

Meeting Jesus In The Tenth Commandment
Exodus 20:17

November 25, 2018

SI: Today we're concluding our study of the Ten Commandments.

Our guiding verse in this study has been 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 20:17

The tenth commandment is:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Colossians 3:5 says:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and coveting, which is idolatry.

INTRO: I've made the point several times that it's helpful to imagine what it was like for the Israelites to hear the Ten Commandments for the first time. We've known the Ten Commandments all our lives.

We've read them, seen them printed on plaques, inscriptions, wall hangings. They seem to have always been here.

But there was a time when the Ten Commandments had not yet been given.

And then at a particular point in redemptive history, God brought the Israelites out of slavery.. They were unable to liberate themselves, so God sent his liberator Moses to lead them out of Egypt.

He brought them as a people to the base of a mountain in the wilderness, Mt. Sinai. There the Lord God of Abraham gave them the Ten Commandments.

Now think again about who these people were. They had been slaves 400 years.

That's more than twice as long as the United States has been a country.

Their entire existence had been making mud bricks for the building projects of the Pharaohs. They had been doing this for generations.

Children would grow up and do what their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents had done before them. Make bricks and live hand to mouth.

Now they are free. And one of the wonderful things the Lord tells them is:

I'm going to give you the land I promised your forefather Abraham.

And this may seem unimaginable to you now because all you've known is slavery.

But when you enter the Promised Land, I'm going to give you houses you did not build and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant, and fields and farms that will be an inheritance for your children.

That's what's I have planned for you as the people I've loved and saved and redeemed from slavery.

Now here's my law. Here's how I want you to live as my free people.

Here's how I want you to live in a way that honors me.

And what God puts at the end of the Ten Commandments is basically this:

You might not believe this about yourselves, but when you get to the Promised Land, you're going to step into a house you did not have to build—and then you're going to look at your neighbor's house, and want his house.

You're going to walk through a vineyard that you didn't even plant, a vineyard

I've given you for free—and rather than thanking me every day for it—

you're going to look across the valley at your neighbor's vineyard

And think: Why can't I have that? His is better.

The tenth commandment is not simply another commandment like the others.

It's not just one more added to the list.

It's a window into the human heart.

The church father Tertullian called it the mother commandment.

Because he said coveting is the womb for all other commandment breaking.

It's the mother sin.

The most obvious example is: You shall not steal. Why do we steal?

Because we first coveted something that belonged to someone else.

It takes some thought, but you can link coveting to all the commandments.

Furthermore, the tenth commandment is a witness to the spirituality of God's law.

The spirituality of God's law means that it not only addresses our outward behavior, but the thoughts and desires of our hearts.

No one can say: I've kept the Ten Commandments!

I've never murdered anybody. I've never stolen anything.

Because keeping God's law is more than the outward behavior.

Of course you know Jesus himself made this point over and over in the Sermon on the Mount.

But Jesus wasn't saying anything new. Here within the ten commandments themselves is a witness to the spirituality of God's law.

And one more thing about the tenth commandment.

As it delivers the death blow to any fantasy you might have that you can keep

God's law, and make yourself ok to God—in doing that—the tenth commandment shows us that Jesus Christ is our only hope for peace with God.

We need someone who can not just take away our guilt but also give us new hearts, and give us new desires. That's Jesus.

Let's look at it under three headings:

1. The diagnosis of our coveting
2. The pattern of our coveting
3. The redemption of our desires

Credit where credit is due: Two sermons, Brian Habig, Rob Rayburn

MP#1 The diagnosis of coveting

Imagine yourself going to the doctor and saying: Doc, something's wrong.
And after examination your doctor says:

Here's what we call it. Here's what it's doing to your body.

Here's what will happen if it's left untreated.

What is it? What is coveting? What's being forbidden here?

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

We were in Black Mountain, NC for Thanksgiving.

One afternoon I was running some errands with my dad and he said,

Let me show you a new housing development. The Village of Cheshire.

Amazing homes, beautiful homes, surrounded by mountains.

Was that coveting? No, not necessarily.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

What if you went out to eat with another couple? And you noticed how much they were in love with each other and how much they enjoyed each other's company and you thought: I wish my marriage was like that.

Or if you're single and you thought: I wish I could get a husband or wife and have what they have. Is that coveting? Again, no, not necessarily.

Here's what coveting is:

It's discontentment with the things God has given you.

And then focusing that discontentment into wanting what other people have.

And fantasizing about yourself having those things and your plots and plans and imaginations for getting those things.

Here's how the catechism defines it:

discontentment with our own estate, envying and grieving at the good of our neighbor, together with all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his

Think about it this way. Coveting is a bad form of meditation.

What is meditation? Meditation is thinking on something until it affects you.

And I'm using the word "affect" intentionally.

I'm talking about your affections, your feelings, your loves.

Meditation is thinking on something until it changes your affections—like worry.

Worry is a bad form of meditation.

It's imagining the future in a certain way.

And thinking on it over and over until it begins to affect you.

Until you start to feel a certain way—fearful, anxious.

Regret is bad form of meditation.

It's replaying past events, maybe imagining what might have been.
You keep thinking on it over and over until it begins to affect you.
You start to feel jaded, cynical. Or if someone did you wrong, feel bitter.

Coveting is another bad form of meditation that is especially harmful.
It's wanting something with a discontented frame of mind.

Particularly wanting something other people have that you don't have, can't have.
And it makes you hateful, unloving and hypocritical.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is love the Lord your God with all your heart,
soul, strength, and mind and the second is love your neighbor as yourself.
That's the summary of the law. That's what the ten commandments are about.
Love, love. That's how we are supposed to live
Coveting attacks both of those commandments.

Let's say next week you get one of those picture perfect Christmas cards from some
friends—who of course have already mailed it—so that makes you resent them.
But there they are, the whole family at the beach.

They're all wearing open collar white shirts and khakis and they're tan and
smiling and perfect and they can pay for this trip.
There are so many discontented thoughts that can enter your mind.
Why is she with him instead of with me?
Why do they have great kids and I don't?
Why can they afford a trip like that and I can't?

Those thoughts and especially meditating on those thoughts and allowing them
to run down the tracks of your mind, they attack your love for God and neighbor.
Whether you actually say it or not, what's implicit is:

God, why would you do that for them when you know how much I want it?
And right along with that is another thought: And why do they have it?
It's hard to love God if you feel like he's favoring other people over you,
and it's hard to love other people if you resent what they have.
But so often we hypocritically nod and act like we're totally happy for them.

So getting back to this idea of diagnosis.

Coveting is not like a cancerous spot on your skin or a cancerous tumor—
it's like cancer that has gotten into your lymph nodes.
It attacks love in your heart and it can break out anywhere.

MP#2 The pattern of coveting

I got this from Brian Habig's sermon.

There's a four part pattern to coveting: Look, Desire, Take, Hide
You look at something in a way you haven't looked at it before.

You desire it.

You take it. Maybe you actually take it, or probably you fantasize taking it.

And finally, you hide it. Either literally or you keep your fantasies your secret.
Let's look several famous biblical examples where this pattern shows itself.

We'll start with the very first sin! Eve in the Garden of Eden.

She gets into a dialogue with the Devil and his approach is this:

God is withholding something from you. He knows it would be amazing for you to have, but he's holding out on you. He doesn't want to give it to you.

The Devil gets her to look at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in a way she hasn't looked at it before.

Nothing wrong with looking at the tree. God didn't tell them not to look at the tree.

I'm sure they saw it many times. Probably even comment on it to each other.

But Eve looks at it with longing.

It says she saw it was good for food and pleasant to the eyes.

Then next Genesis 3 says—She saw it was desirable for making one wise.

She desired it. She wanted it. It's the same Hebrew word as covet.

So she took it. And then after she and Adam had eaten, they hid from God.

The second example is the story of Achan during the conquest of Promised Land.

God told them that the first city they conquered, he didn't want them to take any spoils from battle. The whole city and everything in it to be an offering to God.

But this one man, Achan took some of the loot and it brought trouble to the whole Israelite community. When he was confronted, here's how he describes what he did in his own words:

When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels

He didn't just see a robe, he saw a beautiful robe, a Babylonian robe.

Babylon was the Paris and New York of the ancient world. This robe was stylish.

He imagined himself wearing it. The silver and gold, he didn't know how much it weighed, but he weighed it in his mind.

What happened next?

When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.

There it is: Looking, desiring, taking, hiding.

Of course everybody know the infamous example of this in King David's life.

He's firmly established in his kingdom. He's at the top of his game.

The army of Israel is off fighting a war, he's at home sitting on his couch. He gets up to walk on the roof of his palace and sees a woman bathing. The next line in the story says: And she was very beautiful to look upon. Nothing wrong with female beauty. God made it. But David looked and looked and looked. And he wanted her. Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah, one of David's mighty warriors— but David coveted her and he took her and then he tried to hide his crime.

This is the pattern of our coveting. We look. We desire. We take. We hide. Even when the taking and the hiding aren't literal actions— they become a part of our mental patterns.

We imagine and fantasize about taking these things, and of course we hide those fantasies. We would never in a million years admit them or describe them. How we've imagined ourselves with someone else's house or spouse or position. We would rather die than admit that. But, of course, God sees our hearts.

You know what strikes me about this commandment?

God spoke these words over 3000 years ago on the other side of the world in another language to a people who could not be more different from us in their experience and outlook—

And yet, these words could not be more applicable to us right now in our particular time and place and cultural setting.

Just think for a moment about how coveting corrupts our use of social media.

Nothing wrong with social media. Christian stance positive.

But how easy it is to see someone else's life spread across social media.

We know the photos are cropped and airbrushed and enhanced—and yet.

Someone else's wife. Someone else's husband. Someone else's kids.

Someone else's body. Why don't I look like she does?

Someone else's ox and donkey and maidservant and manservant.

We may think that what we think about in the privacy of our minds and fantasies doesn't hurt us or other people if we don't act on it.

But it does. It corrupts us on the inside.

So that lead us to the final point . . .

MP#3 The redemption of our desires

There's a famous quote by Woody Allen.

He was asked to justify himself for his affair with Mia Farrow's adopted daughter Soon-Yi. She was 21, he was 57. He said: "The heart wants what it wants."

That's true. The heart wants what it wants.

We do what we do because we want what we want.

Our desires are the internal force that compels everything we do.

But the problem is not that we desire things. God made us to want and desire.

It's that as fallen human beings our desires are messed up, they're out of whack.

We're curved in on ourselves, as St. Augustine put it.

This most powerful force in our psyche is intensely selfish.

Inevitably we're going to want things and try to get things without any regard for the love of God or neighbor.

So what this means is the only way for you to ever keep God's law is for your desires to be reordered.

Ok, how do you do that? How do you change your desires? Stop coveting?

Study the tenth commandment, right? Memorize it. Will that work?

In Romans 7 Paul is talking about his encounter with this commandment.

He says: I didn't know what coveting was until I read the commandment:

You shall not covet, and then that awoke in me every covetous desire.

The point he is making is that the law does not have the power to change us.

That's such an important point to make at the end of this series.

The law does not have the power to change us.

We could put ten commandments plaques in all our Sunday school rooms,

we could recite the ten commandments in every worship service.

But it won't change us. It might be effective for restraining outward behavior.

But Paul says when our sinful hearts hear law it actually stirs up something in us.

We say: I never thought of sinning that way but now I want to.

The law exposes us. It shows that we need someone to save us from our desires!

When we started this study ten weeks ago we looked at Jesus' own words when he said he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

Jesus fulfilled this commandment. He was full of desires.

I desire to do your will, O God. I desire mercy, not sacrifice.

But let me show you one more desire Jesus had.

I don't like to flip around in the Bible during a sermon, but you have to read this with your own eyes it's so amazing. Open your Bibles to Luke 22:14-15.

And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

Jesus' apostles had proved to be men full of selfish desires.

Sometimes their coveting broke out into arguments over who would have the highest position when Jesus set up his political kingdom. Didn't understand. And furthermore, Jesus knew that very soon their desire for self-preservation would make every one of them abandon him in his hour of greatest need.

Think for a minute, what would it do to your friendships if your friends could see how you covet the things they have. How you've coveted their spouses and houses and possessions? Your thoughts looking at their Christmas card. They wouldn't want to have anything to do with you.

Jesus saw right down to the depths of these men and on night before death said: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

That translation doesn't do it justice. It's word for desire or coveting twice. With desire I have desired. With coveting I have coveted to eat Passover with you. Jesus desired to be with men whose desires were hideously unloving and selfish. Isn't that amazing? Jesus sees into the depths of your heart and he wants you. And in the great substitution on the cross, the man with perfect desires got what we deserve for our unloving and hypocritical coveting—And he claimed us as his own, so that God can look at us and see his Son's desires in us.

So how do you take this wonderful message of Jesus' love for you and his desire to be with you and actually use it to reorder your desires.

Because if you're honest you'll admit that even as a Christian, there are still lots of things you covet and want more than God and Jesus.

Let me give you something practical. You can start today.

I told you coveting is a bad form of meditation.

When we covet something, the way we often try to fight is by repressing thought.

I see my neighbor's possessions and covet them so I try not to think, don't look.

Instead, turn it into a conversation with God.

There's no rigid formula or order but there's some ground you need to cover.

Admit you desires to him. God, I'm discontent and I want these things they have.

Be quick to repent and ask forgiveness when discontent thoughts come.

Thank him for what he has given you and be very specific. Big and little things.

Your house, your spouse, your children, your job, your bank account, vacation. Ask him to give you balance. There's a tendency some Christians have to try to deal with coveting by taking a negative stance toward things.

But houses, spouses, possessions, money—those are all good things.

Those are gifts from God for the pleasure and use of people he has made.

Talk to God about helping you see that and separate your coveting from the way you view those things. Will help you appreciate even when belong to another. And find the cause of some Christian who is suffering and take an interest in that person's welfare and find out about that person and pray for him.

I had the privilege Thanksgiving morning to go to a service at Andrew Brunson's home church in Montreat, NC. He wasn't there, but during the pass the mic time one person after another gave thanks to God for his release.

And I sensed how the thought of that son of theirs, son of their church, in prison for those 22 months, their prayers, their thoughts, changed them. It's hard covet someone's better vacation when you're talking to God about someone who is suffering for him.

This is work. You're trying to starve one set of desire and feed the other. But my point is, do it in conversation with the Lord Jesus.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace.

Realign wants.

But