

Meeting Jesus In The Eighth Commandment
Exodus 20:15

November 11, 2018

SI: We're studying the Ten Commandments this fall.

The theme verse guiding our of our study is Romans 10:4,

Christ is the end of the law.

Doesn't mean Christ gets rid of the law or abolishes the law so don't have to keep.

End is the Greek word telos—goal, aim, fulfillment—that kind of end.

When we study each Commandment we should end up at Jesus.

His perfection, his substitution, his deliverance—and ultimately we should see how the Commandments are ways for us to respond to Jesus in faith.

Our passage this morning is only one verse, Exodus 20:15

The eighth commandment is:

You shall not steal.

Ephesians 4:28 says:

He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

INTRO: A few years ago my grandmother passed away and the family gathered at a cemetery in Fayetteville, Georgia for a graveside service. It was one of the rare occasions when almost everybody on my mother's side of the family was all together. It was a sweet time. But when we left we discovered my cousin's minivan had been broken into. Somebody had smashed the driver's side window and stolen her purse. You could see her vehicle from where we had been standing around the grave. Which means the person who did this was watching us bury a loved one. When the police came they told us it happened all the time in this cemetery. My poor cousin was 100 miles from home. It was November. So before she could go home, she had to get the window repaired. But all her credit cards had been stolen. So we had to help her work things out. I doubt the thief even thought about what he was doing to us.

Now let me tell you another story.

There is a journalist named Barbara Ehrenreich who wrote a book several years ago titled *Nickel and Dimed*. It was about people in America who try to get by working low wage jobs.

As part of her research she worked a number of minimum wage jobs including waitressing. She commented tipping, who tipped, who didn't. One observation.

The worst, for some reason, are the Visible Christians—like the ten-person table, all jolly and sanctified after Sunday night service, who run me mercilessly and then leave me \$1 on a \$92 bill. Or the guy with the crucifixion T-shirt (SOMEONE TO LOOK UP TO) who complains that his baked potato is too hard and his iced tea too icy (I cheerfully fix both) and leaves no tip at all. As a general rule, people wearing crosses or WWJD? (What would Jesus do?) buttons look at us disapprovingly no matter what we do, as if they were confusing waitressing with Mary Magdalene's original profession.

Is that true? Barbara Ehrenreich is an outspoken atheist, disdainful of Christianity.

I thought, come on, she barely has any waitressing experience and an ax to grind. But one of our former church members who some of you remember, Lori Lay, worked at Cracker Barrel for many years.

Lori once told me something similar about the after church crowd.

So which of these is a violation of the 8th commandment? Which is stealing?

Is it just the first one? Breaking a car window and taking a purse?

Or is it also the second one? Not giving a waitress a generous tip for her labor?

Is that also stealing? But not tipping isn't against the law. It's your money.

What if you think she didn't refill your drink enough?

I hope you've noticed by now that the commandments are bigger than first seem. They are more like chapter headings over all the important areas of life.

The first three are about our lives in relationship with God our Maker and Savior.

The fourth about our lives at work and rest.

The fifth about family life and life under authority.

The sixth about our lives as neighbors.

The seventh covers our sex life.

The ninth our word life and the tenth our thought life.

The eighth, you shall not steal—covers our lives as property owners.

So the commandments are not just a narrow list of prohibitions, they cover all of life.

And as we've seen over and over in the Sermon on the Mount—

Jesus says they extend far beyond mere actions to words, thoughts, attitudes.

What you think about your property, what you feel about money.

And the commandments are interconnected.

If a person steals he's also breaking the first commandment.

He's putting money before God.

And he's certainly breaking the tenth commandment because he's coveting his neighbors possessions.

So the commandments function as a comprehensive denunciation of our selfishness.

Now as we study the 8th commandment today, I want to introduce another thought.

We tend to think of the commandments as mostly prohibiting things.

You shall not kill, steal, bear false witness, have other gods.

But the commandments don't just prohibit, they also command the opposite.

So obeying the command fully means not only that you don't do what is forbidden, but that you do what is required.

That's how I want us to look at the 8th commandment. What's required?

Is tipping a waitress required by the 8th commandment?

Let's explore that and see how it leads us to Jesus.

We'll look at it under three headings:

1. The positive command
2. Our resistance
3. God's generosity

MP#1 The positive command

I've introduced this idea already, but let's look at it from different angles.

Theologians talk about two classes of sin: Sins of commission and omission.

Sins of commission are doing what God forbids.

Sins of omission are not doing what God requires.

When we hear: You shall not steal, it's the sins of commission that come to mind.

Robbery, fraud. One of our elderly neighbors has been scammed out of tens of thousands of dollars. People doing evil things on the phone and internet.

Frivolous lawsuits, pilfering at work, padding your reimbursements, shoplifting.

I read that one in eleven Americans has shoplifted.

And there's no shoplifter profile, poor people do it and celebrities do it—and everybody in between. So that means some of you shoplift.

Ever since I started using Walmart self check out, I'm tempted to shoplift.

Especially when I scan something and put in bag and then realize it didn't scan.

I want to just leave it in the bag.

You know those Walmart employees who stand at the door and supposedly check your receipt. I said to one of them, Come on, you aren't really checking.

She lowered her voice and said: The only thing we really check on a receipt is if we see someone has a case of beer in their buggy. That really tempted.

What about sins of omission?

Here's a big one: Not giving your employer an honest day's work. Idleness.

If you're getting away with being on social media for hours, you're stealing.

Not paying your taxes. Interesting how often mentioned.

Withholding justice. There may be things that people are owed that the civil law does not require, but a bigger sense of God's justice requires it.

Leviticus 19:3 says: Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him.

That's obvious. There are laws against fraud and robbery.

But listen to the second half of that verse.

Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him.

Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.

You're an employer in Israel, maybe a farmer. You've hired day laborers.

These men live hand to mouth. The day's over and you say: I'll pay tomorrow.

No laws against that. I'm not stealing. I'm going to pay them.

Yes, you are stealing. You're withholding justice.

The lightness they feel in their pockets, the worry they feel in their minds, perhaps the emptiness they feel in their stomachs that night—that's on you.

God's word equates withholding justice with fraud and robbery.

I think there's an application of this verse to tipping wait staff.

This person serving you is your neighbor who you must treat justly. If you don't think she should get a tip because she got your order wrong, you can take that up with the Lord.

Now let me take this one more step.

There's a sin of omission against the eighth commandment that might surprise you.

Non-generosity. Not sharing. Stinginess. Don't steal, work, so you can share. The Bible describes the generous person as one with an open hand, it describes the stingy person as one with a closed fist.

Old Testament and New Testament call believers to generosity over and over.

There is a repeated list of four categories of people who we are to consider: the poor, widows, the fatherless, the alien.

There's nothing wrong with giving generous birthday gifts to your children.

Or giving your business clients tickets to a ballgame or a fancy restaurant. But the Bible commands generosity to those people who cannot pay you back, who don't provide you with any financial advantage, and who are, in some sense beneath you.

By beneath you, I don't mean their worth as persons—of course not—but their position, their socio-economic status, their advantages.

People who don't have the possessions and opportunities you have.

In fact, the Bible actually describes this kind of generosity as giving to God.

We hear giving to God and think that equates to giving to the church.

But Proverbs says:

He who is generous to the poor, lends to the Lord.

Isn't that thought-provoking? That you can lend money to the Lord?

When you loan to God by giving to the poor, do you get paid back?

The second half of that verse tells us:

He who is generous to the poor lends to the Lord and he will repay him for his deed.

The Lord says: Trust me, I'll repay my loans.

But to not do that, and to not be generous toward God, is a form of theft.

To say my money does not exist for those in need, my money exists to serve me, and will be handled as such, that's stealing.

So why is this positive command so hard—to be generous, the open hand?

Here we start to get to the heart of the matter. Let's consider . . .

MP#2 Our resistance to the command

A number of years ago on a mission trip to India I got to know a young pastor.

This was not my friend PBA who our church has supported.

This was another man, younger than me.

We kept up occasionally by email over years.

He was called to teach at Presbyterian Theological Seminary in North India.

He's a very intelligent person.

But he and his wife were from South India and they missed the south.

It's like they were from Gulf Shores and the seminary was in Buffalo, NY

So he left that position and moved to a southern city and is planting a church.

We started corresponding more when he made that move,

and I could tell from his emails that he was discouraged, struggling.

So we Skyped a few times and started sharing prayer requests.

He never asked me for money but as I started piecing together the bits he

told me I was stunned by how little they lived on and were using to do ministry.

And I realized that just \$100 a month would make a huge difference.

For some reason that figure stuck in my mind. I felt that's what God wanted.

That was the generosity God was requiring of me.

But I wouldn't do it. And I had reasons.

Mostly Eliza and Will were both in college, we were already tithing to the church and we had given some gifts to some other ministries. So I didn't do it.

And sometimes I would feel bad about that.

If Allison and I went on a date to Birmingham and I realized that adding up

the restaurant and gas and all we had spent \$50 on a Friday night, I would think about this man and his wife and how they never went out to eat.

But I still kept my fists closed.

Then Eliza totaled her car. It was the car she and Will were using at college.

She was on her way to visit my parents when the wreck happened.

So that caused their grand-parental love to kick in to high gear.

My dad called me and said: Our next door neighbor has a used Ford Focus wagon for sale. I'm going to buy it for the kids to have at college. So that was amazing.

Also, the car Eliza totaled had comprehensive insurance—thanks to Elliot Free.

I just wanted to buy liability, it was such a junker.

But Elliot told me: Andrew, those college kids will wreck that car.

So I listened to his wisdom and I got a much bigger check than I expected.

And with that check I was able to completely pay off Allison's little Fiat,

which was about \$125 per month. So that money was freed up from the budget.

Almost exactly the amount I had felt an urge to start giving the Indian pastor.

But after all those amazing providential events, do you know the first thing that came to my mind? Adrienne's upcoming wedding.

I can't be sending money to this fellow pastor who is scraping by in the most humble circumstances if we've got a big wedding in a few months.

After the wedding, then I'll be generous.

But my conscience was killing me and the Holy Spirit made me see how generous God had been to me through this whole episode. So I finally pulled the trigger.

Allison and I put that \$100 per month in the budget.

And of course the Lord has repaid us generously.

This pastor and his wife pray for us, pray for Christ Covenant.

They are doing amazing ministry and we're connected with them.

So here's my question: What was that thing that made me resist giving?

Those months, that year when I didn't give to this man and knew God wanted me to give to him, I was stealing from him.

I was breaking the eighth commandment and I knew it.

Why did I do that? What motivated me to break God's law?

I asked myself that question.

Before I give you the answer, let me ask you.

How much do you feel like you need before you can be generous.

How much padding? How much of a buffer?

Do you think, Lord, I don't need to be a millionaire, but if I just had \$30,000.

Then all the bills and contingencies would be taken care of and I could give.

If I just had the wedding behind me and paid for.

But there's always something, isn't there.

If I had waited until after Adrienne's wedding, then Eliza's was on the horizon!

The Bible's not against saving, planning financially for the future. Proverbs.

But it also warns us against trusting money, how hard for rich to enter kingdom.

So what is it that causes believers to keep our fists closed against the generosity that God commands? It's unbelief.

It's lack of faith in the generosity of our heavenly Father in Christ Jesus.

So our keeping of this commandment from the heart can only happen when our hearts are melted by the generosity of God.

So let's think about . . .

MP#3 God's generosity

There was Scottish pastor who lived in the mid 1800s named

Robert Murray M'Cheyne.

He died when he was only 29, but in his short life he had an enormous impact

on the Church of Scotland. His sermons and writings were widely read. One of his sermons was on generosity and let me read you a little bit of it. I know it's a stereotype that the Scots are tight-fisted with their money, but stereotypes have a grain of truth.

M'Cheyne says:

Now dear Christians, some of you pray night and day to be branches of the true Vine; you pray to be made all over in the image of Christ. If so, you must be like him in giving.

Then he quotes 2 Cor 8:9

“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that we, through his poverty might become weak.”

If you want to be like Jesus, you have to give like Jesus gave.

And then he says:

What would have become of us if Christ had been as saving of his blood as some men are of their money?

Think of a church full of Scottish Presbyterians for whom saving their money and building their savings is very important. M'Cheyne says: If Jesus saved his blood the way some of you save your money, we would be lost.

So then he starts voicing objections Christians have to generosity.

Objection 1. ‘My money is my own.’ Answer: Christ might have said, ‘My blood is my own, my life is my own’ ... then where should we have been?

Objection 2. ‘The poor are undeserving.’ Answer: Christ might have said, ‘They are wicked rebels ... shall I lay down my life for these? He gave his blood for the undeserving.

Objection 3. ‘The poor may abuse it.’

Before I read his response, the abuse of charitable giving is certainly something that wisdom requires us to consider. Something our Deacons always weighing.

M'Cheyne's not disputing that. He's dealing with our excuses not to be generous.

How we might use the possibility of misuse of our generosity to keep fist closed.

Objection 3. ‘The poor may abuse it.’

Answer: Christ might have said the same (of us); yea, with far greater truth. Christ knew that thousands would trample his blood under their feet; that most would despise it; that many would make it an excuse for sinning more; yet he gave his own blood.

Here's how he ends.

Oh, my dear Christians! If you would be like Christ, give much, give often, give freely, to the vile and poor, the thankless and the undeserving. Christ is glorious and happy and so will you be. It is not your money I want, but your happiness. Remember his own word, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’

Jesus didn't tithe himself, he gave his whole self.

God didn't tithe his Son, he gave his whole Son.

The opposite of theft is giving.

For God so love the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

And the irony of Jesus' death is that he died between two thieves.

Thomas Aquinas, the great Medieval Catholic Theologian asked what that meant, that Christ hung on the cross between two thieves?

Was it just a meaningless detail, or was there a deeper meaning?

Aquinas says that the primary meaning is that Jesus died in shame.

We despise thieves. When I think about the person who broke my cousin's window and stole her purse while he was watching her bury her grandmother—I think, what a lowlife.

That's who Jesus died with. That's who he was associated with in his death.

Lowlife thieves. The despised, the shamed.

But Aquinas says there's another meaning.

He says the two thieves represent all humankind.

It's not that there are good people and bad people and God saves the good people.

We're all commandment breakers. We're all thieves.

We've all been tight-fisted towards those in need.

One of those thieves cursed Jesus and died.

But what happened when the other thief said:

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

How did Jesus reply?

Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

When that grabs your heart, what happens?

We can have wise savings, we can save for a rainy day, we can think about money

for when I can't work anymore and leaving something for those I care about—

but do you know what Jesus enables you to do?

To have an open hand. To really hear the apostle Paul:

He who did not spare his own Son but freely gave him up for us all, how will he

not, along with him freely give us all things.