

Part 3

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Before we turn through to Exodus, let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, as we come together tonight in worship on your Holy Day, on the Lord's Day, we thank you that we can do so. We thank you for the privilege of friendship and fellowship and community in Christ.

And we give thanks for all the blessings that we enjoy today. Forgive us for the number of times that we fail to return to you with a sense of thanksgiving.

We often think back to the story and the gospels of the lepers, Lord, who were healed by you. Ten of them. And only one return to give thanks to you, and that you noted that very forcibly and very powerfully in your humanity, this sense of wanting to be thanked and recognizing that it's a good and right thing to do.

And we ask, Lord, in our lives that we would be people who would give thanks, generally, for things people do for us, that we would not take people's kindness for granted in our families, in our workplace, in the relationships we have, that we would be quick to say thanks, to write a note of thanks, to encourage people to receive from us thanksgiving.

We know what an encouragement it can be. We ask that we would just not be complacent and take people for granted.

[1 : 55] And that that would reflect ourselves not taking you for granted, that we would not rise in the morning, go into our day with a thankless spirit, that we would not take the day as our own, that we would not presume on our health or our protection or our future, that we would not just take for granted our lives, the gifts that we have, the wages that we take in, the love that others show to us, the balance and the ordinariness of our lives with all the goodness that's in that, but that we would be thankful for each day, presuming that each day may be our last, but not in a morbid way, but in a dependent and thankful way.

Lord, we rejoice in all the good things You give us, we rejoice in the glory and in the variety of Your creation, for the loveliness of the world that You've made for us, so highlighted on a day like today, for the beauty of the colours and the variety of the natural world, and also for the variety, even in a city like our own.

We thank You for the many ordinary things that we do take for granted, and we pray that You would give us hearts of gratitude.

And Lord, today we give thanks above all on this resurrection day for Jesus, because we recognise not in a naive or in a glib way, but as we give thanks for the beauty and the glory of life, that there is much that is broken and tainted and bruised because of sin, and that we were in such a mess that we just simply couldn't get out of it.

So we thank You for Jesus, we thank You for His inestimable, the inestimable cost of His salvation for us, for His love, for the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the freedom, for the forgiveness, for the friendship, for the spiritual life, for the direction, for the promises, for the hope of the future, for the word, and for all these things that You have given to us.

[4 : 29] As we were saying this morning, how easy it is to be embattled to focus on the conflict, the struggle, the difficulty, the problems, and the complexity of living as a Christian in an unbelieving world.

But we do pray and ask that You would help us also to lift our heads high and look heavenward, give thanks for all we enjoy and all we have been given to take us through in this battle to victory. Lord, we remember our congregation tonight and all who are here. We remember all who are not here, those who are away and those who are away for the summer, those who have left recently.

Remember those who are struggling with ill health, those of our number who are older and unable to get out quite so easily. We remember those who are bereaved and are struggling with bereavement.

We remember them today. We think of Jeremy and Jude and pray for them. We also remember Callum and Liz, and we think of Liz as she is concerned for her, the ailing health of her father in these days.

[5 : 41] We think of Gurhan and Elchin and their baby. And remember the surgeons who will be working in such a delicate way with such a little heart to work with.

And we pray that You would give them great ability to do what they have to do. Lord God, we ask and pray that You would continue with us this evening and bless our worship and bless our study of Your Word and help us to know Your presence, Your nearness, Your grace and Your love for Jesus' sake. Amen.

I would like to turn back this evening to, well not turn back to, but read Exodus chapter 20 verses 4 to 6, which is the second commandment. Exodus 20 verses 4 to 6.

Last Sunday evening we looked at verse 3, You shall have no other gods before me, the first commandment. This evening we're going to look at the second commandment. 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.

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 sins of the Father and 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.

[7 : 12] Now we're going to look at this commandment. I'm just looking round to see if there are people in the Christ tonight.

I'm getting the sound of a child getting murdered. I can hear it from you. I don't know if anyone else can hear it. I presume it's probably outside, but I was hearing it all the way through the prayer and it did sound like a child in great distress.

So it may be just my imagination. It's probably sunstroke. Anyway, I'd like to look at this commandment this evening.

As I was looking through my sermon before church, I was thinking, I hope I'm not just in one track all the time just now.

There seems to be quite a lot of repetition in what I'm saying, even from this morning, although completely different themes in many ways or certainly not meant to dovetail the way that they will seem to dovetail.

[8 : 19] I was looking at Galatians this morning, very different passages from Exodus tonight. But when you're preparing two different sermons, sometimes your thoughts overflow and they overflow into one another.

You don't realise at the time, and I just tell me this evening, not during the service, but tell me afterwards, well you can tell me during the service, but it'll pull me off my flow of thought, but tell me afterwards, you think, oh you're just a stuck record, we want something fresh, because it does seem to be on that same kind of theme, for whatever reason, maybe that's the Holy Spirit.

But the first two commandments, it's sometimes quite difficult to discern the difference between them both, and possibly even the third one.

But you shall have no other gods before me, then you shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or in the earth beneath. And in many ways there are two sides of one coin, and there is a lot of similarity between the two.

The first command is very much about the importance of worshipping the one God, that there is only one God, and he's the one we're to worship. He's the only worthy God, he's the only living God.

[9 : 36] The second commandment is really about the importance of not worshipping this right God in the wrong way. So can you see the difference?

The first one's talking about he's the only God worth worshipping, and then the second commandment is now that you know he's the only God worth worshipping, let's worship him in the right way, don't worship him in the wrong way.

And that immediately doesn't only draw into ourselves this evening because we're worshipping in a formal way, but for you and I as Christians, our whole lives are to be worshiped.

So it's connected with our whole lives as Christians, and I hope you'll find that significant and important for us.

He's the real God for us, he's the living God, and these 10 words remind us that he wants us to worship him, to see him, to understand him in the right way, and see who he is and why it's important for us to worship him.

[10:40] What I want to do is speak for a moment about the trouble that we have doing that, and then focus much more on Jesus Christ and how he channels this commandment for us.

So I want to take all these commands and channel them through the prism of Christ, in many ways, for our lives. Because our hearts, and we saw this last week, really our hearts, at different times, but in our very nature, our hearts displace God from His rightful place in our hearts.

They displace God so that we remove Him from ours. We saw that last week when we were talking about desire, you know, what we desire is a reflection on what's important to us.

And naturally our sinful rebellion has displaced God from that place of desire in our hearts. And so we displace Him. And G.K. Chesterton says, when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything.

And so the trouble is very often we displace God and put anything in His place, and we simply don't put Him first anymore.

[11:57] And that's what is our natural tendency. We spent a bit of time looking at that last week, putting anything first, not necessarily anything religious, but anything first before God in that place of desire in our heart.

That sinful tendency, which we maybe don't like to deal with. But Calvin is a great saying which I'm quoting tonight, which is that our heart is a perpetual factory of idols, very up-to-date kind of imagery that he uses there, that we're just a perpetual factory of idols.

We keep just making idols all the time and replacing God from His rightful place. And that's really the picture in Romans. If you want to look up, I may encourage you to look up one or two passages this evening, if for no other reason than to keep you awake on this Bami Scottish evening.

Romans 1 verse 24 and 25, therefore God, or verse 25 particularly, they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, speaking about humanity, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator, who is forever to be praised.

Amen. So there's this kind of exchange that goes on, and our hearts displace God, and we worship created things. We worship anything except God.

[13:22] So our hearts displace God. And also at the same time, our hearts distort God. They don't only displace Him, which I suppose is more about getting rid of Him altogether.

But even when we acknowledge God, we tend to naturally, without Christ and without salvation, we tend to distort God. And that's probably much more common to ourselves as people who have been born and brought up, or at least are going to church in our lives.

It's much more common. Most of us tend not to displace God to the length of not believing that there is a God. But we do distort Him. We believe in God clearly.

And maybe Western society will believe in God, but will believe the wrong things about the right God. You know, we see that even in false religion. For those who will say that there's many paths to the one God.

So they acknowledge a God, but they don't acknowledge any exclusivity of approach to Him, or that He can be known in any exclusive or genuine way.

[14:38] So that people will say that Muslims and Sikhs and Hindus and Mormons can all worship God and can all lead us to God and can all show us God.

But that stands very much against the exclusivity of Jesus' own claims, and the claims of God, and the claims of this commandment, you shall have no other gods before me, that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

So that as Christians we stand against the multiplicity of world religions, not in any kind of proud or judgmental way, but as we stand behind the truth of God's word, and the reality of God's claims that there is truth, and there is false reality, and there is a clear sense in which people can worship the one God in the wrong way.

So false religion, but also false ideas of the living God. Now the Israelites, who had God revealed to them in miraculous ways, even in the Old Testament, even by this stage, they had God revealed to them not only through the stories they knew about creation, and Noah's Ark and all these things, but

then as he led them out of Egypt.

Very powerful revelations of God they had, they knew that there was this one God, yet the moment Moses went up the mountain to receive these 10 commandments, it didn't take them long did it, to say, we want to worship the God that Moses is going to see, but we want to do it with a golden cow. [16:17] We want to have an idol that we can see and bow down to that will be an image. Well maybe not an image of God, but an image that nonetheless we can see, because it's much easier to worship something we can see.

So they made a golden calf, an image, you know, a kind of tangible physical image to worship, even though it wasn't in a sense the calf that they were worshipping really, they thought this calf symbolized and represented God.

And in Micah's idols that he, we learn about later on, they were idols that he made to the Lord. So there was this kind of, the false ideas of God that led them into this idolatrous practice.

Now we tend not to melt down our earrings and our rings and our bracelets to make a golden calf. We think we're more sophisticated than that.

We've moved on from having physical idols that we worship in that way. But nonetheless, there is many ways that with false ideas we also can worship the living God in the wrong way.

[17:31] Mental idolatry is one very common way when we can worship in the wrong way, where we distort God. We hear it all the time and we maybe think it ourselves, my God is like this, and we say what we think our God is like.

Or we say, oh I can't believe in that kind of God, the kind of God that's maybe revealed in the Bible. And we say, well that's not the kind of God we need for today. And you know, you'll often find that people will speak to you, did not speak to you like that?

Or the kind of God I believe, I can't believe in a God who wouldn't put everyone to heaven, for example. Or, you know, I believe in a God who loves everyone and couldn't possibly be a God of justice and judgment.

And so people have their own mental ideas of God that they make up because it suits them. You know, lest we stand in judgment, I think we do it ourselves a great deal as well.

Mental idolatry, making up the kind of God that we believe in. Or even remolding the God of the Bible to suit our day and generation.

[18:41] Jay John, who is an English evangelist, who's written a great book on the Ten Commandments called Ten. He does a series of evangelistic kind of rallies, I suppose, the old fashioned word for them.

I don't know what you would call them today, which have been very popular in England. I don't think he's been to Scotland, but he certainly has spoken to thousands upon thousands of people. And he uses the Ten Commandments, Ten Evenings, using the Ten Commandments, and he starts at the end and ends up at the beginning.

And they're very, he uses them evangelistically, very relevantly, very powerfully. He was up here addressing a meeting of ministers here, and he was talking about a meeting in Birmingham where he'd been doing the commandment, you shall not steal. And he said on the following evening they had skips outside the conference centre, where people were bringing back all the things that they had stolen, as God was working through these different addresses that he gave.

But he says a very interesting thing about society in his book on this commandment. He says society rejects the whole idea of authority, and so they don't like the exclusivism of God's claims. They don't like the idea of a God who makes any demands, so they want to get rid of that kind of idea. And that we live in a society that embraces tolerance.

[20:13] And he says, interestingly, you know, everything is tolerated except blood sports, fur coats and new bypasses. And I would add to that, and also traditional Christianity.

But we see that, you know, in this age of tolerance, people don't like the idea of a God who makes his own exclusive claim. So we reshape God to reflect that. We remold him, and we distort him, so that it fits in much more with the society in which we live.

So we remold him. And we can also be in danger of replacing him in our thinking, distorting him, by replacing him with religion itself, and making an idol of religion, rather than God himself, so that we kind of idolise religion as something that we do.

We can make an idol of the form of our religion, or of our attendance at church, or of our denomination, of our reform thinking.

Now I quoted Calvin earlier on, we can make an idol of Calvin, he's not God. And yet we can make an idol of him, of the purity of worship, of certain truths.

[21 : 33] And the command of God here exposes our duplicity, and doesn't let any of us off the hook, because it's not kind of just golden calves that he's speaking about, but it's mental idolatry and it's remolding of God and replacing God with all kinds and all manner of things.

And so the command exposes our hearts, how easy it is for us to displace God and to distort God. But I do want us to focus for a few moments on Jesus Christ, and Christ is our hope.

And Christ is the fulfilment of this command, and the channel through which we can obey this command. Christ is our hope. Now we read in John, John's Gospel, about his story of Jesus with the Samaritan woman, and they ended up talking about worship.

And she had her own idols, and she had her own ideas coming from a religious sect of the Samaritans who worshiped in a different way. And when asked about worship, Jesus said, you, those who worship me, will worship me in spirit and in truth.

That is what genuine worship is. It's not about whether it's in Jerusalem or in Samaria, it's a changed heart, worshiping God in spirit and in truth. And that is the channel through which we understand this command and indeed all the commands of God.

[23 : 04] So that Christ becomes the prism through which we are able to understand God and worship Him. He speaks about the importance of spiritual worship and biblical worship. That is worship in truth and serving God in that way.

Now this does kind of overlap from this morning. We spoke a lot this morning about spiritual truth, didn't we, about the importance of rebirth and the spirit in our lives.

Now that absolutely dovetails with tonight. When Jesus said we can only worship Him in spirit and in truth, he was pointing to the need for that rebirth.

Where we are given God's spirit. We ask God into our hearts. We receive His spirit and we know then we can worship.

So we can only worship when we see ourselves and see God channeled through the cross. The cross is central because the cross speaks to us about our need for rebirth and our need for the spirit of God made to be in relationship with God, but only brought back into relationship through the cross and what He has done.

[24 : 22] So that we can in a new way reflect His image. Now isn't that interesting? He says don't make any images of me and yet in Christ we become an image of God.

In other words the only image that is allowed in life is the renewed image of God in us through Christ. That is the only image that Christ or God has allowed, has legislated for, because it reflects the fact that we are to be in relationship with Him.

And we are given His spirit to redeem us so that we can reflect His image in our lives rather than making our own images of God.

Spiritual worship is crucial, vital to true worship. Spiritual worship may mean spirit and in truth. So is biblical worship or biblical lives and kind of broadening it.

I'm not just speaking about what we do in here, but I'm talking about worship. I'm talking about all of our lives. The Bible is so important. John 1, if we're looking at John 4, we're talking about Samaritan women, John 1, in the beginning was the Word.

[25 : 45] The Word was with God. The Word was God. So we've got this description of Jesus, because it's a capital W, who's given a name. It's called the Word. The beginning was the Word. And Jesus is the Word incarnate.

And the Bible is a revelation from God. And so when He asks us to worship in spirit and in truth, it's that we worship knowing Jesus in our hearts and knowing Jesus through His revelation in the world. In the word, sorry. And so we have this, again, I suppose, again, this conflict that we looked at this morning. But Romans 12, 1 is that great linking passage for us, where Romans up till then has been talking and revealing God and His salvation and our need.

And it comes to, in response, we give our lives as living sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable to Him. And then He tells us not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Not to be squeezed into the image of the world, but rather to become transformed to be like Jesus in our lives.

[27 : 04] So true worship, as God wants it for us in Christ, is spiritual, relationship with Him. And also biblical so that we're being molded by Him.

Not just squeezed all the time into what Jesus doesn't want us to be. So we have Christ as our only hope of understanding this command.

Firstly because He channels the command through what He says about worship in John 4. Worship me in spirit and in truth. But also because Jesus Himself is the expression of God's love.

Now you may say, well, I don't see much reference to God's love in this command. Well there is clearly a reference to God's love because He says, I am a jealous God.

Now we've got a kind of bad understanding of the word jealousy. We associate it with insecurity, insanity and possessiveness. Someone who's insanely, we say insanely jealous, we say all the time.

[28 : 10] That's the way we would describe it. That's not the use of the word that the Bible has of God. It's maybe got a root similar to that. But the idea is the same kind of jealousy that a mother has or a father has for the protection of their children based on the great love that they have for them.

The tremendous love that they have for them. The intensity of that love which would protect their child from anything at all. From any danger, from any situation.

Love that is beyond expression. And that's the kind of love that is described here in its jealousy.

There is a possessiveness, it's a rightful possessiveness in God anyway.

Sometimes in us it can become overbearing. But in God it's an absolutely genuine and pure and complete possessiveness. And that jealousy has been shown to us primarily at the cross.

Because He wants us back. He wants us back to Himself. So again we see all of these commands and all that we understand by them through the prism of the cross. Where we see on the cross the inestimable cost that was paid for our sins.

[29 : 34] And the beauty of that love and the power of that love and the desire of that love which would go to the cross. Doing everything to take us out of Satan's grip.

Take us out of the power of death and away from the power of the grave. To set us free, to give us joy, to give us hope, to give us happiness. And that love that's an expression of God in Jesus, because Jesus is God, demands our exclusivity.

Because of what it is. It's a love which is jealous in the sense that it bears no rivals. And that's what He means.

Because there are no rivals really to God's love in our lives. And so He demands our exclusivity. That's what this love demands of us.

Because it's so great and because it's so real and because no one else has created us and made us and redeemed us. It demands our exclusivity. So He, the command does speak about not being lukewarm as Christians.

[30 : 44] It does speak about not playing fast and loose with God as if it doesn't matter. It does speak about being willing to submit to His gracious Lordship. It does speak about trust and it does speak about how we live our lives.

Because it reminds us not only of His exclusivity but of His justice. These are very difficult words that He says. The Lord, You've got a my jealous God, punishing the children of the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me.

But showing love to thousands of generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. These are very difficult words. But surely they do speak about the reality of our responsibility to live our lives in the knowledge that God is a God of justice.

And that those who hate Him, as He speaks about here, will be punished for that. And will face divine justice. Because the cross speaks not just about love but about justice.

A church of Scotland minister said something interesting to me last week. When they were talking, we were talking about the paucity of arguments sometimes that people were bringing out in the whole theological debate about homosexuality and also about the Old Testament.

[32 : 04] And someone had kind of made a fairly loose comment about we don't believe in that theology anymore just as much as we don't stone adulterers. And this minister said to me, but the reality is the stoning happened at the cross.

And that's a very real challenge to us. Is that God's justice wasn't just abandoned and isn't just abandoned, but it is channeled through and dealt with and meted out on this Son of God on the cross.

That is where His justice is dealt with. That's where sin, our sins are punished on the cross. It's a reminder to us of a day of reckoning for all who will not fall in behind Jesus Christ for their salvation. Because it's not a kind of optional extra, a fifth course on the dining table of life. It is the reality that God is a God of great love, but also a God of unfailing and pure and complete justice.

And don't say that we don't care about justice or that it's unfair. We all have a reality which includes justice, but is often tainted and self-centered.

[33 : 22] So the cross does speak about God's justice as well as His great love. And it reminds us, I think, and this command reminds us that our behaviour does have repercussions.

You know, as he speaks about the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation, I don't think it's saying that children ultimately are punished for sins that their fathers committed.

But it's saying that the sins of their fathers are passed down so that the children themselves, as it's stated here, hate God also.

So as individuals, as families, as mums and dads, as churches, our lives affect other people after us, affect the generations beyond us.

Our choices do matter. The way we think about God is significant, not just for ourselves, but for the following generations. And if we kind of throw God out of the picture, as we've done, maybe, I'm not so sure about talking about things as a society, because I don't think we ever were a Christian society. People brand about that phrase an awful lot.

[34 : 34] You know, I wish we could get back to the days when we were a Christian nation. But anything we were ever a Christian nation. I don't think there's ever been a Christian nation, apart from maybe Israel, or a nation of faith.

But certainly there were maybe more Christians than there are now. We're never a Christian nation. But nonetheless, if you can talk about nations turning their back on God and rejecting the authority of the Bible and rejecting the malady of God's word, then we're beginning, having sown the wind. We are beginning to reap the whirlwind.

Even if you take God out of the picture, morally we're beginning to do that because, you know, anything goes. And so we're seeing a society where there are leaders, those in authority over us, who said, it doesn't matter how we live in our private lives. It doesn't matter any kind of private morality.

And that's been a very real argument among our political leaders that it doesn't matter what we do in private, in our morality. As long as we govern well, that's all that matters. But of course it matters how we live in our lives privately, because our morality then affects how we claim our expenses. And if morality doesn't matter, then greed doesn't matter. And it's about getting as much as we can out of the system as long as we're there. And when that particular tap is closed off, then we just resign because the gravy train has landed at the station, and there isn't any more for us. And there's no sense of calling, there's no sense of moral leadership, there's no sense of commitment that goes with that, because we've abandoned all these things.

[36 : 16] And as I said a couple of years ago, party political broadcast, sorry, it just becomes frustrating when you see these things. And when it's all disengaged from morality and from justice and from God and from truth.

But as we sow the wind, we reap the world, and our behaviour has repercussions. And the choices you make now and I make now will affect our lives, young people, the choices that you make now, the decisions that you make, the Christ that you follow or choose not to follow will have repercussions for you.

There's parents, what a great responsibility, what a burden. There's grown-ups and adults, what a burden. But give thanks to God that we can lay it before Him and ask for His grace and His help to live our lives and to seek His forgiveness.

So a response to this God who, in Christ, we find, I hope, the prism through which we can understand and obey these commands by His grace, because the wrath has been dealt with, and because He has fulfilled these commands perfectly on our behalf, and He enables us to live our lives in faith and in repentance.

And that ought always to be a response to the commands. The commands are teachers that lead us to the Master, that lead us to Jesus Christ.

[37 : 49] As God is God, He is right. And they speak to us of our need for change. They speak to us of the amazement of His love, which has seen that we have fallen short and has provided the solution for us freely, fully, lovingly, longingly, voluntarily, so that we can live. He's a great God, and

our response is to turn from our sin that separates us from Him, and live by faith and ask Jesus into our heart, and in response to be living sacrifices.

It's the least we can do to offer our bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable worship, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, because that's the best we can have. That is the best life, and it enables us to look forward to the greatest eternity in this kingdom.

A day like today has been a great day, a lovely, beautiful, sunny day, and it kind of brings out in many ways the best in this world, and I hope in ourselves sometimes, but it's just like a grain of sand and a sea shore compared with the glory of eternity, and the fact that we'll not even need the sun there, because Jesus Christ will be at the centre of the throne, and the protection and the warmth and the love and the safety and the hope and the joy and the adventure and the excitement and the learning and the beauty of what is ours in Him. We can look forward to with great anticipation. Amen. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Lord God, we thank You for Jesus, and we thank You that the cross is the prism through which we must look at, not only our own lives, but also Scripture and the Old Testament and the commands that are given to us.

We thank You for these 10 words that do reflect Your nature and reflect what You want from us, and help us not to be despairing because we realise we fall short of them, and that we often distort You and we often displace You from our hearts, but may it take us in a new way and a daily basis to the living God for forgiveness, for hope, for empowerment and for life, and above all, do change our hearts, Lord.

[40 : 33] Give us hearts that desire You and that want You and that are voluntary in our service of You and that see You for who You are.

Help us not to keep kicking against the gods and fighting You, but enable us to submit to You as we saw this morning, be led by Your Spirit, but also walk in step with the Spirit. Help us, we pray, to do that.

We know we can't do it on our own. We know we can't ask other people to do it for us, and we know it can't be done simply through listening to sermons.

So help us to come to You in dependence and repentance and faith and offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to You.

We pray for anyone who doesn't know You tonight in the church, here in the worship, that they might simply ask that Jesus would come into their heart and forgive their sins and give them life and hope and newness. In all its simplicity, we pray for that request to be made.

[41 : 49] In Jesus' name, Amen.