

“REVIVE #4: FOLLOWING GOD’S DIRECTIONS”

(Exodus 20:1-17)

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[Cornerstone UMC.; 9-24-23]

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1. [11am ONLY... Read CEB Text: Exodus 20:1-17 and Pray].
2. We’re continuing our September series called REVIVE, using the story of Israel’s exodus from Egypt to talk about what it will take for us to experience personal and corporate revival -- for us, like them, to journey towards and find our own “promised land.”

A--So far, we’ve been reminded that it will not only require us to answer God’s *call*, trust God’s *presence*, & claim God’s *provision*, but in today’s story from Exodus 20, we’re reminded that it will also take us *following God’s direction* in all we say and do.

[9am ONLY... Listen to its words, “1 Then God spoke all these words:

2 I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.  
 3 You must have no other gods before me. 4 Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever—of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. 5 Do not bow down to them or worship them, because I, the LORD your God, am a passionate God. I punish children for their parents’ sins even to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me. 6 But I am loyal and gracious to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. 7 Do not use the LORD your God’s name as if it were of no significance; the LORD won’t forgive anyone who uses his name that way. 8 Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. 9 Six days you may work and do all your tasks, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. Do not do any work on it—not you, your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, your animals, or the immigrant who is living with you. 11 Because the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them in six days, but rested on the seventh day. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. 12 Honor your father and your mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the LORD your God is giving you. 13 Do not kill. 14 Do not commit adultery. 15 Do not steal. 16 Do not testify falsely against your neighbor. 17 Do not desire and try to take your neighbor’s house. Do not desire and try to take your neighbor’s wife, male or female servant, ox, donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.”]

B--Here, of course, is one of the two places in the Bible where we find a sharing of what we now call the "Ten Commandments." <sup>1</sup>

3. Now, much has been written and said about the meaning of these, and how they are meant to be applied in and for our lives.

A--In the Jewish tradition, these "Ten Words" (as they're known) are the *essential* component of the "TORAH" ("Law", which is made up of the first five books -- or "Pentateuch" -- of what we Christians call the "Old Testament"). <sup>2</sup>

B--Along with our Jewish sisters and brothers, even we Christians have historically valued these as the *foundation* of our ethics, behavior and responsibility.

4. Yet, as important as each of these commandments is, in today's context, I want us to think about them *not* so much *individually*, but *collectively* -- not "zoomed in" on the *specific* "trees" of each one, but "backed-out", looking at the "forest" of their meaning as a *whole*.

A--...Because when we do this -- when we study them *collectively* -- I think it changes the way we think about and apply them *individually*.

B--No longer are they restrictive, legalistic *rules* that "kill the fun in life," but instead are strategic *directions* -- GOD'S directions and guidance -- for how you and I can live an abundant, revived life!

5. Now, now what do I mean by this? Well, to understand what I'm talking about here, let's look both at the MEANING of the "Law" in scripture, and HOW the Ten Commandments (which are *part* of that Law) give guidance and direction *FOR* that meaning.

--II--

6. First, "Law/TORAH" in the Bible is used in a very *specific* way, for a very *specific* meaning.

A--Again, its intent is *not* to squelch life, fun, or creativity, but to provide *boundaries beyond which* (i.e., when we *violate* them) there are negative life consequences for which we need to be aware.

B--Many of you are taking (or have taken) Disciple Bible Study, and in the readings for Session 5, the student study book gives this description for the purpose of the Law:  
*"Law makes life tolerable. Without law, society explodes into fragments. Law keeps the strong from destroying the weak. Law lubricates social interaction. Law helps us know who we are. It reassures that we belong to a given people. The Law helps to hold the covenant people together; to give some sense of social justice, and to provide the light of morality to the world."* <sup>3</sup>

C--So, you see, its purpose is not so much RE-strictive but PRO-scriptive -- *proactively* giving guidance and direction for how to LIVE lives of abundance, passion and energy by *AVOIDING* things that will void or degrade them.

1--Listen to how Psalm 19:7-10 (NRSV) puts it, *"7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving [NOTE the word "revive!"] the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb."*

2--Notice that these verses talk about the Law (which include the 10 Comm.) as a *good* thing that brings joy, NOT as something that's a "kill-joy."

--III--

7. So, all of this makes the "Ten Commandments" -- collectively -- simply God's guidance and direction for *doing* this.

A--Think about it: the the first *four* commandments focus on the relationship you and I are to have *between US and GOD*:

#1--Don't have any other gods before the Lord God. <sup>4</sup>

#2--Don't make an idol out of anything -- whether it be money, success, power, or even our spouse/family.

#3--Don't treat/use God's name as if it had no significance (e.g., "*in vain*").

#4--Keep the Sabbath -- set aside 1/7th of each week to honor & worship God.

B--And the *next six* commandments focus on the relationship we are to have *with our FELLOW HUMANS* :

#5--Honor your father and mother

#6--Don't murder

#7--Don't commit adultery

#8--Don't steal

#9--Don't testify falsely (or "lie")

#10--And don't desire/"*covet*" anything that belongs to someone else.

C--In other words, thinking of these Ten Commandments *collectively*, the guidance and direction that they give is that -- if we want to have an abundant, revived life -- then we are to do *two things*: (1) Love God (1st 4); & (2) Love our neighbor (last 6)

1--Now where have we heard these before? Well, not only were they the source of a sermon series earlier this summer about how to live "*The Great Life*" <sup>5</sup>....

2--...But, more importantly, they are the essence of what *Jesus* refers to in Matthew 22:37-39 when he describes "*The Great Commandment*" of our faith <sup>6</sup>

D--Now, I don't know about you, but when I focus *my* strength, *my* energy & *my* passion on loving *God* with all my heart, soul, and mind, and loving my *neighbor* as myself, then I usually find that the mistakes of my past, the struggles of my present, and any fears I might have about my future *lose* their power and sway over me.

1--Oh, its NOT that those things aren't still there; it's just that now I have something *more* powerful that makes *those* things seem *less* powerful.

2--When I was younger and about to leave for college, I remember feeling very nervous: would I make friends? would I fit in? would I find my place there?

3--So, I went and visited one of the "saints" of our church -- a pastor's widow named Etta ("Ma") Barton (as we called her). And I shared with her my fears.

4--And I'll never forget what she said: "*Brian, if you WANT a friend, BE a friend!*"

8. You know, when you and I think of the Ten Commandments, too often all we think of are the things it tells us NOT to do -- don't do this, don't do that, and so on!

A--But the reality is that the *real* power and relevance of the Ten Commandments for our lives DOESN'T so much come from the *negative* things it tells us NOT to do, but from the *positive* guidance and direction it implies, invites, and encourages us TO DO!

1--"*If you want a friend, BE a friend*" is, in essence, the same type of advice and direction that the Ten Commandments give -- I.E., if you want a life of fulfillment and meaning with GOD, then *Honor and Love God* by what you say and do, and by how you act (and that means -- among other things -- by not treating God with disrespect, by not worshiping our possessions, and by making time for God = the purpose of Sabbath).

2--If you want to live peaceably with OTHERS, then treat *them* with the honor & respect with which *you*, yourself, would want to be treated (& that means, for example, that we show respect to those who raised us, and that we don't do things that harm others, even when they're *different* from us in some way).

B--In today's world, too often our focus is on "MY" choice = what's best for "ME." Even as people of *faith*, we want to do great things for GOD, but we want to do them "OUR" way.

C--Yet, the 10 Commandments illustrate the power of a life focused *not* on *ourselves* or on *our* way of doing things, but on a life that is not only focused on the will of GOD, but which also considers the needs and cares of OTHERS in what we say and do.

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9. The bottom line, you see, is that if you and I want to get free from (1) the problems of our *past* Egypts, from (2) the struggles of our *present* "wildernesses," and (3) from fear of the "what ifs" of our unknown *futures* -- in other words, if we want to live an abundant, revived life -- then we need to **FOLLOW GOD'S DIRECTION**.

A--That direction (yet again!) consists of two simple things: Love God; Love your Neighbor -- details aside, *THAT* is what the Ten Commandments are really *all about!*

B--If we follow God's direction by doing these two things (difficult and challenging though they may be), we *can* experience personal and corporate revival, and (like the Israelites) we, too, can reach the "Promised Lands" of and in our lives.

10. [PRAYER: "*Lord God, we confess to you our human tendency to want to read and make your PRO-active guidance and direction into RE-active, legalistic rules -- standards of "dos" and "don'ts" that we try to hold ourselves (and others) to as "proof" of the purity of our faith in, and commitment to, you. Forgive us for seeing your "Law" -- including the Ten Commandments -- in this way. Instead, help us to see these how Jesus saw them : as invitations and examples of ways to live a more PRO-active life of LOVE both towards YOU and towards OTHERS. Help us to understand that when we are LED by the practice of LOVE, then all other things fall into proper place: justice, equity, ethics, correct doctrine and practice, and so much more. Help us to follow the lead of your love, not only modeled by you when you were with us here on earth in the form of Jesus, but also as we are empowered to love others through the guidance of your Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus, our great leader, guide, and model of love, Amen.*"]

### ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> The other place in scripture where we find a listing of the Ten Commandments is Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

<sup>2</sup> In Jewish tradition, the "*Ten Words*" (as they are known there) refer to the first 10 of 613 laws given to the people of Israel by God in *Torah*, which is made up of the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Read "*Judaism: the Ten Commandments*" at <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-ten-commandments>. Exodus 43:28 and Deuteronomy 4:13 reference these as the "*Ten Words*" [Read Don Downall, ed., *Favorite Bible Passages: Lessons from 26 Familiar Texts, Vol. 1* (Graded Press, 1989)].

<sup>3</sup> It goes on to talk about how the Law made the people of Israel a distinct people, and that *that* was its purpose. It noted that the Law cannot be separated into "religious" and "civil" law like we do in American society today. No. ALL aspects of life and society (civil, religious, personal, communal, etc.) came under its rule (From the beginning of "*The Bible Teaching*," Disciple Fast Track: Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study Bible Study, (Disciple 1) Participant Book, Session 5, in the section titled "Order," page 40).

<sup>4</sup> Implying, of course, that there *are* other things that people worship as "gods" out there -- just don't *worship* them! This first commandment demands Israel's sole allegiance to Yahweh. Notice that this is not necessarily a command to be "*monotheistic*" (i.e., to *believe* in only one God). No. It *assumes* the *existence* of other deities. Instead, this command is for us to be "*henotheistic*" (i.e., not to *believe* in only one God, but instead to worship only one God, Yahweh, and not any other).

<sup>5</sup> In that series, I unpacked how you and I can live "*The Great Life*" with God and others through our practice of three guides (or "rules", as the founder of Methodist Christianity John Wesley called them) to the Christian life: "*Do no Harm; Do Good; and do things to help you Stay in Love with God.*"

<sup>6</sup> There, Jesus says that we are to "*love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind,... and our neighbor as ourself.*" This command is also found in Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27, and Romans 13:9.