

INTRODUCTION

I invite you to open your Bibles to Exodus 20. We are beginning a new series today called "Ten Requirements for America's Survival." It's a series of messages about ten requirements and I believe with all my heart that if America is going to return to the greatness that she has enjoyed as one nation under God, we must be restored to God's biblical standard of morality found in the Ten Commandments.

If you go to Austin, Texas and walk in our state's capitol, between the State Supreme Court Building and our State Capitol, you come upon a 6-foot monument of the Ten Commandments. It was given to the State of Texas in 1961 by the Fraternal Order of Eagles, which is a social, civic and patriotic organization that donated copies of the Ten Commandments to many different states in order to promote morality among young people.

This past year, a disbarred attorney, who claims to be homeless, Thomas Van Orden, brought a lawsuit against our governor and our state, saying that it is unconstitutional for those Ten Commandments to be displayed on public property. Although our United States Supreme Court has resisted hearing many cases regarding the Ten Commandments, they have accepted this case. And, within the next few months of the message you are hearing me preach today, the Supreme Court is going to rule whether or not it is allowable to have displays of the Ten Commandments on public properties.

The last time our Supreme Court ruled on the Ten Commandments was in 1980, when they ruled 5-4 that public schools in Kentucky could not be required to display copies of the Ten Commandments in all of their school rooms, and many people who love the Bible and love God's word believe that was a setback. Although I am not a prophet, or as Amos said, "A son of a prophet," I believe when our United States Supreme Court reviews this case coming up, that they're going to make a ruling in favor of the Bible and in favor of the Ten Commandments. I honestly believe what we are seeing happening in America today, as we are turning back to God, is just an indication. I think our nation is hungry for moral standards. I think the time has come in our nation when good, godly people are going to stand up and say, "We are not going to take it anymore. We don't want our rights and our privileges in God's word taken away from us in the public forum. So, you pray and you wait as this case is reviewed.

I was encouraged by the words written by our Texas Attorney General, Greg Abbott about these Ten Commandments in Austin, "It was to promote morality among the state's youth which was not thought about twice in 1961, because it was the right thing to do. The Ten Commandments are undoubtedly a sacred, religious text, but they're also a foundational document in the development of western culture and legal codes. The Ten Commandments are memorialized in the very building housing the Supreme Court of the United States. All the Justices have to do is look over their left shoulders from the bench to see Moses, holding the Ten Commandments, looking down on them."

There's someone more important than Moses looking down on our nation! It is God Almighty who is looking down on our nation right now, to see if we are going to be a people who will honor and obey His word.

In Exodus 20, we have these words God gave Moses 33 centuries ago, as this group of people we call the Children of Israel were gathered out on the plain, approaching the beautiful range of the Sinai Mountains that rise 4,500 feet above the desert floor. Then Mt. Sinai itself turns its steep face to heaven, as if listening to God. That's where Moses went and as Moses was on the mountain, God gave him these Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:1-3. "And God spoke all these words: 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.'"

That is commandment number one. In your lifetime, there are lot of important questions you are going to need to answer, but none are probably more important than these questions: Does God really exist? And if he does exist, what is he like? And if God exists and you find out what he is like, what does he require of me? And in the Ten Commandments we have answers to all of those questions, where God reveals himself to us. He says, "This is what I am like and this is what I require of you."

The Ten Commandments are made up of 2 tables. The first four have to do with our relationship with God and the last six have to do with our relationship with one another. So, here in these concise Ten Commandments, called the Decalogue, or the ten words, you have the secret for the vertical dimension of life—knowing and serving God, and you have the secret for the horizontal dimension of life—how to live with one another.

I. GOD'S PROFOUND SELF-DECLARATION

We begin today by learning something about who God is and what he requires of us. Notice three things about what God says in this verse. Number one, notice God's profound self-declaration, "I am the Lord your God." Have you ever been in some gathering when there are a lot of people there you don't know and somebody comes up to you and you wonder who they are and then you look on their lapel and there's one of those adhesive nametags that says, "Hello, my name is..." That sure helps the mood and atmosphere when you can call someone by their name. The first thing God says is, "I want you to know my name."

2. God reveals His name

There are two things we learn in this declaration. First, God reveals his name to us. He says, "I am the Lord." In the Old Testament, the name of God was actually a very holy name represented by only four Hebrew Consonants: YHWH. I will be the first to admit Hebrew is one of the most difficult languages in the history of the world. I recall one of my fellow classmates in seminary was trying to study his Hebrew Bible and was sweating over it, trying to translate a certain passage, when the professor walked by and informed him he had his Bible upside down, because Hebrew often looks like a chicken has stepped in ink and scratched over the paper. There's also another true story about a man who was taking a Hebrew test in seminary and a fly landed on his paper and he swatted the fly away but the poor fly left one of his legs lying there and it changed the whole translation of a verb, that one little fly leg.

Hebrew is comprised of just 22 consonants. Originally there were no vowels. That's why we have those 4 letters, YHWH, which is sometimes called the Tetragrammaton, the four writings. We are not really sure how the Jews pronounced that name. The most common pronunciation today is YAHWEH—but because there are no vowels, we are not exactly sure. Sometimes people ask, "What about Jehovah? I've had people come to my door saying that's God's name. God's name is Jehovah and if you don't call him Jehovah, you don't really know the Bible." Well, after the Bible was translated into Latin, one of the next languages it was translated into was German. When you take those four letters, YHWH and you transcribe them into German, you get WHVH and they just supplied the vowels in there—Jehovah. So that's where we get the name, Jehovah, from the Hebrew, YAHWEH.

So, when someone comes to you and says, "Well, God's name is Jehovah and you must call him Jehovah." You say, "Well, that's his German name all right." But, God is trying to say here, "This is my name." But, really he is saying, "My name means more than just a title." The name YAHWEH literally means Creator, one who reigns, one who is in charge.

Many of you are familiar with the wonderful chorus we sometimes sing, "Our God reigns." I love singing it. But, I also heard about one church that had a typographical error in their Sunday bulletin and instead they transposed some letters and it said, "Our God resigns" instead of "Our God reigns." My friend, God has never resigned, but he does reign over heaven and earth and that's what his name means.

2. God reveals His nature

God first reveals his name. The second thing he reveals in this profound declaration is his nature. Because, in that name, our God, Yahweh, Creator, he's telling us he is the originator of everything: He is the creator.

There are some today that really don't believe there was any kind of intelligent design behind our universe. They believe it was an absolute accident; there was just some fortitudinous collision of molecules in space and there was a big bang and then *suddenly* life began. My friend, I tell you, it takes more faith to believe a story like that than it does to believe God created the heavens and the earth!

When I look at my watch, I see stamped on the face of this watch, Timex. I know that there was some kind of intelligent design and manufacture behind all of these moving parts and they keep time. There is design behind it and there is purpose behind it. When you look at our universe, as the psalmist said, "When I see the heavens, the work of your hands," you have to say, "There's intelligent design behind it."

Just think about the universe itself. It's a vast place. If I could take our sun and reduce it down to the size of a pinhead and then place our solar system in the same scale around that pinhead, our entire solar system would fit in a 12x12 ft. room. That's our solar system. Now, that's getting a handle on it. But keeping that same scale, if you were to go to the next nearest star in our galaxy, you would have to go 26 miles down the road. Astronomers tell us there are millions and millions of galaxies. Using that same scale, if you were to just go from our Milky Way galaxy

using to the next galaxy, you would have to travel 300,000 miles. That's why they call it outer space. It's mostly just space. Yet God said, "This is something I did with my hands—the work of my hands." Isaiah says, "You have measured the heavens in the palm or in the span of your hand." God is revealing his name; He's revealing his nature. He's saying, "I'm the one who created all of this." So, in the Ten Commandments, before God ever gives any kind of law or any kind of demand, he says, "I want you to know who I am."

II. MY PERSONAL DISCOVERY

So, we have this profound declaration, but also in this commandment, we see what I call my personal discovery.

My favorite word in these verses is when he says, "I am the Lord YOUR God." I like that a whole lot better than if God said, "I am the Lord THE God" although he is THE God. He said, "I am the Lord YOUR God." In other words, he's letting us know from the very start we can have a relationship with him. That's the greatest discovery you can ever, ever make. It's nothing new.

In 1492, when Columbus sailed across the ocean blue, he hit what we call the West Indies. We call them the West Indies, because he thought he landed in India. That's why he called the people Indians and he went back to Europe and said, "I've discovered a new world." It was always there, wasn't it? He didn't create it. He didn't invent it. He just came upon it. And the fact that God wants to have a relationship with you is nothing new. He planned it from the foundation of the world, but it's up to you and it's up to me to come to that personal discovery.

1. God is seeking you

When you come to understand who God really is, there are two things you discover. First is that God has been seeking you - that God has been seeking you. Sometimes we talk about seeking the Lord and it's something we ought to do, but he says here that "I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of Egypt."

I love that verse in II Chronicles 16:9, where the Bible says, "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him." God is looking for a few good people who will enter into a personal relationship with him. God is not hard to know. He's not playing cosmic hide and seek. He's not trying to say, "Find me if you can." He says, "This is who I am and I'm seeking you."

2. God is shaping your circumstances

The second thing we discover is God has been shaping your circumstances of your life. That's what he means when he says to the Children of Israel, "I am the one that brought you out of Egypt. I brought you to this place today. The reason you are standing before Mt. Sinai, no longer slaves, but free people, is because I brought you here." The Bible says the reason God wants to have a relationship with you is not just arbitrary and it's not so he can take you to heaven. The reason God wants to have a relationship with you is that he is trying to change you into the image of his son, Jesus Christ. That's what the Bible says in Romans 8:29. He's trying to change

us to be more and more like Jesus and what he does is takes all of these events of our lives, all the circumstances of our lives, and he can use every circumstance, good, bad, neutral, to shape your life so you can be more like Jesus.

I heard about a man traveling through the Smokey Mountains and he went into one of those old country stores. In the back of the store were some guys sitting around an old pot-bellied stove, leaning back in their wicker bottom chairs and they spent all day there, just whittling and spitting and talking and carrying on. These guys whittled beautiful replicas of different kinds of dogs and they put them out for the tourists to buy. This particular man went over to one man who had carved a beautiful replica of an Irish Setter and said to him, "Wow! How in the world can you take a block of wood and carve out such a beautiful replica of a dog?" The old mountain man spit on the stove and looked at him and said, "Well, it's pretty easy. I just cut away everything that don't look like a dog."

That's what God is doing in our lives. He's continually shaping us and changing us. That's why he brought the Children of Israel to this place. God says, "This is who I am. I want you to know me." But he will never *force* you into a relationship.

The Bible says in Psalm 53:1, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no god.'" Sometimes people say we're fools for believing the Bible and we're fools for believing in God, but the Bible says just the opposite. It's the fool who says in his heart there is no God. That word "fool" in Hebrew is the word, *nabal*. It literally doesn't speak of intellectual emptiness; it speaks of *moral* emptiness. It's the word *nabal* that means "like an empty sack." When somebody's saying, "The fool has said in his heart there's no God," it literally means God has said, "Here I am" but that person says, "No, thank you." This fool is not saying God doesn't exist, he's just saying "I don't want to have a relationship with you."

Have you ever been to someone's house and after you have eaten a delicious dinner, they start bringing around the dessert and you're so stuffed you can hardly breathe and you say, "No dessert for me." You are not saying the dessert doesn't exist and you're not saying it isn't good. You're just saying, "No dessert for me." That's exactly what the Bible means in Psalm 53, when it says the fool has said, "No God for me."

III. GOD'S PRIMARY DEMAND

God makes this profound declaration, "I am the Lord your God." And then we have this personal discovery we make, that we can know God. He's been seeking us and he's been shaping our lives. Finally we come to the law itself, which I call God's primary demand. Look what he says in verse 3, "You shall have no other gods before me." When we hear the word "gods," we are thinking of all these Old Testament idols like Baal or Dagon or perhaps some of the Greek Mythological gods like Zeus or Mercury. Those are the gods we think about and we think, "You know what? We've advanced beyond that in America today and we don't have those false gods." *Oh yes we do.* In fact, one important question America has got to settle is, "Who is going to be America's god?" When we say "one nation under God," what God are we talking about?

God is anyone or anything that orders your life. There are a lot of people worshiping god, small "g." You say, "Wait a minute. Are there many gods in the universe?" Sure. But there's only one living God—the Lord God in the Bible. But there are multitudes of gods and people in America today are worshiping these gods; anything or anyone that orders their life.

If you want to know who your God is, just give it the 4T test real quick. What do you THINK about the most? What do you TALK about the most? What requires most of your TIME? Into what do you put most of your TREASURE? If you can find a person who will honestly say, "This is what I think about, talk about, where I give my time, where I give my treasure," that is their God.

1. Seek God earnestly

God says, "I don't want there to be any other gods before me." He's saying you must seek him and in a certain way. Let me give you two words to describe what God is demanding here. He's saying, "I want you to seek me earnestly." In other words, "I want you to be sincere as you seek me." Jeremiah 29:1-14 says, "You will seek me and find me when you see me with all your heart. I will be found by you." The reason some people don't have an experience with the Lord is they're just seeking God half-heartedly. You have to devote your life to seeking God, to knowing God, to loving God, to serving God.

It's like anything else in life, if it's important to you, you'll give your utmost attention to it. Many of you know I play a lot of stringed musical instruments. Maybe you didn't know how good I am with the violin. In fact, I took violin lessons. I'll just play a little number for you right now. [Screech! Screech! Saw! Saw!] Whew! You say, "That sounds like two cats in one bag to me there." Actually, I did take violin lessons. I took two of them. After an experience like that, I could say, "You know what? [Screech! Saw!] There's no music in a violin. Forget it. There's no music in an instrument like this." But, whenever we hear Jonna Fitzgerald or somebody else in our orchestra play a violin, we realize there's a difference between them and me: They earnestly sought expertise, so they practiced and took lesson after lesson after lesson and I didn't. The reason I can't get music out of a violin is simply because I never paid the price. I was never earnest enough about trying to learn.

Do you know why some people in America today have a great relationship with God and love God and praise God and God is their ever-present companion? It's because they have earnestly sought the Lord. While millions of others say, "Who is God?" because they have never sought the Lord earnestly.

2. Seek God exclusively

Not only are we to seek the Lord earnestly, we are to seek the Lord exclusively. Now, when some people hear this—no other gods before me—they think, "Okay, that means I'm going to put God number one on my list."

A few years ago, I was reading an article in *Sports Illustrated* about Emmett Smith who used to play for the Dallas Cowboys. They were asking him what his goals were for that year. He said,

“Well, goal #1 is to put Jesus Christ first in my life and #2 is my family and # 3 is to win the Super Bowl and #4 is to win the rushing title and #5 is to be named to the Pro Bowl.” When you read that list you think, “Hey that’s pretty good. He put Jesus number one.” Well, not really folks. As much as I like Emmett Smith, he’s got it all wrong: God doesn’t want to be number one on your list of six or seven. God demands to be number one on a *list of one*.

Between number one and number two is a huge leap, but the step between number 2 to number 50 or 500 or 5,000 is a relatively small step, because number one speaks of singularity and two or any other number speaks of plurality. What if I went to my wife and said, “Cindy, I want you to know you are my number one wife. Number two is this lady and number three...” No. That wouldn’t be very good, would it? It’s like the difference between having one wife and two is a huge leap, but a step between having two wives and a thousand wives, like Solomon, is a baby step. It’s the difference between exclusivity, and God says, “I want you to know me exclusively. I don’t want there to be any other gods in my presence.” That’s the demand he’s making upon his followers right here. The only way you can know God exclusively and earnestly is through Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

In the 19th century the main mode of transportation in America was the railroad and the best jobs were those in the railroad business— those who either worked on the railroad or laid the track. And, as the eastern seaboard developed rails, then the western seaboard developed rails, they decided they needed to have a transcontinental railroad. So one group started laying track from St. Louis westward and another group started laying track eastward from San Francisco. And on May 10, 1869, just outside of Ogden, Utah, the two groups met. What a celebration it was! As they sent the message over the telegraph, east and west are now connected. Maybe you have seen pictures or seen television specials about what happened that day as the presidents of the railroad took a gold spike and a silver hammer and as they drove that golden spike into the rail, the train whistles were blown, fireworks were shot off, and there was a cheer that came from all the workers. Finally, east and west connected.

Every time I think about that, I think about how the Lord Jesus laid one arm on something like a railroad tie and the other arm on the rough timber and it was not a golden nail nor a silver hammer; it was an iron hammer and a rusty nail and the only gold that day was the gold of his blood and the only silver was the silver of his tears, but as he laid himself upon that cross, he reached out and took the hand of Holy God and reached out and reached out and took the hand of sinful mankind and he said, “It is finished.” Through Jesus Christ, we have a way to be connected with the God of the Universe.

OUTLINE

I. GOD'S PROFOUND SELF-DECLARATION

2. His name
2. His nature

II. MY PERSONAL DISCOVERY

God is

1. Seeking you
2. Shaping your circumstances

III. GOD'S PRIMARY DEMAND

1. Seek God earnestly
2. Seek God exclusively



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes