

23rd April 2023

Exodus 20:1-17

The Ten Commandments

20 And God spoke all these words:

² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

³ "You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹² "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ "You shall not murder.

¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ "You shall not steal.

¹⁶ "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Matthew 19:13-30

The Little Children and Jesus

¹³ Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

¹⁴ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ¹⁵ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

The Rich and the Kingdom of God

¹⁶ Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

¹⁷ "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

¹⁸ "Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁰ "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

²¹ Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁶ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

²⁷ Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

²⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

What's Required to be part of the Kingdom of Heaven (Exodus 20:1-17 and Matthew 19:13-30) - (Slide 1)

Introduction

Alphaville is a popular German band that formed in the 80s. One of the singles they released in 1984 was a song called 'Forever Young.'

(Slide 2) The chorus of the song goes like this:

Forever young, I want to be forever young.

Do you really want to live forever? Forever and ever.

Forever young, I want to be forever young.

Do you really want to live forever? Forever young.

The idea posed here of living forever has made some people think about finding ways of making it possible for people to live forever.

For example, scientist and futurist Ray Kurzweil (Slide 3.1) says that

man will achieve immortality by the year 2030 through nanotechnology. He believes that we will be able to stop the ageing process using nanobots, tiny robots which will repair our bodies at the cellular level.

Or take Mark Zuckerberg, (Slide 3.2) founder of Facebook and Meta CEO. He announced that he intends to build a metaverse, which is a digital heaven and, therefore, live forever by having his own consciousness digitized.

The problem for both of these men is that they are relying on their own work. They are trying to gain something through human efforts that they just cannot gain. Both are relying on things of this world but all things on this world eventually cease to exist, including technology. So, the question still remains: How can we live forever? God is offering us eternal life. He wants us to live with him in his kingdom. But how do we do that? What is the requirement for living with God in his kingdom forever? In our passage today, Jesus gives us the answer to this question.

Before we go any further, though, let me pray and ask for God's help in understanding this passage of Scripture. Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father,

As we come now to hear your word, we ask that you would give us ears to hear and minds to understand what you have to teach us and

to help us put what we learn into practice in our lives. Please help us to rid ourselves of distractions so that we can concentrate wholly on your word this morning. Amen.

Context (Slide 4)

Jesus and his disciples are heading for Jerusalem where Jesus will be crucified and come back to life again so Jesus is preparing his disciples for what is to come, and since Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Christ (Slide 4.1), Jesus was transfigured (Slide 4.2), he showed he has power over demons (Slide 4.3), taught about the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven (Slide 4.4), forgiveness (Slide 4.5) and, last week, Jesus taught about marriage and divorce. After talking about marriage and divorce, it is logical to then talk about children. After all, one of the purposes of getting married is to have children (Slide 4.6). It is no surprise then that our passage today starts off talking about children.

Childlike Faith (Vs 13-15) (Slide 5)

We find in verse 13 that people are bringing their children to Jesus so that Jesus can put his hands on them and pray for them. However, the disciples have a problem with this because they rebuke the people. Why would the disciples do this? In those times, children had no social status in society. They were unimportant and were only to be seen not heard. So, the disciples are thinking that these little

children are not important enough to warrant an audience with Jesus. Jesus doesn't have time for such unimportant people. In fact, it was a common custom that the only day of the year that the priests would lay their hands on little children and pray for them was the Day of Atonement. The disciples probably have this idea in mind.

In the parallel passage in Mark 10:14, we are told that Jesus was indignant when he saw the disciples rebuking the people. Jesus was angry and annoyed at his disciples so Jesus tells them in verse 14 to, *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."* (Slide 5.1) What does Jesus mean by this? Is he suggesting that we should all start acting like little children and then we will get into the kingdom of heaven? No! That would be ridiculous. We would just get told to grow up and act our age, not our shoe size. What Jesus means is that we are to have faith like a little child does. (Slide 5.2)

My nephew Oliver is two and a half years old and he has this uncanny ability to trust the adults in his life. He trusts his parents, his grandparents and his uncles to look after him, to feed him when he's hungry, give him a drink when he's thirsty, change his nappy when it needs changing, comfort him when he's upset or hurt, take him to the doctor or give him medication when he's sick and so on. He doesn't fully understand who we are. He really only knows our names and what we look like and yet, he still trusts us. He feels safe and loved. We need to have that same kind of faith in God. It is only

this kind of faith that will get us into the kingdom of God. We shouldn't be stubborn and full of pride like the disciples but, instead, we should just simply have faith in God.

Put God first (vs 16-22) (Slide 6)

After Jesus places his hands on the little children and blesses them, he and his disciples go on their way and they encounter a young man who has a question for Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, in chapter 18:18, we are told that this young man is a ruler, probably in the synagogue, so he is probably quite rich which we find out in verse 22. This man has an interesting question for Jesus. He wants to know how HE can gain eternal life. This man is assuming that he can earn his own way into the kingdom of heaven by doing some good deed. But, once again, this is not right.

Jesus points the young man to the source of goodness, which God and God alone and the one good thing that God requires is perfect obedience to the law so Jesus tells this man in verse 17 to obey the commandments. The man wants to know which ones, as if he only needs to obey some of them in order to gain eternal life. Jesus starts listing the commandments. The man says he has obeyed them all since he was a child. Before we go any further, there are two things we need to pick up on here. Firstly, God gave Moses and the Israelites 10 commandments but Jesus only mentions five of them. (Slide 6.1) Secondly, Jesus only mentions the commandments that

talk about loving your neighbour except for the last commandment which is do not covet. I can imagine that as Jesus is listing off these commandments, the young man is standing there ticking them off in his mind, like it is a checklist. The young man, however, fails to realise that Jesus has not mentioned the commandments about how we relate to God: you shall have no other gods before me, do not commit adultery, do not misuse the name of the Lord your God and remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. (Slide 6.2) Jesus leaves these ones out as a way of testing the young man, to see if the man can answer his own question back in verse 16. He wants the young man to realize that what's missing is the most important thing of all – his relationship with God.

However, the young man does not pick up on this and, instead, realises that he still lacks something and he just cannot figure out what it is so Jesus has to tell him plainly that he needs to sell all that he has and give to the poor. Only then, he will be able to put God first. The young man's response is not a good one. He loves his wealth and possessions too much and cannot bear to part with them so he walks away sad, knowing that he cannot get into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is not saying that we should go home today and sell of our things and give everything away but what he is saying is this – that if we have anything in our lives that is preventing us from putting God first, we need to rid ourselves of it so we can put God first. (Slide 6.3) This young man's idol was his wealth and possessions

and he had to rid himself of it. We need to rid ourselves of anything and everything that we see as more important than God, anything that takes our attention away from God. These are idols and they will stop us from putting God first so we must rid ourselves of these things and then, and only then will be able to follow God with our whole hearts.

Only by God (Vs 23-26) (Slide 7)

Jesus uses the conversation he has just had as an opportunity to teach his disciples a really important lesson. He says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Slide 8.1) Of course, a camel is much larger than the eye of a needle and so it is absolutely, 100% impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle and, in the same way, a rich man cannot enter into the kingdom of God. This astonishes the disciples because of the fact that those who were rich were considered to be blessed by God and, therefore, had entered into God's kingdom and so, if the rich are not saved, who can be? This is the question the disciples now have.

Jesus goes on to explain that people cannot earn their way into the kingdom of God. (Slide 8.2) Verse 26 says, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." In other words, being good enough is not good enough. We have to live up to God's standards and God demands perfect obedience. We cannot perfectly

obey the law, thus, trying to be good enough to get eternal life is useless. Only God makes it possible for us to gain eternal life.

Rewards for those who trust (Vs 27-30) (Slide 8)

But Peter hasn't quite understood this. He has a similar response to that of the young man earlier in the passage. He says to Jesus that he and the other disciples have given up everything to follow Jesus.

Peter is correct in saying this but he is saying this in a way that is boastful. It's almost like he is one-upping the young man. The young man could not give up all he had but the disciples did. As far as Peter is concerned, there should be rewards for the disciples but Peter is still thinking along the lines of having to be good enough and earning your way into the kingdom.

Jesus then tells his disciples that their faithfulness to God has been noted and that they will judge the tribes of Israel when Jesus returns and that they will be instrumental in building the church.

There are also universal rewards for those of us who do trust in God. We will be rewarded one-hundredfold. (Slide 9.1) Before I became a Christian, I had and still have two brothers and a sister as well as a Father and Mother but, when I became a Christian, I gained so many more brothers and sisters and Mums and Dads. This is because I became a part of God's family. It is such a blessing to be part of a church family. We have gained each other. We should, as a family, love one another, encourage one another, pray for one another,

serve one another, and so on. The other reward is eternal life. Jesus finishes by telling his disciples that the kingdom of Heaven is completely different to what they were originally thinking. It is not for those who are self-righteous and reliant on their obedience to the law who will get into heaven first but, rather, those who are selfless and are reliant on God's grace who will be the first. Those who have childlike faith in God get in first because they are more likely to see that they need Jesus and cannot rely upon themselves. We cannot let the prospect of these rewards go to our heads. We must remain faithful to God just as he is faithful to us.

Conclusion

You may have heard the saying, 'going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than living in a garage makes you a car.' We do not get into God's kingdom based on how often we go to church or how often we read our bibles or by being good enough because we are NOT good enough. This is why God sent Jesus. Jesus is the saviour that we need. He gave up everything he had, including his life, to save us from sin and make us righteous in God's eyes. It is only through faith in Jesus Christ that we can get into heaven, not by anything else. So, we need to come to Him and give up everything we have, and trust him and follow him, as the apostle Paul writes in (Slide 9) Philippians 3:7-9, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider

everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God is by faith.”

Let me Pray.

Lord God Almighty,

Thank you that you are a loving and gracious God. Thank you for sending Jesus to take away our sins and make us right with you. We ask that you would help us get rid of any stumbling blocks or idols that we have that draw our attention away from you. Please help us to have childlike faith in You and not in ourselves. In your name, we pray, Amen.