

“Great Failure, Greater Hope – The 10 Commandments” // Exodus 20:1–10; Numbers 21:4–9

Joke... “You and I have a lot in common.”

- At our church this weekend... We have people here really all over the map as it relates to faith.
 - There are a lot of Christians for whom this is **literally the biggest Sunday** of the year.
 - These are the people who have on their **Easter suit** or their **pink Easter dress** with matching bonnet; they’ve got their **9-inch-thick** Study Bible under their arm—looks like they are carrying a lunch box; they got out of their car that has a bumper sticker on it that says, “**Be an organ donor; give your heart to Jesus**” and when they smile, there’s a little **gleam** in their teeth.
 - These are the kinds of people who **didn’t give their kids a chocolate bunny** this weekend, they got them a chocolate cross, with a little sash across the front that says, “No bunny loves you like Jesus.”
 - BTW, personal pet peeve, **if you do give your kid a choc bunny**, I hope you get them the solid one. I always felt so ripped off when I got the hollow one: I told my parents, “**This feels like a metaphor of your love for me**. Hollow on the inside.
 - Keep your soul-less bunny to yourself.

Works Consulted:

Steven Furtick, “Always Been Yes”

Joby Martin, *Selected Sermon Excerpts from 10 Commandments Series*

Tony Evans, “The Purpose of the 10 Commandments”

Tim Keller, “Freedom of Obedience”

Louie Giglio, “Ten Commandments”

Sally Lloyd-Jones, “Ten Ways to Be Perfect”

- There are some people here like that. Then there are **others for whom this is the *only* Sunday** each year you come to church.
 - CEO’s = Our Christmas and Easter only friends.
- **And then we have others whom this is literally the 1st time you’ve stepped foot in church.**
 - **You’re sweating a little bit right now** because you are wondering, “What’s going to happen now? Why did all these people just have their hands in the air? Were they waving at somebody? Are they trying to give Jesus a high-5? What’s going on?” They look at me and think, “And are you the snake guy?”
- **So, we have people literally all over the map**, but still we have a lot in common. We have **basic questions**, like:
 - **Is there a God** and if so, what does he **really want**?
 - What happens **after we die**?
 - **Does God consider me a good person**, and if not, what do I need to do to become one?

The place in Scripture we are looking at today answers those questions probably better than any other place in the Bible. It’s one of the **most recognized** passages in the Bible: **EXODUS 20** (if you have Bible or someone around you does) – The story of when God gave the Ten Commandments.

- TEAR OFF CARD
- (If you don’t come to church here, we are taking a year to go through the whole Bible, and this is where we are.

- But if you're just joining us... No worries, you are not going to feel left out today, because this message really stands on its own...)
- That said, **if you'd like to get your mind around** the big picture of the whole Bible—THE WHOLE STORY—**come back next week** and jump right in.
- You say, "Well, I wanted to hear about the Resurrection today." Hang on. **You will.**
 - This passage explains **why the Resurrection** was necessary.
 - You need to understand not only that it happened, but why it happened, and why it changed everything.
- Rembrandt was a painter famous for his use of light. His secret, he said, were not the streaks of light he painted, but the amount of time he spent darkening the canvas so that the streaks of light appeared all the more brilliant. You'll never comprehend the glory of the resurrection until you see the darkness it penetrated.

Set up: Exodus 19:10–18

Giving of commandments starts like this:

10 ...And the Lord said to Moses, "...Tell the people to wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

12 And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death... whether beast or man, he shall not live.'

I WANT YOU TO TRY TO IMAGINE THIS SCENE 16 On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast (that just kept getting louder: terrifying!), so that all the people in the camp trembled. 17

Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

18 And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. 19 And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.

Your kids are scared; you want to comfort them but you can't because you are scared.

- **You are holding tight** to them, because if one of them (or even one of your pets) gets loose and runs up past this barrier they'll be killed.

The message is clear: **God's majesty—his holiness, is an awesome and terrifying reality.** It is nothing to be trifled with.

Out of this awesome scene God gives the 10 Commandments. 10 Commandments. God says, Leviticus 18:5, "If you do these consistently, you shall live before me." But cross this line of disobedience—and you will die.

You say, "Well, that sounds harsh." But **at least consider this:** it is **consistent with every other picture** we see of God's holiness in Scripture:

- In the **book of Numbers we find the story of a man** who collects sticks on the Sabbath, contrary to the law God had just given. The congregation of Israel brings him before God to ask what they should do with him. *God* says, "Stone him." For one, small infraction of the law.¹
- In the Garden of Eden, it was **one bite from a forbidden fruit** brought condemnation on the entire human race. Think about it:

¹ Numbers 15:32–36

one bit, brought every disease, famine, natural disaster, and hell itself—one bite!²

- In Genesis 19, Lot's wife was **turned into a pillar of salt for taking** one backwards glance at the city God had told her to flee. One glance! She lost her life for *one* glance! (Gen 19:26)³
- In 2 Samuel, we see **a man named Uzzah** reaches out his hand to steady the Ark of the Covenant, which housed God's presence on earth, as the oxen who pulled it stumbled and it threatened to tumble in the dirt. God had forbidden them to touch... For that one touch, God struck him dead. (2 Samuel 6:7)⁴

You say, "That's Old Testament..." God in his cranky years...

- **In the New Testament**, a man and wife named **Ananias and Sapphira** exaggerate the amount they put into the offering. God strikes them dead.
 - Which is **never good for church growth**... people being struck dead in the offering.
 - Been to a lot of church growth conferences...

But God's holiness—his purity, his goodness—is absolute and perfect, and those who would enter into his presence cannot do so with sin in their hearts. The prophet of Habakkuk said it like this, "God is of such purity that he cannot even look at evil." **Habakkuk 1:13.**

We think sin is not that bad because we have **a very human-centered view of it**. It doesn't seem that bad *to us*. But you measure the wickedness of a deed, in part, by whom it is against.

- **Get mad and kick a wall repeatedly:** that may be a sin of frustration; but kick a dog—and you've done a genuinely bad thing. Kick the lady next to you in the grocery store line; you'll go to jail; walk into Buckingham Palace and roundhouse the Queen of England... it's going to be worse than jail; the little guys in the tall fuzzy hats are going to beat you with sticks.

² Gen 3:1–24

³ Last week, for those of you who were here, saw how **Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron** were struck dead for offering to God "strange fire" once on the altar. (Lev 10:1–2).

- **Our sin is infinitely wicked** because it is against an infinitely righteous and glorious God...

So in light of that, I want us to read through these 10 Commandments.

Have you ever asked yourself how you measure up to them?

- I see these surveys about how well Americans know them... 92% of Americans can't even name them all... naming them is not important.
- How do you measure up? These were supposed to come natural to us... as natural as breathing. We weren't supposed to need to be commanded to do them.

The 10 Commandments

W/L: If you have kept this law consistently...

I. You shall have no other Gods before me. *Can you say,* I have never put anything before God in my life. He has always been pre-eminent in my thoughts, affections, and actions. (IOW, the things I get most excited about in life are him and his word. I have always gotten more excited about my relationship with him than I ever have about a new romance or a new job promotion or new car or new possession. W/L?

- **When I look in my life**, I get a lot more excited about a new TV program than I do God and his word sometimes.
- **That's a big one in the L column** for me.

II. You shall have no carved images of me. This commandment is about reshaping God according to your liking; believing wrong things about him because you'd prefer that he be a different way. Have you consistently refused to do that, believing *fully* everything his word

⁴ I owe this cataloguing of instances to David Platt, in a sermon on Isaiah 6 given at The Summit Church on 1/31/2016.

reveals about him, w/o doubting, or wishing he were different?

YES _____ NO _____

III. You shall not take my name in vain. This has to do with more than not saying, “G.D.” It has to do with how highly we regard the name of God. Can you say, “I have never used God’s name as a swear word, and I have always held his name in highest respect. I have always represented that name well, never, for example, calling myself a follower of his yet and not obeying him fully. I’ve always lived up to the name ‘Christian.’” YES _____ NO _____

IV. Remember the Sabbath. This has to do with giving God fully what belongs to him. In Scripture, he says 2 things belong to him of all that he gives us. Of time, 1 day each week; of resources, the firstfruits (usually 10%) of what he gave us. Can you say that you have consistently given to God all that was due to him, specifically remembering to set apart one day weekly to worship him with others? YES _____ NO _____

V. Honor your parents. This has to do with how we relate to authorities in your life. Our parents are the first representation of the authority of God to us. Scholars point out this commandment comes right in the middle of the 10—the first 4 having to do with our relationship to God, and the last 5 with our relationship to others. This commandment bridges the two sections—because we relate first to the authority of God in our parents. So the bigger question is here is how your heart responds to the authority of God in the people he has placed in leadership over you. Can you say, “I have never disobeyed nor dishonored my parents or any others in authority over me. I have consistently respected them and given them honor and willing obedience. I’ve also done this with other God-appointed authorities, like governmental officials, my boss, and local police”? Kids look at parents, they are shaking “no.” YES _____ NO _____

VI. You shall not kill. (You say, “FINALLY!” One in the “W” column!) Then **Jesus came along** and messed *that* up. Because he said **to hate someone in your heart**, or to desire their harm, is like murder.

- Can you say, “**Not only have I never murdered someone**, I have never had hateful thoughts nor taken the slightest pleasure in seeing harm or misfortune happen to another human.
- YES _____ NO _____
- (Some of you have violated that like 5 times already today... the guy in the parking lot... or you are daydreaming about someone pummeling me so I’ll stop yelling at you...)

VII. You shall not commit adultery. (You say, “I think I’m good on this one, because I’m not even married.”) Jesus messed this one up, too. Because he said to think lustful thoughts about someone to whom you are not married is committing adultery in your heart, which is what God sees. Can you say, “I have never entertained thoughts about physical intimacy with someone to whom I am not married?” YES _____ NO _____

VIII. You shall not steal. Can you say, “I have never taken anything that doesn’t belong to me—not credit I didn’t deserve, anything. I have never fudged my numbers.”

- April 15 is right around the corner... you think, I can just change a few numbers. Government wastes it anyway. And I don’t even like the people in office right now. I need **this money more than they do**, and I’ll do a better job with it anyway.”

So you steal because you say, “Who is it really hurting?”

Can you say, “I never tried to take things that I wasn’t entitled to.”

- Not to make light of this... For example, I’ve never downloaded illegal music. **Remember Napster**, when all this music came out on the Internet, and we were all like, “Look, it’s free!” Then someone came along and said, “Hey, that’s stealing.” And you said, “No... it’s sharing. See right there? It says ‘file sharing.’ And my mom told me sharing is caring. So this is a good deed.”

- But deep down we all knew it wasn't free... and we did it anyway.
- Hasn't your life been filled with these kinds of things—the bigger question is not, "Is it stealing," but "Will I get in trouble for it?"

Have you always given fully to others what they were entitled to... (Never defrauding your employer, for example, by using company time to check Facebook, watch YouTube, etc?)

Can you say, "I have always been completely truthful and fair in all of my dealings?" YES _____ NO _____

IX. You shall not lie. I shouldn't even have to go over this one, but can you say, "I have never lied nor slandered another person. I have never exaggerated the truth for my own benefit or covered up my faults or hidden awkward things I don't want other people to know. I have always told the truth in every situation regarding every person I have ever known"? YES _____ NO _____

- (I've heard people say, "I don't lie *per se*; I just struggle with always telling the truth.")
- I've told you before that **when I lie it most often follows a pattern...** Here's where I most often "struggle with the truth": I exaggerate my accomplishments; minimize my failures. Because I want people to be pleased with me...
- So **the reason I lie is that I love other people's high opinions** of me more than I love God and telling the truth. Which is also breaking the 1st commandment.
- So **my lying is a double whammy.** I not only get an L on this one, I get a double deduction on another one.

X. You shall not covet: This is the worst one. Can you say, "I have never been greedy for something that wasn't mine, nor jealous of the abilities, looks, position or possessions of others. I have always been fully content in what I have."

- I'm pretty sure the entire HGTV network is built on coveting. It's like "*Cribs for people with tools and a little bit of disposable income.*"
- At least on MTV's Cribs I know, "I could never afford that; that's not in my world." HGTV is, "*Here's all the things your house could be if your husband was more handy.*"

Can you say, "I've never resented other people's success, their beauty, their talents, their body shape, their intelligence, their possessions or their popularity. I have always rejoiced with others in their blessings; glad they have them even when I don't"?

YES _____ NO _____

Be honest with yourself? 0 for 10. If you get a 0 on the only exam in a class, do you really think you are going to pass the class?

Now, remember the setup for this chapter: Cross the border one time—**one sin!**—and you die.

- **Do you see why Paul says we are "dead in our sins"?**
- Obedience to these laws was **supposed to come naturally** to us—our hearts were supposed to love God so much that we naturally did all these things!
 - **I don't need to be commanded to do the things I love:** You never have to command me to eat a steak; take a nap, hug my kids or kiss my wife. I love those things because I love to do them.
 - **We weren't supposed to need to be commanded** for any of this.

One man in Jesus' life had the audacity to say to Jesus after he talked through them, "All these I have kept from my youth up." He was a what we call "a Pharisee."

- Pharisees were Professional do-gooders. **They developed this thing called "the hedge about the law," which were** commandments they made up to prevent them from breaking the

commandments... **like a hedge** that kept you from falling in a hole...

- If you **grew up in a home that was strict** you might be able to relate to this.
 - In the world I grew up in, *cussing was so bad you could not even say a word that **sounded** like a cussword.* We couldn't say "darn-it" or "golly" or "gee whiz" or even "daggumit" (sorry Coach Roy).
 - We **couldn't go see G-rated** movies because when we were at the theatre we might be tempted to saunter into an R-rate movie; plus, I was told that someone else might see me at the theatre and think that I was there to see an R movie and that would influence them to go an R-rated movie and then it would be my fault.
 - We **couldn't make out with girls** because it might lead to dancing...
- This guy said, "Not only have I kept all the rules; I've kept all the rules and the rules that keep you from breaking the rules."
- So Jesus said... "One thing you lack. Go and sell all that you have and give it away to the poor and follow me." He couldn't...
 - Not a bonus one... trying to show the guy the commandments were about what your heart **loves most**... not simply whether you had the discipline to obey. For this guy it was money.
 - Has your heart always loved and prioritized God above everything?

These law can't change you. Conforming to them doesn't mean God is what you love most. It can only reveal how messed up your heart is.

- **Dog vomit?**

God's holiness just reveals how sick we are...

- The prophet Isaiah, after seeing how sinful his heart was before God, used this metaphor, Isaiah 64:6: **like a filthy rag?**

- You **walk into the throne of God** and say, "Here's my righteousness."

You say, "*Well, this isn't a very uplifting message.*" You'll never appreciate the true lifting power of the Resurrection until you come face to face with what he lifted you out of.

You see, our usual response to this is to try to **diminish the holiness of God.**

- Well, nobody is perfect... I'm sure God grades on the curve."
- But **Scripture never does that.** It says, "Cross the line one time and you die."

Scripture points to a different **solution.**

- We see it toward the **end of the book of Numbers...**⁵
 - **Israel had broken** one of the commandments. **Commandment 10**—coveting—shown in their lack of contentment... they began to yearn for some of the things they saw other nations had, discontent with what God was giving to them.
 - **God sent snakes**, called "fiery serpents" among the people. They **were symbolic of death**, the curse brought on by sin.
 - The **people cry out to God.** God tells Moses to make an image of a bronze serpent and put it on a pole...
 - **Look and live!**
- **God's response was not to downplay their** disobedience, but, in love, to provide a means by which they could be healed.

You only get a dim glimpse of it in the bronze serpent, because that was just a symbol what God would one day do. In what is perhaps the most well-known passage in the Bible, "**Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that**

⁵ Numbers 21:4–9

everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” And from this correlation you see what the word “believe” means...

And then he explains, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him (looks to him) would not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:14–16

Here’s how Paul says it: Romans 10:9, “For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” What you look at and believe...

Again, our answer to the problem of our sinfulness is to downplay God’s holiness... But **Scripture never does that.**

God demands perfection; the gospel is that he also supplies it.

- The gospel is that **our sin was so bad** that Jesus had to die to save us.
 - **Why do you think Jesus died?** A lot of people say, “to show us that he loved us.” How does that show us he loves us? **I-40.** It would only be loving if his death was helping us in some way.
- **And he was. He was dying in our place.** He was dying to give us the righteousness we could not obtain on our own.

You’ll never understand or appreciate the resurrection until you see the grave he lifted you out of. The price he paid and why he paid it.

- He went into your grave. His cross was your fate. His grave was your eternal destiny. And Jesus took that penalty and entered your grave and shattered it.

The resurrection is not just about giving you a little religious pep in your step; a few giddy thoughts about the afterlife.

- People come at Easter wanting me to make them feel good; I’d rather you feel the flames of hell so that you flee to Jesus; I don’t want to make you feel good; I want to make a disciple out of you, and that starts with understanding the grave Jesus rescued out of.

I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore; very deeply stained within; sinking to rise no more, but the Master of the Sea, heard my despairing cry; from the waters lifted me now safe am I. LOVE LIFTED me. When nothing else could help, love lifted me!

The gospel is that I was so bad that Jesus had to die; he was so loving...

The gospel declares, “Come we weary, weak and wounded, sick and sore, Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love and power!”

Have you ever done that personally? Have you looked, in faith, and and experienced his forgiveness, and healing?

One of the most famous preachers of Christian history was a man named Charles Spurgeon. He pastored in London in the 19th century, he has been called, “The Prince of Preachers.” His own story of his conversion is one of my favorites:

“I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now, had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning while I was going to a certain place of worship. When I could go no further, I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Chapel. In that chapel there may have been a dozen or fifteen people. I had heard of the Primitive Methodists, how they sang so loudly that they made people's heads ache; but that did not matter to me. I wanted to know how I might be saved, and if they could tell me that, I did not care how much they made my head ache.

The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed in, I suppose. So at last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed; but this man was really

stupid. He was obliged to stick closely to his text in the Bible, for the simple reason that he had little else to say.

The text was that morning was (Isa 49:22), "LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH."

He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus—

"My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look.' Now lookin' don't take a deal of skill. It ain't liftin' your foot or your finger; it is just, 'Look.' Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be rich to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, 'Look unto Me.' Ay!" said he in broad Essex accent (that's probably the equivalent of the Eastern North Carolina twang), "Many of you are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves... Some of you say, 'We must wait for the Spirit's workin.' You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, 'Look unto Me.'

Then the good man followed up his text in this way:

"Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! Look unto Me!"

When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. (He could think of nothing else to say.)

Then he looked at me in the back under the balcony, and he (must have known) I was a visitor. Fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said,

"Young man, you look very miserable."

Well, I knew that I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance...

However, it was a good blow—it struck right home. He continued,

"And you always will be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death,—if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved."

Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do,

"Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live."

And at once I saw the way of salvation. I know not what else he said that morning—I didn't hear anything after that—I was so conumed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away.

There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, "Trust Christ, and you shall be saved."

*Yet it was, no doubt, all in God's timing, and now I can say, —'Ever since by faith I saw the stream Thy flowing wounds supply, Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die.'"*⁶

Has this happened to you?

- I was in college... when I finally saw that he had died for me. I'd understood that he died for the world... but for me. I wanted to know how you could know for sure you'd go to heaven... and it finally made sense that he had done it all for me in love, and I looked, and I was healed... and it was like the world dropped off my shoulders. Love lifted me.
- Do you feel trapped by sin? Look.
- Are you fearful about what will happen to you when you die? Look.
- Are you frustrated at how much you try and fail and try and fail? Look.
- Do you feel defeated? Look! Surely if he overcame your sin he can transform your heart...

The **choice is yours!** No one is stopping you. You can look whenever you want.

- Look to Jesus! He took every ounce of punishment for you.
- Look at the tomb! It is empty. Look, and believe, and be healed.
- The bloody cross and the empty tomb are the greatest news in all the world. *The cross is bloody; the tomb is empty; the throne is occupied. The tomb is empty because the cross was victorious, and the one who now occupies the throne dispenses mercy upon mercy to all who believe.*

***(Listen...)* You need to look because you are dying!**

- You may not feel lit, but **like the people of Israel** bitten by those vipers, you are dying under the curse of sin.
- You don't need a moral improvement, a religious booster shot, or a fresh start. You need to be born again.

- You don't need to turn over a new leaf; **you need a new life.**
- That's why I've never been able to get away from **the word "saved."**
 - Honestly, I don't really like it, because (to be honest) it sounds a little redneck. I get the image of the pudgy preacher in a suit yelling out a word in 8 syllables... you need to be **SAVED!**
- But, **in light of the realities, what is the better word?** You don't need to be helped, or improved, or enhanced?
 - Come to Jesus and get spiritually enhanced!
 - You don't need any of that.
- We are **dying people...** under the curse of sin and the wrath of God—we **need to be saved**, and he's **our only hope.**
 - That's why when people say to me, "Well, **Jesus is just a crutch** for you," I want to laugh. I say, "*Crutch? Jesus is not a crutch. If anything, he's a stretcher, because I couldn't even limp into heaven without Jesus.*"

What Christ offers is...

- ...to wash away your sin—THERE IS A FOUNTAIN THIS WEEKEND, FILLED WITH BLOOD DRAWN FROM EMANUEL'S PAIN...
- And then to flood you with the power of resurrection so that you begin to obey God from the heart.

Prayer/Card

See him on the cross. Do you realize he is dying for *your* sin... not just the sin of the world, but *yours*? Do you see the empty tomb? Do you

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography, Vol. 1: The Early Years*, 88.

believe it is empty because God raised Jesus from the dead because he had accepted Jesus' payment for your sin?

Are you willing to look at him like they looked at the serpent lifted up? Can you feel yourself believing, knowing that forgiveness and healing are flowing from God toward you?

