Counting Down the 10 Commandments:

The 6th Commandment: Thou Shall Not Steal

Based on

Preached on March 4, 2015

Midweek Lent 3

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

For our Midweek Lenten Sermons, are counting down the 10 Commandments. The Ten Commandments are God’s Law, and God’s Law tells us what we are supposed to do. The Law is written on our hearts, and our consciences bear witness to the truth of these commandments. And there are two responses to the knowledge of God and his law, one is to suppress it, the other is to face it and repent and flee to Christ for mercy and forgiveness, and He is eager to give it.

And so today, and throughout these Midweek Lenten services, we are going to repent. But remember, repentance is not something you do, it’s something the Holy Spirit does, through the hearing of the Word of God and believing it. For this Lententide, we will be hearing the Word of God in a countdown of the 10 Commandments, because in hearing this Law, the gospel is sweetened, and God produces the repentance and faith that all our good works and noble intentions and personal resolve can’t produce.

One thing to remember is the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. The Law is what God tells us to do. The Gospel tells us what he has already done for us. I heard a Lutheran Pastor tell a story once about before he was a Lutheran, he would study the Bible earnestly and diligently…with a highlighter even, so he could to return to the most important passages and mediate on them more diligently. Afterwards he became a Lutheran and he looked back at his old bible and he found that every passage he highlighted had to do with what God wants him to do--Law. All of the passages that tell of what God had already done for him; especially that He sent his son to die for you; and this salvation is fulfilled in your believing it. None of that was highlighted.

The thing you need to remember about Law and Gospel is that they work together to work repentance, faith, and love in the heart of the Christian. Apart from one another they cannot be digested and leads to spiritual constipation. In the days of Martin Luther, there was no Gospel preached. The message of preaching was that you needed to do enough Good Works or else you are going to burn in hell. The false Gospel was, “Jesus did his part, now you make sure you do yours.” That is not partial law, that is all law. If our performance is responsible for any bit of our salvation, the honest person could have no comfort in this life and would be in constant terror of God for being such a harsh taskmaster. Once Martin Luther rediscovered the Gospel, all that bunged up law was digested, and he could move again, and the Holy Spirit carried out the Good works prepared for him to do.

Today, there is only Gospel preached in most mainline Christian churches, Lutheran ones too. The message of preaching is basically “God loves you no matter what, and he’s there to hold your hand in all your struggles in life”, the false Gospel in this is (Whatever you decide to do, God is there to love, help and support you.) I got bunged up on this Gospel growing up, many of my generation did. What we learned is that God is our divine butler, waiting on hand for us to ring the service bell and then he’ll come down to help us, and once the mess is cleaned up, he’ll return to the kitchen and, like all good servant help, will stay out of my way until I need him again.

Older Christians—know this!, that’s what my generation and younger grew up with, and we need the Laxative of the Law. We need to hear and to know God’s holy and righteous demands so that we can know when we’ve sinned and repent, and so we can know what works please God and actually have focus and direction in our lives. Most of my generation holds off on getting married and having children or punts the prospect altogether because, we’ve been told, God’s there to support us whatever we decide. What we want to know is, what does God want us to do? Because I’m tired of listening to my appetites. Church, tell me what God says, because I’m tired of the bearing the burden of having to steer my life without a rudder from God.

What God says are both commands and promises. Commands are what we must do; promises are what God has done, is doing, or will do. And the first thing God speaks to mankind is a command. Anybody know what the first command God gives to mankind in the bible is? “Be fruitful and multiply.” And this command, as far as I know, was never rescinded, or abrogated, or “fulfilled by Christ and therefore obsolete.” It was given to Adam and Eve before they fell into sin; and so having children isn’t some sort of command given in response to our sinful condition.

Now some Christians can’t have children, others shouldn’t for health reasons; some are celibate and that’s fine, even commendable if they can pull it off and devote their whole life to things above instead. But society and the church, since roughly World War 2, there seems to be an unwritten two child policy. The policy was actually written that way in china, but in the west it seemed to be promoted and enforced more by propaganda then legislation. Anyways, I looked it up on the statistics Canada website for 2011 and on average, no demographic had even up to 2 children. The highest was 1.6 (remember, these are statistics). And my own consciousness, is that, for a stable family that plans its pregnancies, 1 – 2 children is average, 3-4 is a lot, and 5 or more is Mormon (kidding). 5 or more is, well, is eccentric, weird.

I really don’t want to put too fine a point on it, and these things are incidental to the point. The point is that God said, “**Be fruitful and multiply**”, and yet we don’t…and oftentimes we discourage it. We often talk about how we need to plan our lives out, for enough vacation time, so that we can properly pamper the children we do have, so we can have the required 30-40 hours a week of leisure and recreation and “me” time…this sort of thing. This advice is leveled in the spirit of having a "planned parenthood"; and it’s not incidental that that name was adopted by the social agency advocating the killing of children for the sake of personal happiness and fulfillment.

Not liking kids is a sin. Jesus liked kids, and we are called to follow his example. In Matthew 19:14, He chastised his disciples when they stopped them from coming to him. And he chastises anyone who would give any idle reason for closing their womb from him, from bearing fruit for his kingdom.

Look, if you get married and you only have none or one or two kids, that doesn’t mean you’ve sinned. But if you purposefully avoided having children because you wanted more time for your career, or your leisure activities, or because the world told you that two kids is plenty: notice who it is that’s making the rules and setting the agenda. The lord says in Psalm 127:3-5 says, **“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.**” Not only are children a reward; they are a bulwark against enemies, and advocates who defend you in an accusatory world.

If you have the same stigma associated with having many children as I inherited do; don’t beat yourself up. It’s because we have been indoctrinated by it. The way of today’s world is this. First they say to you, “Follow your heart, don’t let anybody tell you how to run your life, who to love, how many children to have.” And then subtly, through TV talk shows, and sitcoms, and celebrity opinions, they tell you precisely what you should follow, how to run your life, who to love, how many children to have, and we listen. Because we are a lost generation starving for God’s commands and we don’t get them in church or from our parents, and so we were abandoned to feed on the world’s commands, wired to our brains by headphones, tvs and the internet. We are the original Latchkey kids raised by the World, because our parents were sold a bill of goods that telling us to do what God says is “Law”, and authoritarian. And so we took our advice from the only place that seemed to be giving it…the world, that is broadcasting for the sole purpose of selling you stuff. Christians, we’ve had enough of freedom of the gospel, we’re bloated with it. Now we need the law of God to digest it.

Friends, the last several generations have seen a moral decline of sweeping proportions. And the church has been powerless to address it because it has bent over backwards to avoid the charge of “legalism.” The church doesn’t want to bind you to the Law, but set you free with the Gospel. The last two generations have been wondering “**Set free to do what**? There’s a lot of time to spend until I die and go to Jesus…what am I supposed to do with it?” And many churches give self-help worldly answers “express yourself, follow your dreams, Jesus is there to help”; but few of them will give the answers that God gives and say “thus sayeth the lord.”

So parents remember this, children need to be told what to do and there’s no shortage of that in parenting even today. The difference is that parents, in telling their children what to do, rarely if ever give God as the reason.” Tell your children what to do, they need direction, but always do so with the authority of God, “**Thus sayeth the Lord**.”

The 6th commandment is a “thus sayeth the lord” and in it he addresses the institution of marriage when he says, “Thou shall not commit adultery.” And this command is based on God’s gift, his gift of sexuality and marriage. And he gives us this gift to be used in a certain way.

And God’s Word and Will is clear on this from the beginning in the book of Genesis. First he says, “**Be fruitful and multiply.**” That’s the first reason he gives you your biological equipment. Thus sayeth the Lord. Second he says, “**It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.**” So God made marriage for companionship, both to combat loneliness and also help raise a family together and make a living together within society helping and supporting one another, the husband sacrificing himself for the wife, the wife submitting to the husband (Ephesians 5). Thus sayeth the lord. God says “For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.” That is, man and woman become one in body and in mind and it is the greatest earthly union prepared for man. And of course what God has joined let no man put asunder. Thus sayeth the Lord.

Finally, as a result of sin, God’s great gift of sexuality and marriage is twisted and perverted so that we don’t even deserve to have it anymore in light of all the perversions associated with it. So, because of the extent of sexual perversions happening, Paul says in 1 Corinthians that it would be better not to marry. But he also says, it is better to marry than burn with passion. And so, as a result of the Fall, one of the purposes of marriage is to provide man and woman with a monogamous sexual outlet.

When I was in law school I was told that I should find a wife and a church because it would help my law practice. I was aghast, to treat marriage as though it's purpose was to serve a career. Because society has repurposed marriage to be made in your own image, God’s purposes are ignored until they have little to no force in what happens in marriage. It’s why western affluent society has an agenda to decrease the size of the “perfect family”, it's so that you can have more time in vain pursuits that make a claim on your time, but avail nothing before God. But God loves children, and so should you.

And so, “What does God want you to do with marriage?” Its clear. The catechism says of it, “**We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other.”** Fornication is a sin; homosexuality a sin, divorce a sin, thus sayeth the Lord. But children a blessing, companionship a blessing, unity of body and mind a blessing and a joy because for obvious reasons, but also and more importantly, because it is according to the word and will of the God who loves you so much, he didn’t spare his own son, but gave him up so you could, by a union with him, have eternal life.

And this, ladies and gentlemen, is the gospel. This is the greatest gift of all, and the central purpose for which God instituted marriage. In Ephesians 5:32, St. Paul writes about marriage calling it a ‘mystery’. He says, “This mystery (of marriage) is profound, but I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

What is marriage ultimately about? Christ and his bride the church. That’s why in the new heavens and the new earth none will marry or be given in marriage, because the real marriage has happened once and for all, and the wedding feast will have begun.

Jesus is the faithful bridegroom. Marriage is a picture of the marriage of Christ to his bride the Church, and just like any marriage we share in everything. He has made you clean by inheriting your sin upon himself and putting it to death; the dowry you give him in marriage is your sin, and he takes it willingly. And from him you marry into salvation, forgiveness, his righteousness is yours because in a marriage you don’t quarantine bank accounts, you share everything, debts and riches and all.

And this gives purpose to our marriages here and now. We are given the honour of reflecting Christ's love to you and his submission to the Father in our marriages. But our marriages are partial, seen dimly through a mirror dirtied with sin. But when the perfect marriage comes, the imperfect will pass away and we will see the bridegroom unveiled face to face. Where you failed, he succeeded. Where you cheated he remained faithful. Where you were once dead in trespasses, he gave you new life in him.