

Meet Your Maker

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[0 : 00] The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God will endure forever.! Let's pray and ask for God's help.! Heavenly Father, may you answer the prayer which we all sung earlier from Psalm 19, that the words of my mouth, that all our hearts would be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Help us now, we pray, to hear you speak, our great God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, we come this morning in Exodus chapter 20, the end of 19 and the start of chapter 20, to one of the high points of all the Old Testament, indeed, of the whole Bible. I don't just mean literally, as we come to the foot of Mount Sinai, but theologically and spiritually.

Exactly. So why is this moment so significant? Because it is quite a scene, is it not? Trumpets kind of blasting, thunder and lightning, the thick darkness of smoke, the people afraid to come near. It is quite a picture. Why is it so significant? Well, because God here gives the law.

God gives these 10 commandments, as we know them, or 10 words, the decalogue. Now, I wonder, as I say that, does that feel like a bit of an anti-climax of an answer? A theological mountaintop? Why?

Because the moral law is given. Perhaps we're thinking as we hear that, oh, that doesn't seem to go together. Maybe perhaps that seems a bit of an anti-climax. Israel, God's people, have been rescued from Egypt. What have we seen so far in Exodus? It's all been pretty exciting, hasn't it? Kind of blockbuster movie stuff. We've had burning bushes that don't burn, staffs that turn to snakes that eat other staffs that turn to snakes. We've had plagues. We've had water separated as people pass through and dry land. We've had all of this amazing drama. And here we are, this hugely significant point.

[2 : 35] God's people giving instructions, words, a law. I spoke to someone recently about Parliament in London and asked if they'd ever visited. And by the look I got, I wondered if I asked them if they watch paint drying for a hobby. Indeed, I think they might have had a more of excitement or more of excited expression on their face if I'd said, oh, do you watch paint dry for a hobby? Watching people pass laws? Really? Or maybe you think, Old Testament, Old Covenant, here we are at Sinai. What does this have to do with me? What does this have to do with us? We're New Testament people now, right?

Does this have anything to do with us? So maybe we think, just a bit dull. Maybe we think, what does it have to do with us? Or maybe we think, Law, ah yes, Bible bashers. Christians who love to be moral kind of judges of all. As I look at these words, as I heard them read, I kind of thought, oh yes, holier than thou kind of vibe. Well, what I hope we see this morning, and indeed in the weeks to come, as case law is worked out from this moral law, from these ten words, these ten commandments, that this is so significant, not just because it tells God's people, all of God's people, Old and New Testament, how to live, how we're to live as God's people. Not only does it do that, but it's so significant because it tells us, it shows us what God is like, what God is like, and therefore isn't dull, has everything to do with us, and doesn't have a kind of holier than thou kind of vibe. No, but the vibe of this is actually what? A holy God. Yes, but a gracious God who calls his people into obedience for his glory, and they are good. These words tell us about God.

This year is the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America, those 13 colonies that got away. There's still grace for them to come back, is there not?

1776, the Declaration of Independence was written and signed. But if you want to get to know the Declaration of Independence, if you want to get to know the later U.S. Constitution, if you want to get to know American law and how it all works, what do you need to do? Well, a great place to start is getting to know the founding fathers. Get to know the lawmakers, the architects of the American experiment. And it's true of any law, right? Behind a law stands a law giver, a law maker.

You tell much about a nation from its laws and those who made them, right? And so it is here. Israel, as they receive these 10 commandments, they do what? They meet their maker. They see what he's like, and they see how he longs to form them and shape them and how they would be as his people.

[5 : 49] Last week, as Joe preached and led us up to this point, what did he say? Israel were preparing to meet their maker. And here we have them at the bottom of Sinai, hearing God's words and meeting him. So in these 10 commandments, these 10 words, who does God show himself to be? Firstly, a savior.

Chapter 20, verse 1 and 2. And God spoke all these words saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery. Before God gives the law, he reminds them that he is a covenant-keeping God who has just saved them, who has just redeemed them, who has just delivered them from slavery in Egypt. And that is oh so important as we come to these words. I don't know how good you are at reading preambles or introductions. I'm generally not so good at it. I just want to skip to the main point. Take me to chapter 1. I'll figure out what the introduction said going back the way.

But actually, often as I skip the preamble or introduction, it doesn't go so well. Take, for example, and this is the time I always seem to do it, reading instructions for building furniture.

Not my strong suit at all, okay? And usually, I just want to skip past the opening pages and get to step one. But when I do that, what normally happens? You get into a few more steps and realize that you don't have the tools you needed. Know that in the little preamble or little introduction first page, in those IKEA ones, the little drawings, they've shown you what you need.

And so I get to step three or four, realizing that I've not found, got the right tools, I've not got everything I need, and have to stop. And so what happens? There on the floor of the living room or whatever it is, there are pieces of furniture everywhere. The thing is completely broken. It's a mess.

[7 : 39] And it normally happens on the eve of a birthday or Christmas Eve, right? The worst time. You can't just nip out to B&Q; and get it all sorted. No, there it is. It's a total mess. If only I'd read bits at the start. Skip the preamble. Leave a mess. And that is true of these 10 commandments here.

Skip the preamble. Leave a mess. Misunderstand what's going on here. And so what do we see? The law is given here to God's people in the context of them having been saved, not needing saved. And that is also important, because what does it tell us about God? It tells us he's a God of grace, rescuing his people, as we've seen over these last few weeks, graciously and powerfully, that they might now come to live according to his ways, not to earn his love. And these words here in the 10 commandments, not given, to earn his rescue. It's significant, isn't it, that we're not meeting God's people still in Egypt. God didn't send Moses into Egypt saying, look, take Israel these laws. Take them these words. And I don't know, watch them for the next five years, maybe 10.

If you could just keep a little chart, little tick box, give each person a bit of an evaluation, a daily score, and then we'll see if they're worthy of my rescue. Is that what's happened?

Is that what we've seen? Is that where we are? No, right? No, not at all. No, God has come and defeated and destroyed and if you like smashed Pharaoh after 10 rounds, giving him the ultimate knockout blow in the sea. And he has rescued his people from slavery by grace, having seen their slavery, having seen their groaning. And now, out of this gracious rescue, gives these words.

And so what we have here is not salvation by works offered to God's people. It is a gracious salvation in which God now calls his people to fullness of life in him. So who is God? He is a gracious savior, a rescuer who comes to his people by grace to save them from slavery. Now, we've seen that. I don't want to spend too much time saying any more of that. We've seen it these last number of weeks.

[10 : 02] But let me just ask one question. The question for all of us this morning is, is he our rescuer? Is he our savior? Do you see there, verse 2, I am the Lord, your God. Can you say that this morning?

Is the Lord who rescued these people, his people from Egypt, is the Lord who rescues his people ultimately through the Lord Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection? Is he your savior? Is he yours? Can you say that this morning? If you can't, then God offers that to you. In chapter 19, verse 4, it said that he bore Israel out on eagle's wings. I love that picture. This morning, that is what God offers you, offers you salvation, not from Egypt or Pharaoh, but a spiritual rescue from sin and

death and hell. If I can put it this way, on the eagle's wings of Christ, he holds that out to each and every one. Come to him. Let him rescue you from a much worse fate than the slavery of his people here, that spiritual rescue that we all need in Jesus. But if you can say this morning, if the Lord is our God, the Lord is my God, then let those be sweet words of joy to you again this morning. Maybe as you think of God, that rescue, that saving work of Christ has grown dull in our hearts or has grown cold in our minds. That can happen. So once again this morning, put your eyes on the grace of God who took us from the house of slavery to sin and certain death and gave us life in Christ forever. Friends, let those words, that rescue ring in your ears again as we come here to see God give these commandments.

So on this mountain, next to this mountain, God's people meet their maker. What is he like? He is a gracious savior, a gracious savior who rescues his people because of his mercy, his love, his power, all through him. But what else is he like? This is our second point, and this is going to be our main one we'll spend most of our time here. He is a covenant maker, and we are to obey him. He's a savior. We are to trust. That comes first. We cannot earn God's love. But now being in covenant relationship with him, having had that rescue, we are to obey him. That is to say, as we say he is a covenant maker here in point two, he's a king, a ruler, a God who in saving his people calls his people to himself to walk in his ways. As we've said, in other words, God's people now are rescued, not to go their own way. They're not taken out of Egypt to go their own way, but they're taken out of Egypt to follow God's ways. And here on Sinai, he's making covenant with them, and he's saying, come and live like this. Now, we see this in a number of places, God making covenant here. We can see it. One, we see it in God's name. God says he is the Lord your God in verse two, capital L-O-R-D.

That is God's name. That is the name that he gave to Moses at the burning bush. Yahweh, it's God's self-revealing to his people that he would know that he is their God. It's God's personal, relational presence with his people. He's saying, I am yours and you are mine. We also see it in the formula, the words that God chooses to use here in verse two. He says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. And we can see that something very significant is happening here with God and these people. Because those are the same formula of words he used with Abraham in Genesis 15. 400 years before this, he makes covenant with Abraham. And he says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans. Different place, but the same thing is happening. These are massively significant moments in the story of God's people. God is saying, I have taken you from this land. I am your God. Now receive these words and listen to me. But we also see God's covenant making, the fact that he's wrapping his arms around his people and saying, follow me. We also see it here in these 10 words, these 10 commandments.

[14:32] These words, notice, are spoken here by God. That was actually one of the things looking at it this week that caught me out. I thought they were written right at the start. It's not actually till later they're written down, but they're spoken here by God. Later they'll be written down into tablets of stone, were told by God's own finger, and will be placed inside the ark of the covenant. And that really is, all that to say is that these words are the foundation upon which everything else is built in terms of how God's people are to live. Having saved his people and said, come and live my way, this is the foundation upon what everything else is built. So in other words, as we've seen, these commandments are not rules for getting out of Egypt, but these are for a free people to live freely and have fullness of life. Now I wonder how you feel about that this morning. That true freedom for God's people, that true freedom then for any of us isn't being taken out of the house of slavery in Egypt or the house of slavery to sin and left to ourself, but is actually true freedom is found in obedience to God. How do we feel about that this morning? Our society massively dislikes that, does it not? It's not the message we hear at all. No, real freedom is what? Doing whatever I want. I think I've quoted this before. You're going to get it again from me here. I think there was concern amongst the family. I might sing it. Don't worry, I won't. But the true freedom that our world thinks that is found within us and doing whatever we want is sung in the movie Frozen, isn't it? As we hear these words, it's time to see what I can do, to test the limits and break through. No right, no wrong, no rules for me.

I'm free. It is a soundtrack for our world, isn't it? True freedom not found in obedience to God, in his law, in his ways. No. But saying that there's test the limits, breakthrough, no right, no wrong, no rules for me. I'm free. What do we think about that? It's a message often taught in our schools. We hear it in our workplaces. But what do we think about it? Well, just imagine if all of Aberdeen this

afternoon put that into practice while driving home in their cars. No right, no wrong, no rules for me. I'm free. What would we have this afternoon as we all headed out? We'd have absolute chaos, right? Utter devastation. And yet our society, our world in this age today screams and sings that message everywhere, most days. It's how people are told to live with their bodies. No right, no wrong, no rules for me. I'm free. But what do we have? Utter chaos. And so, no, friends, true freedom is not found within ourselves doing whatever I want, not at all. We see the carnage of that all around us.

No, true freedom is found in obedience to God, to God living his way in his world as he is the Savior who knows what's best for us. True freedom is not self-rule, but God rule. And so, God calls Israel into covenant with them, giving them this law to obey. Now, we can't talk about each of these commandments this morning. So, what's at the heart of these 10? What's at the heart? Well, the Lord Jesus tells us in Matthew 22, that God's people would love the Lord their God and love their neighbor as themselves, that they would love God and love each other. And that's how these commandments from God can be divided, that the first four speak about love for God. Just cast your eyes down, scan a little bit as we go there from verse 3. No other gods, no images, no taking God's name in vain, and resting on the Sabbath. And then the following six speak about love for others. Honor your parents. Don't kill, don't commit adultery, don't steal, do not lie, do not covet. Love for God, love for others. That is at the heart of these commandments of how God's people are to live. And so, the question is, as we asked right at the start, are these for us? Do we as the church of Christ need to keep and follow these to today?

[19:09] And the answer is a resounding yes. Now, in order to get there and show us that, let me just tell you how the law is used in the life of God's people here in the Old Testament, but also actually stretching beyond that in light of Christ's coming to see how this is for us. And what we see through the scriptures, and we see in our confession, in the tradition that's been handed out to us, is the law can be used in three ways, three ways. The first use of the law is the civil use. That is to say, these laws in Israel were to be used by those who ruled to restrain evil.

That when this moral law is followed, it restrains evil, it holds it back. However, not only in Israel does the use of these laws by magistrates or whatever work to restrain evil. No, we see the use of these by magistrates, by politicians, even today, as these are used. This moral law proves fruitful and good in restraining evil. And that's because this moral law written here is actually that, or what is about to be written down or codifying, a natural law that God has sewn into the fabric of the world. When Israel are told here then, for example, do not kill, they're not thinking, oh, what a surprise. Okay, oh, this is brand new information. No, right, they knew that.

They know that from all the way back to Cain and Abel, right, but they see that all around them. And so there is a way that God has made this world that God codifies and gives to his people here, but that if followed and used in this world does actually restrain evil. So let me take an example, one example. We could have had examples on all of them, but the first one, let's take the seventh commandment, do not commit adultery. Think about that out here in this world. Has it been a blessing to the West? Has it been a blessing to this nation of Scotland that following that commandment has more or less been abandoned? Likely, let's say pre-World War II, something like that, adultery was still kind of frowned upon. Let's think post-World War II in the 60s and 70s, making sex, or sort of people having sex outside of marriage, adultery becoming a kind of total norm. Divorce laws, what, in the last 40, 50 years have become much, much easier. And what's the fruit, the promise of the sexual freedom, inverted commas, of the 60s and 70s, of a nation, of the West that's abandoned this? Fatherlessness, poverty, broken homes, hookup, shack up, breakup, the very fabric of what makes life torn apart as individuals and as people have moved away from this. So this moral law that God has codified here is sewn into the fabric of nature that when it's followed does restrain evil in this world and does so to this day. But the second use of the law, how this works as well, so we have a kind of civil use or restraining of evil use, it is as a mirror. It is as a mirror. Now, the older I get, the less I enjoy looking in the mirror, less and less. It was family haircut week this week. One of my sons was straight to the mirror. How do I look? Very enthusiastic. I look in the mirror hoping the gray hairs have turned back to brown. They haven't. Hoping that there's more hair there than was before.

There isn't. Hoping the hair was thicker than it was before. No, it's thinner, grayer, thinner, shorter. But we need to look in the mirror, don't we, to know how we look, how we truly are. And so this law

holds up a mirror to us and says, how are you getting on keeping this? How have you done with this?

Have you not done what you shouldn't? Have you done what you should? And as we hold up the mirror and read these 10 words, we realize, okay, we haven't. We have fallen short of this. Now, if you don't believe me, or you think, hmm, maybe I'm okay. We read through that. We read through those verses. Yeah, okay, maybe some, maybe not others. I'm not entirely sure. But if you don't believe me, what I want to do and encourage you all to do is to use our confessional documents to try and understand some of this. The Westminster Confession, the shorter and larger Catechism, it gives like an exposition of some of this to show us how some of this works. So let's hold up an exposition of the third commandment to us from the Catechism to show us our hearts, because we will read it. And let me tell you, you will read and say, I am a lawbreaker. Now, this is quite long. There are no full stops. I don't think it has the word doth, which we had earlier. But I read this to say, this is what's going on in the sum of this third commandment. This is it, a bit of an exposition. And we realize, wow, we have fallen short. But there is good news. And we'll come to that in a second. So this is from the larger Catechism. Question 113.

[24 : 32] What sins are forbidden in the third commandment? The third commandment there, verse 7, do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. What sins are forbidden? The sins forbidden in the third commandment are the not using of God's name as is required, and the abuse of it in an ignorant, vain, irreverent, profane, superstitious, or wicked mentioning, or otherwise using his titles, attributes, ordinances, or works by blasphemy, perjury, all sinful cursings, oaths, vows, and lots, violating of our oaths and vows, if lawful, and fulfilling them if unlawful, murmuring and quarreling at, curious prying into, and misapplying of God's decrees and providences, misinterpreting, misapplying, or in any way perverting the word or any part of it, to profane jests, curious or unprofitable questions, vain janglings. I actually don't know what vain janglings are, so if anyone wants to come and tell me what that is, but there you go. Vain janglings, or the maintaining of false doctrines, abusing it, the creatures or anything contained under the name of God, to charms or sinful lusts and practices, the maligning, scorning, reviling, or any way wise opposing of God's truth, grace, and ways, making profession of religion in hypocrisy or for sinister ends, being ashamed of it or ashamed to it, by unconformable, unwise, unfruitful, and offensive walking or backsliding from it. Or as Paul says in Romans, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Hold up that mirror to us and we can see what? Law breaker. And so then what does the law do and what should it do for God's people here? Send us to God. Send us to God crying for grace and mercy and of course finding it in the Lord Jesus. And so the law then, to put it another way, is not a task master, friends. It is a school master. A school master that teaches us what God loves and what we're to love and how we're to live and that sends us back to God when we fail. And it is not a task master driving us with a whip to break us. No, as we read the law and read these commandments and see that we fall short, we can come to Jesus, our great Savior, knowing that we have not had to earn his love, but that he has saved us freely through his gracious love given. So there's this restraining use. There's a second use as a mirror or a school teacher. Thirdly then, and this according to our confession is the primary use of the decalogue, the commandments for us as Christian. The law shows us how to live. How to live as those saved by grace in Christ, it shows us how to live. Have you ever wondered why David says in Psalm 1, my delight is in the law of the Lord? Have you ever asked the same about Psalm 19 that we sung earlier? The law is sweeter than honey to be desired more than riches in gold. We see the same in Psalm 119 as well. How can the

Psalmist write this? How can they see these things? Because they know the infinite worth of God and love of God and God having brought his people to them, they delight to follow in his ways. And so as God has saved us and made covenant to us, it is our joy, it is our delight to hear these words and to walk in his ways. It was a delight, an absolute privilege and pleasure and joy being here on Friday for Flynn and Rachel's wedding. What a special, special day. It was a wonderful day. But for them now, and I guess true for any married couple, when a husband gets a message from his wife or a wife from her husband, maybe on the way home after a long day at work, maybe it's can you stop in and pick up some milk on the way home, or maybe it's something sweeter and more meaningful. But those words, when they come through on a text message or a phone call or whatever it is, they're not just cast aside, are they? They're not treated the same way as getting a phone app notification telling us of some breaking news on the BBC. No, no, my spouse is in touch. They spoke, they messaged, they phoned. And because they are mine and I am theirs in marriage,

no, I'm going to honour and listen to. And if it's manageable, do what they say and delight in those words. And so it is for all of God's people. We're delighted to live God's way because it's God's way. He's our saviour, our redeemer, our king who calls us to life in his kingdom, always knowing what's best. Not always easy, right? Living according to God's ways, but he always knows what's best. And so in the light of Christ's coming, we want to say, yes, this is for us. And actually, our obligation to it is strengthened because Jesus has come. And he said, not an iota of this would pass away. And so these words now, as God's words to us in the context of our salvation, become a joy and a delight because they tell us what God is like and remind us that we are his.

[30 : 15] So as Israel come to meet their God, what is he like? He's a saviour who they are to trust. He is a covenant maker who they are to obey. And lastly, he is holy. He is holy. And they are to draw near through their mediator. At the end of chapter 19 and chapter 20, verses 18 to 21, show us, don't they, something of the holiness of God. Verse 18 of chapter 20, the people hear all this and they are afraid. Verse 19, they were afraid they're going to die.

They want Moses to speak, but not God. And so verse 21, they send Moses kind of back up the mountain into the thick darkness to hear what else God will say. Yes, these words are given graciously in the context of rescue. But the one who rescued them is a holy and mighty God. We've already seen that, haven't we, through our studies in Exodus so far, that God is not a God to be trifled with. But in case we've missed that, we see it again here. God has crushed Pharaoh and his army like a fly, total control over nature. He's given food and water to his people through miraculous means on their journey here. And he has thundered now from the mountain. And as they hear the trumpets blast and as they see the darkness, these people fear for their lives. But there's good news. There's good news.

They have a mediator. They have a mediator. Moses can go. Moses enters the thick darkness and goes to speak with God as God now. It gives the case law, more law to come, the ceremonial, the civil law, the law of how these people are going to live. We cannot come before this holy God and live. Sinai taught Israel that.

The tabernacle, which they're soon to be given at the end of Exodus, will teach them that. We need a mediator. And we have one, a greater Moses, the Lord Jesus, through whom we can draw near to God.

So again, have you come to the Lord Jesus, to the only mediator between man and God? There is no other name in heaven or on earth in which you can come. There's no other name. There's no other one who has fulfilled the law, kept all its commandments, and through whom you can draw near to the Father. So come to him. Praise him. And you can come near to the Father in Jesus. What a savior.

[32 : 53] What a mediator we have in Christ. While Israel have met their maker, he is a savior who calls them to trust him. He is a covenant maker who calls them to obey him. And he is holy, and we can come to him through a mediator. He is their maker. He is their redeemer. He is our maker. He is our redeemer. He is our savior. And so as then, dependent on his spirit, seek to walk in his ways with reverence and holy fear, knowing what a great God and savior we have. Let us pray.

Lord God, we thank you that in your grace and mercy you have come to us, that you saved us, that you did not make us earn our salvation, because we could never do it. But you came in grace and mercy in the Lord Jesus, our savior, our redeemer, our mediator, to bring us before you, our Father. We thank you then now that because we belong to you, adopted into your families. You've shown us how to live in your world. So may we delight in your word. May we delight to walk in its ways, knowing that we don't need to keep it to earn our salvation. No, you've given that to us freely, but that we delight to walk in it as we seek to delight you, and knowing that it's best for us. Lord, when we fail, when we stumble, when we fall, when we break these commandments, thank you that we can turn back again to our savior, knowing that we are secure, we are safe in him, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. So by your spirit, empower us to be more like our savior, the perfect law keeper, whose perfect righteousness he's given to us, that we would delight in your words and desire them more than all the riches of this earth. For how great are you, our savior and holy God. Amen.