

Exodus 20:1-17

March 15, 2009 – 3rd SUNDAY IN LENT

Honor God for His Deliverance

† from sins against Him (vv.1-11)

† from sins against your neighbor (vv.12-17)

In the name of Jesus, God's great Deliverer, dearly redeemed:

We Christians are sometimes a bit naïve about God's law. It hurts our judicial system for secular humanists to rip God's Ten Commandments out of our courtrooms. But a "personal," anonymous letter this week from Tennessee showed another Christian who thinks God's law can fix morality. How did that work at Mount Sinai when God's thunder and smoke had Moses trembling with fear? Israel heard God Himself speak the Ten Commandments. Moses brought down stone tablets written with the finger of God. But what did he discover back at camp? The golden calf made by the first high priest, Moses' brother Aaron! God's holy, good, perfect law has no power to make us moral. We need it, like a railroad engine needs tracks. But the tracks cannot make the train run. God's law shows us the need to **Honor God for His Deliverance**. But the power of why this train is bound for glory is God's **Deliverance**...

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Commandments on the wall leave out God's first words of grace-motivation: *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."* He wanted them to remember the agony of bondage they suffered in Egypt before His great **Deliverance** *"with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders."* (Deuteronomy 26:8 NIV) Ten plagues and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground – even unbelieving archaeologists have to admit this is unique in antiquity. But you have to go back to Exodus 19 to get the full flavor of this **Deliverance**. The Almighty told Moses to say to Israel: *"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* (Exodus 19:4-6 NIV)

God wants love in return from His cherished people. Literally: *"Not shall there be to you other gods in my face."* Remember "in your face" basketball jamming a shot down somebody's throat? See why we needed referees? But who can referee with God? *"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 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 fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."*

One missionary told of a 60' Buddha for worshipers to lay gifts and prayers at the base, then ride the elevator up six stories for the view and sometimes use the restroom. They see no problem with going to the bathroom in Buddha's head. And Americans can't see why God gets angry if sports or hobbies, work or relationships come between us and God. But a man would understand God's angry love if he found his wife in bed with someone else, or if she found him in pornography. "In your face" God?

God does not want His Name held up to empty lies, like teaching salvation by works instead of by grace alone. **Deliverance** is the same Hebrew root as the name *"Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21 NIV) God's **Deliverance** commands literally, *"Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."* In Deuteronomy it says to literally, *"guard the Sabbath"* and *"do the Sabbath."* (5:12,15) Jesus fulfilled the Third Commandment as our Sabbath-Rest, so that the Holy Spirit frees us from the no-work command, but not from His command to assemble weekly in order to hear God's Word

of law and gospel, sin and grace. He wants us to gladly **guard the Sabbath** from too much Saturday night and too little Sunday morning. God wants us to give Him the honor He deserves by faithful worship.

My earthly father tried to teach us this by calling our names in a service if our eyes glazed over. I thought he caught me once during the Prayer for the Word: “Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, *mark*, learn and inwardly digest them...” All I heard was, “Mark,” and tried not to look surprised or guilty. He went on and nothing came of it. But the threat of punishment did not teach me to love worship either. It scared me, like a train coming right at me. The fear of the LORD is good and right, but power to fear, love and trust in God comes from the Good News. Christ was foreshadowed in all the Old Testament sacrifices commanded by God for the Israelites. He is **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”** Jesus teaches us to **Honor God for His Deliverance – from sins against Him** and...

✠ **from sins against your neighbor (vv.12-17)**

Can you sense God’s love in the Fourth Commandment? **“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”** What if your father is harsh with your mother or your mother disrespectful to your father. What if your parents just don’t understand you? Remember the commandment, but most of all remember Jesus. Then pray: “Dear Father in heaven, make me like Jesus. When Mary and stepfather Joseph scolded you in the temple, you answered respectfully, then went home and obeyed them. (Matthew 2:49ff) You promise life long blessings for this.”

Luther caught the spirit of God’s love in his *Large Catechism*: *“Those who keep God’s will and commandment in sight have this promise: everything they give to temporal and spiritual fathers, and whatever they do to honor them, shall be richly repaid to them. They will not have bread, clothing, and money for a year or two, but will have long life, support, and peace. They shall be eternally rich and blessed. So just do...your duty. Let God manage how he will support...and provide enough for you. Since He...promised...has never lied yet; He will not be found lying to you. This ought to encourage us and give us hearts that would melt in pleasure and love for those to whom we owe honor....God wishes to give you everything exceedingly and abundantly according to your heart’s desire...”*¹ Yes, God says, **“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”** (Psalm 37:4 NIV)

God’s love commands: **“You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house, ...your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”** Church people think not murdering or stealing is enough, but what about the sin of gossip? Where is that sin more than at ladies’ meetings – unless it’s at pastors’ conferences? Break the Eighth Commandment, you’ve broken all the law of God in thought, word and deed.

Years ago I attended a meeting where the pastor was gone. An elder read a fire and brimstone sermon, then commented, “We really need more sermons like that in our churches.” He made the mistake of asking me what I thought. You see, his pastor did not deserve to be criticized for sermons well balanced with law and gospel, sin and grace. But I did not want to break the Fourth Commandment by dishonoring the elder. So I asked the others, “Can you tell what was missing from that sermon?” It was like switching on the radio with the volume way up. What was missing from that sermon? A whole room full of women shouted: “Jesus!” I was so proud of their beautiful confession.

Commandments cannot make morality. They do curb wickedness, and one good reason to post them where man’s law tries and convicts criminals. The Ten Commandments do mirror our sins, and that’s why we personally need them every day. But the holy writer to the Hebrews reminds us: **“You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them...The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, ‘I am trembling with**

¹ *CONCORDIA The Lutheran Confessions –Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord.* (403). (CPH, 2005)

fear.’ But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” (Hebrews 12:18-24 NIV)

“Abel’s blood for vengeance Pleaded to the skies, But the blood of Jesus For our pardon cries.” (CW 103:4) Do you want to **Honor God for His Deliverance – from sins against Him and from sins against your neighbor?** Then use God’s Ten Commandments as a fool proof guide, like the rails on an Alpine train that won’t let the cars jump the tracks. Remember that God saved us by grace to be His *“workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”* (Ephesians 2:10 NIV) *“Only let us live up to what we have already attained.”* (Philippians 3:16 NIV)

Thank God for His blessings on your neighbor. Instead of coveting them, help him to improve and protect his property, business and relationships. Honor your parents even in their old age, especially when they don’t seem to deserve it. *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves”* (Proverbs 31:8 NIV), the innocent unborn, the weak and frail, the developmentally disabled. Rather than listen to gossip, defend your neighbor’s good name. Protect God’s good Name, His soul-saving reputation as our great Deliverer. Only Christ’s forgiving love can help us win our daily battle and power this glory train up the steep hill of sanctification to live and love God’s way more and more. But salvation is God’s gift through Jesus Christ our Lord.

“When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-7)

Grace unearned powers our life of good works thankful praise to God – guarding, treasuring and obeying His commands. For Jesus’ sake, in heart and life, **Honor God for His Deliverance.** Amen.