

## The Law is Good

3<sup>rd</sup> Sun. in Lent – 3/7/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.  
Text: Exodus 20:1-17 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 2, **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”**

### **Introduction**

- ⊗ We live in a time when the Word of God is not viewed in high favor with the majority of people in the world; dare I say, even our own community. The authority of Scripture has, in fact, been attacked on many sides.
  - ➔ If the Bible is mentioned or quoted in a TV show or movie, it is far more likely that it is done so with a critical or belittling tone rather than in a positive manner.
  - ➔ Regardless of that though, we who seek to be faithful believers in Christ; we still turn to the inspired, inerrant Word of God delivered to us by prophets, apostles, and evangelists to teach us and strengthen us each day.
- ⊗ Today’s Old Testament Reading begins with the children of Israel gathered around Mount Sinai. The LORD God had descended upon the mountain in fire. As the mountain trembled, God called Moses to come and meet with Him.
  - ➔ And when he did Moses heard these words directly from God – verses one through three, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me”.
- ⊗ These beginning words that form the introduction to what we know as the Ten Commandments and Commandment #1, show that the way that the majority of people view the Ten Commandments is incorrect.
  - ➔ Most people think of the Ten Commandments as a set of unrealistic and oppressive rules, set in place by an unloving and power-hungry god.
- ⊗ But in these words we hear of God’s extreme love and care for His people; of His deep desire to protect and save them from things that are hurtful both to their soul and body.
  - ➔ Yes, these Ten Commandments are God’s generous gift; given to His people now that He has saved them, to guide them in their new relationship as God’s people as they live within His gracious covenant. He reaffirms here that it is best for all concerned that they now live as His people. And as such, He then promises to bless them.
  - ➔ We mentioned this last Wednesday, in the first three commandments God instructs the people how to live in their relationship with God, while Commandments 4–10 define their relationship with their fellow man.
- ⊗ It really is intended to be a two-way relationship of love. In response to God’s love shown in saving the people from slavery and taking them in under His grace, the LORD directed Moses in Deuteronomy 6:5 to teach the people, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”. This moral Law would guide them and all generations to follow as they entered the new Promised Land that God was giving to them.
  - ➔ It was for the good of His people, then and still today, that God gave His law to them; to us.

### **I. God’s Law reflects His will for his rescued people.**

- ✘ At the time of this text here in the book of Exodus, it is in His mercy that God brought His chosen people out of many years of suffering and slavery. But it's not like He brought them across the Red Sea to the foot of Mt. Sinai and then said, "Ok, now you're on your own folks".
  - No, His love and mercy continues to work as He is now bringing them to a good land where they can live and prosper as His holy nation. So, as they traveled, God established a new relationship with them. As they were gathered at Sinai, He came to them in mercy and said in Exodus 19:4-8, "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' 'These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.'" So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do.' And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord".
- ✘ You see, the Law had an important role in their lives. God wanted them to turn away from the things that were worshiped by the other people they would encounter in their communities.
  - In fact, God declared that He is a "jealous God". Now, that might sound strange to us, but it meant that He was not about to "share" the people with any other gods, because that would only bring them harm. He wanted them solely for Himself; for their good.
  - The truth is, there are no other true gods. Anything else is merely an invention by man, guided by Satan. The triune God is the only one who could rescue them from the mire of sin.
- ✘ And so He urges them in verses 4-6, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments".
  - And so, worshiping any other created beings or images would therefore break the relationship that God established with them. It would mean that they would be lost. So, it was a big deal; crucial to His people's salvation in fact, that they not fall prey to the false beliefs and gods of the pagans around them.
- ✘ It is all in love that God aimed to shield His children from this sinful environment. So He established the moral law for a curb, if you will, or a wall – a restraint to hold back the influence of Satan and the world in order to maintain outward discipline against the secular, wild, and disobedience of those who would not believe in God.
  - But God didn't just give this Law to Israel. Here at the mountain, they formally received it from the mouth and hand of God, but this Law was actually received earlier as it was written on their hearts. It's at Creation that both Jews and Gentiles were given this Law, the same Law to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves.
- ✘ This truth applies to all people of all time, as Paul says in Romans 2:15, "that the work of the law is written on their hearts...".
  - Like the children of Israel, you and I know that it's wrong to hurt or harm our neighbor in his body. We know we should befriend and help those in need. We know that we are to respect our parents, elders, and those placed over us as authorities. We know we should not take our neighbor's property; but rather help him improve and protect his property.

- ⊗ Still, this knowledge of the Law did not prevent the Israelites from sinning against God, did it? Soon after they received the Commandments from God, they fell again into sin. They disobeyed His will for them and His Law rightly condemned them! Yes, they were in the same condition as the rest of the world, as all of us – sinful from the time of conception.
  - ➔ So, consider this question seriously, does the Word of God’s Law accuse and condemn you too? Let’s be honest with each other. We have all broken all the Commandments repeatedly!
  - ➔ As Luther said, they serve as a mirror to show us what we look like! And it isn’t pretty, is it? Try as hard as we might, we cannot fulfill the Law’s righteous demands. We just can’t do it. Nor can we make payment for our sins. Only God can make it right, as we Lutherans confess in the Book of Concord, “In this life we cannot satisfy the Law, because the sinful nature does not stop bringing forth [evil inclination and desire], even though the Spirit in us resists them” (AP V, 25).
- ⊗ St. Paul wrote about this same struggle in Romans 7:18-20, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me”.
  - ➔ Look, there’s no doubt about it folks, we are sinful. The Law of God tells us what we should do to please God and care for our fellow man, but the sin inside of us rises up and still does its evil! What a mess we’re in! None of us is any good by ourselves. But Jesus said in Matthew 19:17, “There is only one who is good”.

## **II. Because of Christ, we walk in God’s Law.**

- ⊗ Yes, Jesus, God’s one and only Son, came and took our place in this sin-corrupted world. Only Jesus obeyed the Law perfectly for us. Only Jesus took its punishment in exchange.
  - ➔ Paul vividly declares in Romans 8:1-4, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”. Did you catch that? In Christ, you and I are able to “walk”; to obey the Law ... and we should.
- ⊗ But don’t misunderstand; Jesus did not abolish God’s Law. Even though He fulfilled it for us, God’s Law still has an ongoing role and place in this world. Jesus even said, “until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Mt. 5:18).
  - ➔ Just because we are forgiven, none of us has a free ride to go out and sin. The Law still applies; the Law still provides an important curb for our lusts to sin. It still has power to accuse our guilty consciences. Romans 7:7 says, “if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin”. Yes, it keeps God’s will in front of us; it defines what is right and what is wrong.
- ⊗ Especially now that we have been born of water and the Spirit in baptism, this new life in which we live means we sincerely desire to follow the Lord’s ways. As 2 Timothy 3:16 explains, the Law provides us with “training in righteousness” so that we learn the kinds of works that are called good in God’s family of faith.
  - ➔ This is the beauty for us now as Christians, the Law no longer condemns us, for Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets; to take our punishment. Now in faith the Law leads us daily to the foot of Jesus’ cross in repentance and in faith, to then rise in forgiveness and live as God’s servants.

→ There is no better guide for living than the Ten Commandments; the gift God gave us just as He did the Israelites at Sinai. In Jesus and by His Spirit, you and I actually want to live God-pleasing lives.

✘ He lives and works inside of us. He alone makes it possible for us to walk in God's commands. And as we do, He rejoices over us. He deals with us in mercy, showing His steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love Him and keep His commandments.

→ We sang of it just before this message. Allow me to remind you of the last two verses of our Sermon Hymn again:

The Law is good; but since the fall  
Its holiness condemns us all;  
It dooms us for our sin to die  
And has no pow'r to justify.

To Jesus we for refuge flee,  
Who from the curse has set us free,  
And humbly worship at His throne,  
Saved by His grace through faith alone.  
(LSB 579:5–6) Amen.