

On Eagle's Wings

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[0 : 0 0] We're starting a series tonight that'll last us pretty much the whole semester on the Ten Commandments. And we will not come close to covering all that we just read about in Exodus chapter 19.

We could probably do a series on just this chapter. But the Ten Commandments is important because this is the most famous law code that the world has ever known.

And a lot of times when people come and read it, we read it earlier in Exodus 20, one of the questions that comes up for people whether they're Christians or not is, what is this law for? What are these Ten Commandments for?

And Christians will often ask, are these Ten Commandments for me? Do they apply to me today? Should I obey these commandments today? Now, the modern mind comes and looks at the Ten Commandments if they have read them and says, this is religious regressive law from a long, long time ago.

And as soon as God brings Israel out of Silivarian Egypt, He enslaves them again by giving them all these rules. This is the first Ten. There's going to be 42 in the next three chapters and then 613 total by the time you read through numbers.

[1 : 1 3] And so He enslaves them just like they were enslaved under Pharaoh. And the reason people say that is because to the modern mind, religious law is the restriction of freedom.

And that's because we live in an age, we live in a time where the law is there is no one right way to live. Everybody should be an individual and live freely. Do what they want to do. There's no one right way to live. We can live as we want to live.

I heard one preacher talking about the Ten Commandments and he said, the modern view of the Ten Commandments is that the Ten Commandments are a fence around an amusement park. They are there so that you never have fun.

And that's exactly the modern mindset of the Ten Commandments. Now, even if you grew up in the church community, even if you've been a part of this church community for a long time, it is possible to also approach the Ten Commandments with this mindset, a very modern mindset.

And that may happen because of two possibilities. One, you may have grown up in a church where the law of God, the Ten Commandments and other laws were used as a bully pulpit, an agenda where the culture was rules, rules, rules, law, law, law.

[2 : 2 9] And although grace was talked about, it was never lived. And so law, the Ten Commandments, became for you a word of judgment. And that's not dissimilar at all to the modern mindset that looks at something like the Ten Commandments and says, this feels like most religious law, like I'm being judged.

The other reason maybe you come to this with a skeptical mind is because Jesus Christ has come into the world and the New Testament has been written. And we say, we know now that Jesus brings a religion of grace, not law.

And so can we really say the Ten Commandments are for us today? And that's very similar also to the modern mindset, which says, I thought Christianity was a religion of grace, not law, not judgment.

I like the ethical teachings of Christ. I like His talk about love, but I don't like it when Christians talk about law. And so what are the Ten Commandments for? What are we supposed to do with them? Now, let me say that Exodus 19, the context, the preamble to Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments, gives us a different and better vision for what the law is for, for what the Ten Commandments are for.

And let's see it like this. The Ten Commandments, we're going to learn tonight, help us see what we could have, help us see what we really are, and then help us see what we do have.

[3 : 54] So what we could have, what we really are, and then what we do have, and then finally, in just two sentences, a fourth point, help us to see that the law really is for us. Now, this is a three-point sermon, not a four-point sermon, but there are four points.

But the last point is just a couple sentences, and the last point will last us ten whole weeks. The fourth point will be ten weeks long. Okay, so we'll just do three tonight and four the next ten weeks.

All right, so don't worry. First, the Ten Commandments shows us what we could have. All right, in chapter 20 verse one, we read that God spoke all these words.

So the Ten Commandments aren't actually called the Ten Commandments. Nowhere in the Bible do we have the phrase, the Ten Commandments. It's actually that they are the ten words that God spoke, and he wrote them on a tablet of stone.

We don't know how many commandments made it on one side or the other. We have no idea they could have all been on one side. We're never told that either. So it's ten words written into stone, but the context for how that happens actually comes all in chapter 19.

[4 : 57] And so it's important to look back at the context. And in chapter 19, at the very beginning, maybe you notice this awkward phrasing in verses one and two, it says that after they've come out of slavery, they came into the wilderness of Sinai.

Verse two, they came into the wilderness of Sinai, verse two, be they encamped in the wilderness. So it says they came to the wilderness of Sinai, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and they encamped in the wilderness in three clauses, back to back to back.

So there's a lot of use of the word wilderness right there at the very beginning. beginning. And then right there, as soon as you read the word wilderness, wilderness, wilderness, all of a sudden, and the mountain of God. And it's almost like the mountain of God rises up.

God comes down and there all of a sudden in the midst of wilderness, wilderness, wilderness, is the mountain of God. Now this is important because it reminds us of Genesis 2 and 3.

It, Moses, the writer here is trying to make you think about this in relationship to what's already taking place all the way back in Genesis 2 and 3. And there in Genesis 2, the Bible says, Ezekiel 28, as well, that Eden is on the top of a mountain and it's called the mountain of God. And Eden is a garden and the mountain of God simultaneously. And you have this image in Genesis 2, even before sin, that everything outside the mountain of God, Eden is wilderness. It's a place of chaos. Now chaos is not necessarily bad before sin enters the world, but in the garden you have cultivated land.

[6 : 35] You have a place for humans to live. Outside the garden you have uncultivated land, the land of the beast. It's wilderness, wilderness, wilderness. And in the midst of wilderness, wilderness, wilderness, there is the mountain of God. That's Genesis 2. And then when sin enters the world, the wilderness becomes known throughout the whole rest of the Old Testament as the domain of symbolic sin. So remember the day of atonement. You put your sin on that one lamb and that lamb goes out where? To the wilderness, the place where sin belongs. Wilderness is where sin belongs. It's symbolized throughout the Old Testament constantly. In Genesis 4, Cain murders his brother after his mom and dad got kicked out of the Garden of Eden into the wilderness east of Eden. But when he murders his brother, God sends him further away from the mountain into exile. And what does Cain say?

That is too much for me to bear being sent further and deeper into the wilderness territories. And so you have this image constantly throughout the Bible. And here it is again, Exodus 19.

And that means that the context of the Ten Commandments is that Israel has come out of slavery, but they are still in the wilderness. And there in the heart of the wilderness rises up the mountain of God. And that means that the context of the Ten Commandments is that coming to the mountain of God is like coming home again. And when you're wandering through the wilderness, you're wandering through the land of sin, and the mountain of God comes to you. God condescends and builds a new home right there in front of your face. It's like coming home again. It's the place you were always meant to live. It's the place that you were made for. The Garden top, the Mountain Top Garden City of God is the place that you were made for. And that is the place where God gives the Ten Commandments.

And so you have to think about where we are when the Ten Commandments are given to really have a new and better vision for what the Ten Commandments are trying to do. James calls the Ten Commandments the Law of Perfect Freedom. The modern person looks at the Ten Commandments and says, this is a fence around an amusement park. Not at all a law of perfect freedom, but a law of enslavement. Taking away my freedom, how could it be a law of perfect freedom? And the answer is, you have to think about the where, the mountain of God, the home you were made to live in. Now think about it like this. Imagine stepping through the door of the greatest home you've ever been in.

So maybe you can actually name the family home, the best home that you've ever been in. Maybe it's your own home, but maybe you've visited somebody else's house at some point in your life. And you've said, wow, that was the most comfortable, easy, warm household I've ever set in. So some of you have had that great experience, some of you haven't. But imagine the warmest home you've ever set in.

[9 : 36] You know, you come in, it's comfortable. It's comfortable and it's great, not because the furniture is clean. Probably if the furniture is clean, it's probably not the warmest home you've ever been in. Right? It's not great because the decor is amazing and expensive and the art on the wall is fantastic. That's not at all what makes it great. That's not at all what makes it freeing.

You know, you come into this kind of a house and you say, you know, I really felt safe. I really felt free. I felt like I never had to leave. They could have kept me here. They would have adopted me. And it's the kind of household that a child grows up in and feels safe. They feel comfortable.

They feel able to go to sleep at night and everything is good. Mom and dad have it. They're there. They're for me. And when visitors come, it's warm. It's inviting. It's hospitable. Now, imagine you've probably had many experiences of households like that. What is it that makes it like that? And what makes it like that is not the claim that, you know, everybody can live their own way. Everybody can, you know, everybody's an individual here and they can live any way they want.

That's true freedom. That's how we're meant to be. That's real freedom. It's find your own path. And instead, a household that is truly great is one where the parents have cultivated a lifestyle in order of existence where nobody steals from each other, where nobody cheats each other, where nobody is envious of what the other person has, where nobody is constantly coveting, where nobody is lying about their neighbor, about their brother, about their sister, about their sister, about their friend. That's the reason that that house is so warm and so freeing and so comfortable. And you constantly want to go back. You see, when you are at home and there is a law that is truly good and it's obeyed, you are most free. You're safe. You've actually discovered a space of real safety in your life. Freedom is not the ability to do anything that you want to do.

Freedom is the ability to live in the way you should live. That's what really makes you free. That's what really makes you safe. That's what really makes you feel like you've come home again.

[11 : 55] And here we are in the midst of the wilderness and God brings home the garden, mountain, top, city of God to the people of Israel. And he's saying, this is the context in which the perfect law works.

You know, when you enter into the true home, the home that God made for you, and you live in that order, that order of goodness, you will know, I'm truly free. I'm safe. I'm exactly where I should be. Now, let me point this out to you in two ways and we'll move on. There's a new vision here, a household vision, a parental vision, a vision that you've come home when you obey the Ten Commandments.

And here's how it works. You can see it in verse five. In verse five, he says, Now, you say, well, that does not sound freeing. It sounds like God is saying, if you obey the Ten Commandments perfectly, if you keep my law, then you will be a possession to me.

You will be a treasure to me, but only then. Now, the word that gets used here for treasure is the word that we would also often translate delight. And it has the word, now the word that gets used here for treasure is the word that we would also often translate delight.

And it has the connotation of parental delight. So he's talking here about the way apparent delights or treasures or grows and warmth towards their child. That's the kind of word that he uses here. You see, he's already saved them out of the house of slavery while they were grumbling.

[13 : 25] They didn't deserve it. And he's brought them across the Red Sea and they were grumbling the whole way. They didn't deserve it. And he's brought them home to the mountain of God and they didn't deserve it. And he cannot possibly be saying, I will only love you if you keep the Ten Commandments.

That can't be it at all. He's loved them every step of the way when they were grumbling already. And instead, he's saying, if you keep the Ten Commandments, the order of life, you will be my treasure. What does that mean? It's the same thing as this. If you're a parent, you've had this experience with your child, or if you don't have children, you've had this experience as a child, where you were out and about, out and about in the city, wherever you might live, and you, your child, was unexpectedly polite to a stranger. They said, please, they said, thank you.

They said everything you wanted them to say, and you thought, where did this come from? And what happens in that moment? You could take the same Hebrew phrase and say, you are my treasure.

I delight in you in this moment. In other words, it makes your heart warmer to your child in that moment. Right? You delight more and more in them. Now, if they go out and they are expectedly rude to somebody in the city, you don't turn around and say, you are not my treasure anymore.

You don't say, I'm casting you away. I'm kicking you out of the household. Not at all. Instead, you might offer discipline, encouragement in some way. You try to educate. You try to help them along to obey in the future so that they warm your heart more in the future with that moment.

[15:06] That's exactly what God is saying here. He's speaking as a father. He's not saying, if you obey the Ten Commandments perfectly, then I might treasure you. He's saying, I've already loved you to the end. Now, allow me to grow and warmth and delight over you as a father over his children as you live in this order of existence of goodness more and more and more and more and more. You see, it's a household idea. One more, and we got to move on. This is half the sermon, by the way, the first point.

Secondly, verse six. This in verse six, he says this, and not only will I treasure you and delight in you, but verse six, and you will be to me when you obey, you shall be to me a kingdom of priest and a holy nation. Now, he's saying here that this order of life around the garden city of God, obeying the Ten Commandments as God's people, he's saying this signifies you publicly in the world as a kingdom of priest, a new community, a community that shows forth the possibility of a transformed society for the rest of the world to see, a transformed family for the rest of the world to see. He's talking about the possibility here of showing forth a beautiful community.

And he's saying, when you come home to God and you live according to this order of life, you can display the beauty of the possibility of a society that the world has never seen. You see, the Ten Commandment shows us what we could have, what we could be, what we could become a beautiful community.

And the world looks at this, the modern mind looks at this idea, a beautiful community on display, a new community through the obedience of the Ten Commandments and says, you know, what is a beautiful community? The modern mind says its first tolerance, its ability to let everyone think and do what they want to think and do without bothering them. And secondly, it's to say individuals can choose for themselves. You're an individual, you can choose what you want to do, there is no right path.

Now, if you say tonight, if deep down in your heart, you've been moved by that idea and you say, you know, I'm not convinced that there's a single right way to live. Let me just suggest that no one believes that when they're choosing a flatmate. You know, nobody thinks that when they're looking for their flatmate. Nobody thinks that when they're looking for a spouse or a girlfriend or a boyfriend that there's only one right way to live. You know, do you want to live in a household with a bunch of flatmates that lie, that steal from you, that covet your possessions, that are only friends with you because they want something, that are so angry at you that they're tempted towards even murder by hand or by heart? You say, no, of course I don't want to live in a house like that with flatmates like that. You see, nobody believes that there's not one right way to live when it comes to choosing a flatmate. And let me suggest that there is nobody in the world that truly believes there is no one right way to live. Nobody. It's a living contradiction. And the Bible comes here and says there is a right way to live. And it's the revelation of God's own character into the world through these 10 words. It's the right way to live. And it teaches us the possibility of what we could have in a beautiful community. Now, we're halfway. Second, the 10 commandments shows us secondly, the 10 commandments shows us secondly who we really are as well. It exposes us.

[18:32] Now, there's a real tension. We can't plumb the depths tonight of this passage in full. But there's a real tension here. I hope you called it. Did you catch it? He says, I bore you out of Egypt on eagles wings. I loved you. I saved you from the house of slavery. I loved you because I loved you. Nothing that you did. I will delight in treasure and you more and more and more as you obey.

I want to bring you home to the garden city of God on the mountain of God. And then you get texts like verse nine and 10 and 12 and 13 and so on that say things like this. God is coming down in a thick cloud in darkness and lightning and in thunder on this mountain. And verse 10, now go and consecrate yourselves, bathe yourselves, wash your clothes, tell the people, do not get close.

At verse 12, Moses create a police barrier around the mountain so that nobody gets so close as to even touch it in the smallest of ways or they will die. And he says in verse 13, you shall come near but do not get closer. You shall come close but do not touch. Tell even the priests they are not fit. And Moses was the only one allowed to come but even he had to veil his face. He could not see the holiness of the living God. You see the tension in the passage is I've come to bring you home and I've come to give you an order of life that you've never seen before and create a beautiful community but do not get close to me. And you begin to realize that this place is dangerous.

The law is good, the mountain is good, God is good and it is not safe and the way is not open. Now here's the real tension underneath that tension. God bore them on eagles wings out of the house of slavery and saved them and yet the way is not fully open. The mountain of God is still closed. The people cannot fully approach. They cannot have what they were really made for.

There is something that's been left undone that keeps it this way and the subtle idea here and throughout the book of Exodus is that these people still have a justice problem. The problem of personal injustice and corporate injustice as they try to approach the holy mountain of God.

[21 : 09] There's a theological biblical question underneath that that I want to pose give you that's very important to even understand most of the Old Testament. And it's something like this. There's this idea. It's not explicit, it's implicit. But it's something like this. If Israel here were to really obey these 10 commandments perfectly, could they do what Adam and Eve failed to do? Could they obey to such a degree that they bring about the full kingdom of God one day?

Could they stand in the place for all of humanity and open the way to the mountain? Could they be the Adam and Eve that Adam and Eve never were? That's the question. That's the tension here. Will they obey perfectly and bring humanity to the full presence of God, to the Garden City, to the holy mountain under this beautiful order with a new community? Will they do it? Can they do it? That's the question underlying this passage. Now they say, did you catch it in verse 8? All the people answered together and said, all that the Lord has spoken, we will do. Now that is sad and humorous at the same time, if you've ever read the rest of the Old Testament. And you can flip over to Exodus chapter 24 where this scene ends. It comes to a conclusion. And in verse 8 in Exodus 24, they complete that pronouncement that we will do this.

We will obey by saying, yes we can. We will obey, we promise. And they take an oath before the Lord. They make the covenant oath before the Lord. And Moses then turns and throws blood upon them.

And the text calls it the blood of the covenant. Now the scholars call this an oath of malifaction. It's a simple idea, a complicated word. And the simple idea is just this, that when Moses throws the blood upon them, it is a public statement saying something like this, if I break the conditions of the promise I've just made, may my blood be poured like the blood that's been poured upon me. So they would have had blood on their shirts. They didn't have a lot of clothing.

They're in the wilderness. And that blood would have stayed on their garments. And they would have remembered that bloodstained garment, I made a promise, if I break any one of these 10 words, may my blood be poured like this blood that was shed and thrown upon me. Now Israel, know thyself.

[23 : 43] Human being, know thyself. You say, how could you make a promise like that? And you see the law, the law exposes us. On the one hand, God says, you cannot come close to me. You have a justice problem. On the other hand, it says, even if you try to make an oath that says you're going to obey the 10 words perfectly, you will not make it. You won't make it a fortnight. You will make it a week.

You could place bets over and under. Will they make it seven minutes before the oath has been broken? Obedience to these 10 words. You see, the law shows you the possibility of the beautiful community of home, of true home, but it also then immediately cuts you and says you are exposed. Injustice in the past, injustice in the future, you have to be honest with yourself and you have to face who you really are when you read it. The 21st century, Western mind looks at this and says, this is the part of Christianity I don't like. I like the religion of love. I like the ethical teachings of Jesus to a degree, but I don't like it when we come and we talk about being exposed in judgment and injustice before the living God, that I don't have access to God because of who I am and because of what I've done. But look, think about it when you relate to other people in your relationships. You say, I don't like reading the 10 words and saying, God telling me I've broken every single one of these, but look, what kind of a flatmate do you want to have? How do you want your spouse to live around you?

Your girlfriend, your boyfriend, your best friend, how do you want these people to live? Do you want them to cheat? Do you want them to steal? Do you want them to be envious and covetous and only have a relationship with you because they're treating you in that way to get something from you?

And what if God is real and he really is the father of humanity? The creator and he comes and he says in command number one, don't have any other gods before me. He says, if you put anything else in your life functionally above me, if you love something in the world more than you love the living God, then you have cheated him. You have stolen from him. You have stolen his glory.

You have committed adultery against him, the Bible tells us, over and over and over again. You see, when you break that very first law, you have committed a cosmic injustice by which you have broken every one of the other laws. If you've ever in any moment right now, if you're loving anything in your life more than the living God, you've committed a cosmic injustice.

[26 : 25] And we, how can that be true? Well, we know this in our relationships that we don't want to be cheated on or stolen from or envied or where does this come from? Can there be justice without this God at all? Can we speak of injustice without speaking of the living God? And he comes to us and says, we've all committed a cosmic injustice. We've broken every single one of these laws and do all the time before the living God. The law exposes us. Are you willing to say so?

Are you willing tonight to say that's me? I know that that's me. You look at the commands and you have to say with Israel as they carried on through the Old Testament, my blood is required of me. I know who I am. I know what I deserve. Lastly, the clothes, but wait.

The law also shows you what you do have or perhaps can have tonight if you don't have it yet. Here's the subplot. Let me rehearse it. Israel, could they be like Adam and Eve all over again?

Could they obey these laws and usher in the new creation, bring humanity back to the Holy Mountain of God? Can they obey? It's an emphatic no. Humanity, no human, no nation, no person can do this. And so the tension here is that there's something yet to be accomplished, something yet to be fulfilled in justice looms still. The mountain is not open. You read the law. You say, I am undone. I know who I am. The law exposes my heart. But when you read the gospels, the law reveals another heart. So when you read the gospels, Matthew and Mark, Luke in particular, Jesus Christ from the very earliest moments of his life goes down to Egypt. And then he comes up from Egypt. He goes through the river, the waters part for him. He goes into the wilderness and he's tempted by Satan. And you start to realize that the gospel writers are telling me something, that Jesus Christ has come to be the Israel that Israel never was. Jesus Christ has come to be the

Adam that Adam never could be. Jesus Christ has come to be the human being that I could never be. He's reliving the life of the Old Testament, yet doing it perfectly, doing it obeying the 10 words entirely. Now don't pass over this. We're closing here. Don't pass over this.

[29 : 03] Don't pass over this theological truth that you know if you've been here for any amount of time, but that you cannot understand. And it's this, Jesus Christ is perfect. Jesus Christ is a human being who never broke any of the 10 commandments. Jesus Christ never lusted. Jesus Christ never lied. Jesus Christ never stole anything. Jesus Christ never ever committed idolatry, loved anything in this world more than he loved his father. Jesus Christ never coveted. He was never envious. He never got so angry that he committed murder in his heart. He never woke up a single day with an ounce of discontentment. Can you imagine? Do you understand what it means to be perfect?

No. That's the only answer. No, he was. He obeyed the 10 words fully, and the gospel says he did it in your stead. Now here's the other side of the equation and the last thing. Jesus Christ on the night he was betrayed sat in the upper room and he picked up the cup and he said, this blood, this wine is the blood of the covenant. You remember Exodus 24? When Moses sprinkled the blood upon the people, he called it the blood of the covenant. If we break the 10 commandments, may our blood be shed. That's the blood of the covenant. Jesus Christ on the night he was betrayed lifted the cup and said, here's the blood of the covenant. You're going to see it tomorrow morning.

You see, on the one hand, he kept the law fully. On the other hand, his blood became the blood of the covenant. That's a contradiction. It shouldn't be. And you see how Jesus Christ works for you in both directions? He obeyed the law in your stead, and then he gave his blood in your stead.

When you didn't obey the law, it works in both directions. He substituted for you in every way. He obeyed for you and he died for you. He obeyed the 10 commandments for you in a way you could never imagine and he lost his life because you didn't. And he did it all because he wanted to meet your justice problem. The mountain of God is closed in this passage. When Jesus Christ walked out of the grave, the barricades were gone. When the tomb was open, the curtain ripped into.

When Jesus Christ opened the way, they sent the cherubs home. Eden, you didn't need a cherub anymore guarding the way. He had opened the way again. Jesus Christ came to be for you. He came. The law tells you what you can have. You see, you look at the 10 commandments and you look at Jesus and you say, this is what I can have. I can have complete forgiveness and acceptance in him. I can get to God. Do you want to be reconciled to God?

[32 : 08] Are you? Are you reconciled to God tonight? Believe this and accept this and follow him. And you are reconciled to the living God tonight. You have access to the mountain, the mountain of the living God. Now, our fourth point, we're going to take 10 weeks to explain.

And it's this, Jesus, when you look at the law and you look at Jesus, Jesus shows us that the law is for us, really is. 10 commandments still are for us. Why? Because the law of God, the 10 commandments, is the revelation of the character of Jesus Christ. When you read the 10 commandments, you are reading the character of Christ. And Jesus, just before he was betrayed, got down and he washed the disciples feet and he says, I've loved you all the way to the end.

Now go and love like I love. Take upon yourself my character. And his character is the 10 commandments. Obedience to the 10 words. Peter Lighthouse says it like this. He says, if you're asking if the 10 commandments are for me, it's like asking is Jesus for me. Am I to obey the 10 commandments is like asking, did Jesus come for me? Did Jesus tell me to be like him?

Here's the order. God says in Jesus Christ, I bore you on eagle's wings out of your slavery to your son. You have been brought out of slavery. The 10 commandments is not the way to heaven.

It's the way to live freely and happily after you've been daringly rescued. Let's pray. Father, we ask that you would teach us the way to live, the way to live by looking at the character of Christ. But tonight, before the next 10 weeks of doing that, I pray that you would show us who we really are and that you would expose us and that you would then remake us by teaching us and showing us the grace of our Lord whose blood was poured.

[34 : 20] So I pray tonight for all of us that we would believe that more, that we would lean into it, and maybe for some tonight that that would be discovered for the first time. Perhaps, Lord, you would help us all tonight and somebody specifically tonight to see it makes absolutely no sense in this life to say you can live any way you want to live. That none of us believe that. We don't believe that. Teach us that, Lord, and show us that these 10 words actually reveal that there is a cosmic creator, a law giver, one who is just and holy, and that the only way to you is through Christ. So Lord, move now by the Holy Spirit as we sing about your holy mountain from Psalm 15, your holy hill, and show us the grace of Jesus and the way of Jesus. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.