriage, the protection of property, the protection of justice, all of these things come under the rubric of these last commands and God's concerned about that and they're very far ranging, they're only kind of summary statements from God which are expanded in a lot of places in the Bible including in the passage that we read today tonight but the eighth commandment is a basic command against stealing which is about the protection of one another's lives and properties in many ways, within that there's that underlying lack of truth, lack of trust probably involves as it broadens out lying and cheating and greed and insecurity in a lot of cases and a lack of respect for other people and other people's property and stealing is, we see the antithesis of all these commandments in the nature of Satan and his destructive character, we looked at that this morning that Jesus was the good shepherd and Satan's described as the thief who comes to steal, who comes to destroy and so it's very much related to the destructive nature of darkness and of Satan and of hell which is to disrupt and destroy the unity of humanity and of human beings and anyone here, I didn't mention this this morning without thinking about this evening, anyone who has been stolen from knows that.

If you've had things stolen from you, you know immediately that it sets you on edge, who is it? Who did that? How did they know?

Why did they do that? That's rather uncomfortable, even though nothing's been stolen from your house, if you come home and the windows open and things have been disrupted, it's not just an uneasy feeling, isn't it?

You feel violated, you feel that your property has been violated, that that space that you regard as your own has been taken and there's a sense of unease and mistrust comes into relationships when that is evident.

[5 : 40] So Paul in Ephesians is speaking about living as children of light. We saw this morning the picture of Jesus as the one who comes to bring life and he is the one who brings life and light.

So light is knowledge and understanding and spiritual insight and he brings that through his salvation and he says as Christians we live as children of the light.

So we've moved, remember we saw this morning that you move from death to life when you become a Christian, spiritually you've moved from darkness to light and so there's this movement in our lives and it's an ongoing movement, it's an ongoing process that we're to live as children of the light.

So there's a kind of transforming reality that is always happening in our lives as old ways get ditched and new ways get adopted in our life.

Now can I just digress completely for a minute and ask the AV team to switch my mic down a bit, I'm ringing around here too much, it's too loud.

[6 : 52] Okay, you still hear me? Maybe up just a twitch smidging. Yep, you still hear me? That's better.

Okay, that's good. As far as I was hearing myself, it's bad enough hearing myself once but hearing myself twice coming back, it's not good for me or for anyone else. And so living as children of light, we have a motivation to do so, we have a desire to do so because of what Jesus has done for us and because we see, we begin to see that his parameters for our living, the Ten Commandments, there's only ten, are for our benefit, they're for our good, they're for our blessing both in our relationship with him and in our relationship with one another, they're all about valuing life, valuing him and putting him first and we know we need forgiveness and we need to turn to him again and again but we find he gives us the way of living and it's interesting in, for example in Titus where Paul is speaking or giving a letter to Titus and passing on New Testament exhortations to the people and when he's talking about even slaves, now it wasn't that the New Testament was condoning slavery but it recognised that it happened and even slaves had to live as children of light if they were Christians and he says teach slaves to be subject to their masters and not to steal from them because that was obviously what happened all the time, very tempting it would have been too presumably to do so but to show that they can be fully trusted to make God our saviour attractive. So there was an injunction even on slaves at that point to live in such a way that would make their saviour attractive by being, them being fully trusted so the whole issue about stealing is also related to the whole issue of trust so that in a Christian community there should be a really high level of trust if there's a trust omitter that we could put in the church it should ring really high in a Christian community because there should be a high level of trust and a high level of honesty not just in our day to day dealings, not in this sense you could put your hand back down no one's going to steal it we can hope that's not going to happen but just in our honesty and our relationships and the trustworthiness with which we deal with one another which is related to this but can I just go on to speak about the specifics of this commandment do not steal I think it applies at different levels to us maybe in some way more than others and I may go off the mark at some places and it's very simple isn't it at one level it doesn't need any explanation I guess in our lives but as individuals there's this recognition that God has given us gifts God has given us the ability to own things and to have property there's nothing wrong with that some people in the New Testament church at the very early stages decided to sell all their property and give it to the cause of Christ that's fine that was fine it wasn't a command for all time property is regarded and recognized biblically as a good thing our material possessions but they're not ours to hoard they're not ours to amass and build up more and more shoes and suits and houses and cars as if that's all that matters everything that we own and have we have in stewards almost we're stewards of it and we're to use it in a way that is God glorifying for ourselves our family to help others to maintain the state to support God's work whatever it is that we do but we recognize even within this command that God respects

ownership of property and it's okay for that to have that and so that for the individual it's a very simple command that's stealing from other people is wrong you know if someone has something and you don't have it and you want it you don't steal it okay that's fairly simple and I'm sure you all know that and I know that and that's the kind of absolute basic command you wouldn't go into someone else's house and steal their watch because you liked it and they have it and I don't well I hope you wouldn't because we are you're breaking this commandment and that's not great but it's a little bit more it can be a little bit more subtle than that I think potentially stealing from employers and not potentially but in reality stealing from our employers is wrong I think sometimes we can have a very casual attitude towards the time we spend at work how we spend at work what we do with the time that we're at work and how we potentially abuse that time what we claim from work what we claim from expenses because it's all socially acceptable we see it all the time we see it among our politicians we see it among our employers we see it in lots of places that it's okay it's just up for grabs to get as much as we can from our employers and to gain as much as we can from them but in many ways what was attractive even about Christian slaves and the time it Tidus was in it was when they were being honest and trustworthy with their employers who were very often not employers but those slave traders who were slave masters who were often brutal and not acting in an acceptable way but we need to just be aware that the Christian walk always challenges us to maybe live in a way that is not socially acceptable that's not we don't just put on an extra couple of hours on overtime that we didn't actually work because it's stealing from our employer because it's not our right to do that because we have a higher standard than just what everyone else is doing around us because of Christ our Savior and Lord stealing from employers maybe even stealing from the state is an application of this taking benefits that we're not entitled to or avoiding taxes that we should be paying uncomfortable as we sit in our seats again fair game today the whole drive of society and I'm not saying that governments use taxes in the right way but Jesus said render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is

God's and if we are to pay tax even if it's an unfair tax as a Christian we have the duty to be absolutely honest in all our dealings even if nobody else sees that but maybe a more sensitive application is stealing from God himself where we steal with an attitude of thanklessness selfishness by hoarding what he's gifted to us for ourselves by not giving back to him and to the gospel work in proportion to what he's given to us you know the Malachi speaks about that about the people who were robbing God they were stealing from God because they weren't giving to God what was his due financially in terms of gospel ministry gospel work and New Testament is full of encouragement to give proportionally to give sacrificially to give cheerfully to give happily because it's God's in the first place and anything we have as a gift from him and so there's that sense in which you might be stealing from him everything we earning we just keep in our pockets and stuff our pockets with it and if I've got five pence at the end of the month we'll give that into the to the work of the gospel not recognizing that he wants us to proportionally give from what we are doesn't want everything from us he simply wants us to recognize that what we have is we are stewards of and he's given us in the first place but maybe it's in stealing time from God again that you know he's given us so much he's given us so much and we're only here for a short time but he wants us to use that time proportionally as Christians to serve him to serve other people to not simply be concerned about our own futures and our own wealth creation and our own benefits but to use our time and our talents and our energies in doing his work and then serving him because time is so short I guess there's a kind of biblical pattern and six and one in terms of the weekly pattern of life but

I think it goes beyond that because we're to be living sacrifices in all that we are and of course in terms of stealing from God there's stealing the glory from God you know where we have dethroned him we've kicked him off the throne of our hearts altogether he's not there and we're on the throne of our hearts we're number one we're all it's important we live for ourselves and not forgets the root of sin isn't it it's the root of sin from the very beginning that we don't need to him we're not interested in him we're stealing from him the glory that's due to his name because of who he is the sovereignty of our lives is in our own hands and we've got no time for allowing him to be lord over us we've rejected the truth and that a very fundamental level is where the commands point us to Jesus all the commands point us to Jesus because Jesus fulfilled them in our place where we fail he acted absolutely perfectly in each situation he never broke this command practically or mentally or in his mind or anything physically he absolutely kept this and God was Lord over his life as he lived as a human being and yet he died as one who is a law breaker because he was dying in our place so we recognize that Jesus is who we need because we break this command in thought and word and indeed by wanting to receive the glory for us to stealing the glory stealing the time and maybe in other ways stealing from God or from our employer or from society or whatever it might be and so it always points to a new heart points to a new attitude points to a new desire within us that we want to serve in the society we live not just by society standards and I think even in today's society at some level stealing is regarded as a crime but in lots of ways it's not if we've seen the way that just decisions are made it's okay for some to steal in other words and maybe not others and it's easy to pick out the obvious stealers but maybe there's those who steal we are fine clothes who are not so easy to expose because society accepts there's a general level of deceit and hypocrisy and theft that happens whether it be through tax evasion or whatever it might be avoidance so there's individuals that this command breaks and then briefly can I just mention employers which may or may not apply to us directly here but applies to your thinking and also lastly very moving governments so just employers because the Bible doesn't just speak about the individual the Bible also is clear about the responsibilities of employers and the responsibilities of society as a whole and in Malachi 3 verse 5 God says so I will come near to you in judgment against those who defraud laborers of their wages or those who use in Hosea 12 verse 7 the merchant who uses dishonest scales and who loves to defraud the Bible quite often uses that picture of dishonest scales where there was they weighed the scales in a certain way so that you were getting less for what you were paying for

[20 : 54] and it was quite subtle but there were dishonest scales and the use of these dishonest scales false weights and measures there's a lot in Deuteronomy about the false weights and measures and it was it was employers were or businessmen were business people were defrauding and cheating on the public so that they could earn more profit that sounds familiar God sees that and it is an uncomfortable reality that many of our big businesses are abusing their right to make money because they are doing so in a way that is deceptive false weights and measures in some cases will be being used because all of society is broken by sin and that includes big business and we need to recognize that in our understanding and thinking of the world in which you live as is the denial of a proper wage we read about the Bible has lots to say about injustice and it's all very well for us to speak about personal faith and poverty being the result of people's bad choices and everything else like that which we say from the comfort of our middle class realities but the Bible speaks about the importance of not denying a proper wage to the worker the worker is where worthy of his hire now we know there's abuses on the labor side the employment labor side is not a political labor side but we know there's also abuses on the employer side and we recognize that and we need to recognize that and stand up against it because we live in a society where greed and exploitation is hugely acceptable and hugely important modern day slavery as it were God despises oppression of the poor Luke James 5 verse 4 says the wages you the rich people have failed to pay the workers are crying out against you while you have lived in luxury and self indulgence I don't think you can spiritualize that and you move away from it being an absolute categorical standing against the vast inequalities that we see in the society in which we live because as the rich get richer the poorer getting poorer and that stands as a great mark of guilt on the day of judgment there's astonishing figures of the Western world and of the monumental and doubling and trebling and quadrupling of wealth of the very top end of society which is in the backdrop of a great deal of poverty also and we recognize that human rights and God's will is being broken by that injustice so employers have a responsibility as do employees which I mentioned earlier so the

Bible is very practical and our Christianity must be very practical and they say it even our politics need to be practically outworked on the basis as much as is possible where we can make choices make choices that are honoring to God that's very difficult I appreciate but lastly very briefly I think government is also highly responsible under God not to steal how that works out I'm not quite sure in terms of justice and judgment everyone will stand before God as individuals but anytime society or government fails to understand and recognize their moral responsibility then we begin to go down a very dangerous road where people are only potentially economic units where we recognize in the world in which we live the inequality the world inequality is a huge problem richer countries as as individuals getting richer poorer countries getting poorer economic systems which take advantage of natural resources in poor countries and abuse these countries and bleed them dry in order for a certain other sectors in the world to benefit from it paying slave wages for high quality sports goods that are sold for vast profit in the West whereas the workers are not being paid fairly for what they are doing where the power of government decisions is not moral but is based on economic power and economic significance and economic influence and I guess kind of modern day colonialism God says of Assyria who an early colonial country in terms of taking over other nations I have removed the boundaries of nations they said

I have plundered their treasures God's judgment is that I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the hotty look in his eyes and all of that is constantly something that we see in the world in which we live and very clearly in Ukraine at the moment I guess at one level and in the complexity of some of these decisions we see the commands of God being broken so we recognise I guess I'm trying to say is we recognise from the commands that they are they have a personal application very fundamental basic personal application but they also are a provision for society and the reason our society is in such a mess is because we ignore God's commands and we go out on we and there's a need for a societal repentance and also for individual repentance and we look for a world and we seek to be in our Christian communities a small reflection of what it is what it looks like to live God's way and that means self denial and it means self control and it means putting Christ first and knowing his grace and knowing his forgiveness and moving forward in his strength and in his power and it may be that we are challenged by our attitude to work or our attitude to stealing from others or maybe more significantly stealing time and glory from God maybe we find forgiveness in our lives and we challenge to think about the world in which we live amen let's bow our heads in prayer.

May God help us we pray to understand the world in which we live in all its complexity we know there are no easy answers and we recognise the darkness that sin brings us into both in our economic thinking and in our spiritual thinking also and in our societal thinking we do know that we live in an age at least politically where individualism is very rife and strong in the West and we know that sometimes that militates against others and caring for and loving others and equality and we pray and ask that you would help us to have a conscience for the poor who make up such a vast number in this world.

It almost seems too great a problem too scary and frightening a problem to deal with and we can't change this world but we can change our own attitudes Lord and our own generosity and our own willingness to share from the undoubted riches and wealth we have proportionally to help those who haven't and we ask that there would be more honesty and more trust in this world through the gospel and through Christ not abandoning us and we think quite a terrible world this would be without your common grace and without the patience and compassion and grace of God at work that would be hell indeed.

[31 : 02] So Lord protect us from these things both in our own hearts and in this world in which we live and bless us tonight we ask in Jesus name. Amen.