
From Slavery to Obedience (Exodus 20:1-17)
3/4/2018 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



Slavery. Imagine being forced into hard labor from morning to night with nothing to show for it but the promise of more of the same forever forward into the future. That would be horrifying. There's a reason our forefathers in the United States worked to abolish slavery. But the sad reality is: they couldn't get it all. Slavery goes much deeper.

You can be a slave to addiction. Imagine the addict, who has made some bad choices and now his very body yearns for, longs for the sensation of just one more buzz, one more high. And that person can give themselves every reason in the world why they should quit, but when it comes right down to it, all the reason in the world, all the misery their addiction has created in their life and in the lives of the people around them, their own body just doesn't care as long as it can get that one thing it wants. No one is forcing them to do this, but their own bodies and their own brains seem to hold them as slaves.

You can be a slave to self. Imagine the person who is sick of all the corruption in the world around them, all the people who have wronged them and there doesn't seem to be a thing they can do about it. But if they are honest with themselves, they haven't done much at all to make things better. By their own estimation, they've made a lot of bad choices. They still do a lot of things they know they shouldn't. Maybe they've even tried to change in the past, with New Year's resolutions or talking to people they hoped could help them, but in the end they always fall back into their old patterns. And things just keep getting worse. Again, no one is forcing them to do this, but they still feel almost like slaves, unable to do the things they know they want to do.

Now, stop imagining. Look at yourself honestly. You were born into a world in slavery to death, sin, and Satan. Your parents were raised in that same slavery. Their parents were raised in that same slavery. Every person you've ever met has lived their whole life in that same slavery. Are you, all by yourself, going to throw off those shackles? Are you, alone, going to escape death? Are you, where everyone else has failed, going to be the one to never sin? Are you, not even 100 years old yet, going to be the one to overthrow Satan who has been enslaving mankind for thousands and thousands of years? Let's be honest. No, you're not. We are no strangers to slavery.

Today, as we look at the 10 commandments, our God brings us From Slavery to Obedience, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. Many people want to start with those laws, but let's instead start where God starts. The ten commandments begin with an all-important statement: And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

These commandments don't just come from anyone. This isn't your parents telling you to clean your room. This isn't your good-for-nothing relative telling you how they think our country should run. This is the LORD, God the Father, who created the world and who is minutely involved in the second by second preservation of this universe from the

functioning of vast galaxies all the way down to subatomic particles.

This is God, who knows more about the universe than all the scientists who will ever exist will ever discover! This is God who knows more about how humans interact than all the sociologists and psychologists will ever find out! This is God who knows you better than you will ever even know yourself! Your parents might be wrong about what they think you should do. Your good-for-nothing relative may be wrong about how society should function. The scientists could make mistakes in their discoveries and theories. But God? God knows what he's talking about.

Moreover, these commandments don't come from some manual writer who lives across the country from you. These commandments don't come from some instructional teacher who hopes to make money by giving you something they hope you will value. These commandments come from the LORD, God the Son, the Savior.

This is the God who promised that a Savior for the world would come from the nation of Israel. This is the LORD who saved that nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. This is the LORD who fulfilled his promises and sent his Son into the world, born among the people of Israel, to bear the burden of mankind's slavery to sin, death, and the devil.

This is the LORD who perfectly obeyed these same 10 commandments himself, and now promises that perfect status to you and me who have not obeyed these 10 commandments. He promises that perfect status freely through faith the LORD Jesus. This is the LORD who took the punishment you and I deserve for our rebellion against these 10 commandments all so that you and I might be washed clean of our sins. This is the LORD who 3 days after dying on the cross rose from the dead so that you and I might be certain that in Christ God does consider us to have perfectly obeyed these 10 commandments. In Christ, God considers the punishment that we deserve for our rebellion against his commandments to be fully paid. In Christ, God promises the reward for perfect obedience to these 10 commandments to us.

And again, these commandments don't just come from some self-help guru who gives us some concepts and hopes people are smart enough to do what they've learned. These commandments come from the LORD, God the Holy Spirit, who knows that we have all broken every one of these commandments, who knows that we are naturally slaves to sin, who knows that in our slavery we always and only rebel against these commandments. We are naturally God's enemies who hate God's laws, refuse to live by them, and aren't even able to live by them in the first place! That is why these commandments come from the LORD who has worked a real miracle in your heart so that you actually believe all that Jesus accomplished for you, so that you receive the benefits of all of Christ's work on your behalf. This is the LORD who has put a new creation in you that actually does hate evil and love what is good. This is the LORD who has given you new life to even want to do what is right in the first place. This is the LORD who works in you, through the Word and Sacraments, to live according to these commandments.

These 10 commandments don't come to us from just anyone. They come from our

Creator, who made us and knows everything about us. They come from our Savior, who loves us enough to live, suffer, die, and rise again for us, who alone can legitimately make the claim that he wants what is best for us. They come from our Sanctifier, who makes us new in Christ, creating faith in our hearts, and giving us the power and ability to even live according to these commandments in the first place.

In the 10 Commandments, God is bringing us From Slavery to Obedience. God doesn't want us to remain slaves of sin, hopelessly and foolishly fighting against God who is our only true friend and our only true hope. God doesn't want us to remain slaves to death, running our whole lives from the inescapable fact that we will die one day and nothing we do will ever change that. God doesn't want us to remain slaves of Satan, who deludes us with pride and rebellion against God so that we bind ourselves to the same hellish fate as Satan.

Instead, God wants to bring us to the freedom of obedience. Now, you might say, "Obeying commandments doesn't sound like freedom to me." "Doing what someone else tells me to do sounds like slavery all over again!" Those are good points.

But let me ask you this: if my doctor tells me that a certain diet and certain exercises will lead to a healthier body, is it slavery for me to obey what he says? In that case, obedience to that diet may very well lead me to the freedom of a healthy body! Disobedience, on the other hand, will leave me stuck with an unhealthy body! Which do you prefer?

Let me ask again, who would you rather be: the person on their death bed who looks back at a reckless life of meaningless self-indulgence and broken relationships or the person who looks back at a self-disciplined life of doing the right thing even when it was hard, a lifetime of serving your God and serving others?

This is why God brings us from Slavery to Obedience. Not because he wants to end our fun, not because he's an uncaring task master, but because he genuinely cares for humanity and he wants what is best for us.

God teaches us so much about life in these 10 Commandments and, unfortunately, we simply don't have time to really dig into all of them right now. For now, we'll settle for two illustrations from C.S. Lewis.

Imagine humanity as a fleet of ships. Three things need to happen if that fleet of ships is going to get to their destination. #1 The ships need to travel together. That means that need to avoid crashing into each other. #2 Each individual ship needs to be working properly. If a ship's steering is malfunctioning, it's going to be very difficult to avoid crashing into other ships. #3 The ships all need to be traveling in the same direction.

Or imagine humanity as an orchestra with many different instrumentalists. Again, three things need to happen if the musicians are going to play music. #1 The musicians all need to play together. That means they all need to be in the same key and play in the same meter, coming in at the right time. #2 Each individual instrument needs to be tuned properly, otherwise it won't matter if the musician comes in at the right time, it won't play

the correct notes! #3 The musicians all need to be playing the same piece of music.

God teaches us a similar 3 lessons in the 10 Commandments. #1 God loves humanity. He created us, he died for us, and in mercy he grants so many of us eternal salvation! He wants us to care about our fellow humans too. So he teaches us to love others as we love ourselves. God takes our treatment of other people personally. If I wrong someone else, no matter what my rationalization for it, God considers that a wrong against himself. Humanity cannot function together without this morality, just like a fleet of ships can't travel if they crash into each other and an orchestra can't perform together if they aren't in the same key and following the same beat. And so, God commands that we respect the lives, possessions, and reputations of other people.

#2 God also knows that we are more than just social creatures. We are rational, emotional, mental beings. We have an internal life. And so God's commands also guide our inner lives. Often people excuse their wrong-doing by saying they aren't hurting anyone. But doing wrong always corrupts our souls, our emotions, our minds, our consciences. If a ship's engineer starts smashing the steering system, how can that ship possibly avoid colliding with another ship? If I start messing with the tuning on my instrument, how can I possibly play in tune with the rest of the orchestra? This is why God commands us not to covet. This is why he commands us to live pure lives and to honor parents and others in authority.

Finally, #3 freedom from the slavery to sin, death, and the devil can only be found in the One True God. Therefore, the first commandments guide us in making sure we have a right relationship with God. If we don't put God first in our lives, if we fear, respect, honor, trust in, or love anything else more than God, those things will only lead to our damnation. What good will anything else do us if we spend eternity in hell? What reason do we have for obeying the other commandments if we don't care who the true God is or what the true God says? If some of the ships in the fleet are headed to a totally different destination, that's certainly going to cause problems. If some of the instruments are playing a totally different song, it won't matter how well they play their parts, right? And so our God commands us to have no other gods, and to honor his name and his Word.

If you know where your Catechism is, get it out this week and read through Luther's explanations for the 10 Commandments again. Our God brings so much wisdom as he leads us from Slavery to Obedience. But never forget where it all starts. These commandments come from the God who created and preserves us, the God who saves us from the punishments of complete disobedience and through Christ freely grants us the rewards of perfect obedience, the God who works in our hearts through the Word and the Sacraments to keep us trusting in God for salvation and to grow us in our love for him and our desire to live for him. Amen.