



HEBRON

Sunday, June 11, 2023

Rylan Sloop

THE EIGHTH WORD OF LIFE, LIGHT, AND LOVE

Exodus 20:15

- Exodus 20:15—Just 4 words, actually two words in the Hebrew.
 - *"You shall not steal."*
- If you're anything like me, many of us probably have been looking forward to this week.
- We've been hearing preaching about some very heavy and difficult things.
 - Just two weeks ago, Landon led us in a sermon on the command not to bear false witness about one another.
 - Then last week, Chet led us in the heavy command not to commit adultery.
 - And many of the commands prior to those have been heavy and challenging.
- And we come to the eighth command and many of us probably feel like we can finally breathe a little bit.
- Maybe some of us hear the words, "You shall not steal," and the first thing that comes to your mind is, "Yes! I'm good for this week."
- To be honest, I had the temptation to come up, read the passage, pray, and then walk off stage.
- But the reality comes down to the fact that we may have too limited of a view on this command.
- I think some of you may think you are good for this week simply because you hear this command and think to yourself, "I've never stolen anything before."
 - "I've never taken something that wasn't mine to begin with."
- But what if I was to tell you that this command means more than what you may think? What if I was to tell you that God is not simply commanding His people not to do something?
 - What if this verse was not only to *command* His people to not do something, but also to call His people to something else?

Main Idea: *The Lord commands His people not to steal and calls them to imitate His giving character.*

- First, I want to lead us to consider the truth that **the Lord commands His people not to steal...**

The Lord commands His people not to steal (v.15)

- This command forbids taking something that doesn't belong to you.
 - To steal is to take something that does not belong to you without permission.
- This command not to steal assumes the idea that a person has the right to private property.
 - I mean think about it...If a person does not have the right to have ownership of something then it can never be classified as ever being stolen from them.

- The fact that God here commands His people not to steal means there is an owner of that which is being stolen.
- But there are various ways to one can disobey and disregard this command.
 - And even the Bible shares some of these examples.
- ***The various ways of stealing***
 - ***Material stealing***
 - These examples may be some of what we commonly hear today and think of when we hear the word stealing.
 - Examples like:
 - Larceny
 - Robbery – the taking of property from a person or place with force or the threat of force.
 - Kidnapping – the taking of a person and holding them captive.
 - Embezzlement – the taking or misappropriation of funds.
 - Shoplifting – taking goods from a store while acting like a customer.
 - Just these five examples are words or terms that we are familiar with when talking about stealing.
 - But what about other materialistic ways of stealing?
 - Examples like:
 - Companies or banks charging excessive interest on loans.
 - Check fraud – when you write a check and know it will bounce.
 - Or spending a credit card limit with no intention of ever paying it back.
 - Or maybe it's cheating on your taxes so you don't have to pay all of what you owe the government.
 - Or the government stealing from its citizens when they mishandle or overspend tax dollars.
 - Or when someone hires workers and decides not to pay them for their work OR pays them an unlivable or unfair wage for their work.
 - Or how about a way some used repeatedly just three years ago?
 - Taking sick days when not really sick...Like claiming to have COVID when not really having it, yet taking the sick leave.
 - Or what about the stealing of written material?
 - Like committing plagiarism
- All these examples of stealing are ways that one takes private property and walks away with some form of tangible profit or gain.
 - For the Israelites, stealing looked more like taking animals or crops, or the taking of land.
- And what God commands of His people is not to steal to gain or profit from taking someone else's possessions.
- But what about intangible methods of stealing...
 - ***Intangible methods of stealing***
 - What about examples like...
 - Manipulative stealing

- Manipulating someone in order for you to gain the next biggest sale.

ILLUSTRATION:

- For instance, there is a reason I will never buy another Jeep!
 - I'm sorry to those of you in this room that have Jeeps and are a part of this Jeep lovin' club, but I will not have any part in that.
 - When I got my license, I got home from school one day and in the driveway was a 2002 Navy Blue Jeep Grand Cherokee.
 - My dad walks outside and yells, "SURPRISE!"
 - I was so excited! Here I am with my first car!
 - My dad starts talking about the car and how the guy at the dealership told him this car was a beast! It was in great condition and had hardly been used. He said the guys confidently told him that the car could not possibly break down because Jeeps are just durable and amazing cars!
 - Well, I come to report to you that was hogwash!
 - I got in the car, and I drove eight minutes down the road to go show off my new ride to Mary Claire and the transmission light comes on and then five minutes later...the check engine light comes on.
 - Then a week later the starter goes out
 - Then two weeks later the transmission goes out.
 - Then the battery dies.
 - Then the window regulator had to be replaced.
 - Everything that could go wrong with your first car went wrong within a two-week span of getting this car.
- In short, my dad was robbed! My dad listened to the sales pitch and fell for it.
- So, as a result, I will never be the owner of another Jeep!
 - But even though many of you may have opinions later with me about my Jeep experience, the principal still stands.
 - Even the sales pitch that manipulates someone into thinking they are buying or getting something greater than what it truly is would be stealing from your neighbor!
 - But also consider the stealing of someone's reputation.
 - The moments when find yourself bearing false witness about someone else, you are ultimately robbing them of their honest and pure reputation.
 - Or what about when doing a group project and you rob someone of the credit or acknowledgement?
 - Or catch that small opportunity to look over on your classmate's paper and get some of those test answers.
 - Or robbing someone of their time.
 - Or what about greed?
 - One pastor defines greed as the act of "stealing with the eyes of your heart."
- But regardless of tangible or intangible ways of stealing, there is something being taken away from one person and something being gained to another.
- But we would limit what God is commanding His people if we only consider the common ways of stealing.
- By only looking at the material ways of stealing, we only see stealing as being wrong against one party.

- We only see stealing wrong for those who are being stolen from.
- ***Spiritual stealing***
 - Many of us in here fail to see the ways in which God has richly gifted us with resources and talents to be used for the building up of His church.
 - For instance, instead of using the gracious gift of breath in our lungs to advance God's name, we use that same breath to advance our own names in a variety of ways.
 - Or instead of giving what gracious resources the Lord has given us, we may selfishly use those same resources exclusively for our own benefit.
 - In other words, instead of being *good stewards* of God's gracious provision, we may have become *greedy stealers* that rob God of glory.
- Regardless of how we look at this command, it is important for us to recognize that God is ultimately the one being stolen from.
 - It may be your money or your personal belongings, but don't forget who ultimately gave it to you in the first place.

TRANSITION: Regardless the method used to steal, the Lord makes clear in His word there are consequences to disobeying His command.

- ***The consequences of stealing***
 - Shortly after giving this command, God goes into detail about what should happen if someone is found stealing.
 - He lays out some of the consequences just a few chapters later in Exodus 22:1-4.
 - *Exodus 22:1-4*
 - *"If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. ² If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him, ³ but if the sun has risen on him, there shall be bloodguilt for him. He shall surely pay. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. ⁴ If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.*
 - God says, if someone is caught stealing let him pay back more than what he stole.
 - The consequence for the stealer is not just the embarrassment of being caught, but also walking away with much less than what they sought to gain.
 - But this passage speaks to a man stealing from another man.
 - What about the consequences for those who deliberately steal from God?
- *Joshua 7*
 - The Israelites are outside of the city of Jericho and the Lord gave them the marching orders that would lead to the walls coming down and the city being given into their hands.
 - But once the walls fall, the Israelites were to take over the city BUT all that was within the city was to be devoted to the LORD for destruction.
 - So, the Israelites obey the marching orders from the Lord, and the walls of Jericho come tumbling down and the Israelites take over the city, just as God had promised.

- But then we get to chapter 7, verse 1.
- *But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.*
- Verse 10.
- *¹⁰ The LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? ¹¹ Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings.*
- Joshua calls everyone together for a town hall meeting and calls Achan to confess.
- Achan goes on to confess that he has sinned against the Lord by letting his taking a beautiful cloak and 200 shekels of silver, a bar of gold and ultimately hides them under his tent.
- Nothing goes unseen by the Lord.
 - God knows the sins of Achan and calls him out on it.
- Achan and his entire family and all of his belongings are then stoned to death and burned.
- Everything Achan had already owned and all that he stole to gain was ultimately destroyed.
- Achan lost more than what he sought to gain...even losing his own life.
- Stealing is a big deal to the Lord because at the root of stealing, God is being robbed of His provision or His provision is seen as insufficient.
 - For the one who steals, they see the Lord's provision in their life as insufficient.
 - And for the one who is being stolen from is being robbed of God's provision in their life.
- This goes back even to the Garden of Eden.
- Adam and Eve were provided everything they needed but were given one instruction--Not to eat from one tree.
 - Yet, being tempted by Satan, Adam and Eve begin to doubt the Lord's provision and ultimately eat from the tree, robbing God of His initial provision to them.
 - And God comes and finds the two of them and cast them out of the Garden as a consequence to their disobedience.
- Some may be thinking, isn't that a little extreme? Like, it was only just some food off a tree or just a nice shirt and some money that Achan took. What's the big deal?
 - I mean, everyone knows and lives by the saying, "Finder's keepers, _____."
 - Loser's weepers.
- The problem with this way of thinking is it misses the very heart and character of God.
 - The Ten Commandments are not given by God just to give the Israelites, and us, a list of dos and don'ts
 - Instead, they communicate something about the character of God.
- You see, God can never command His people to do something that is outside of His character.

- When God commands His people not to steal, its because He cannot steal from Himself.
- It is impossible for God to steal from Himself because He's the creator of everything.
 - Everything is created for Him, through Him, and by Him.
- God does not command His people not to steal simply because He is trying to make them "good people."

TRANSITION: The Lord is not commanding His people to be good people who do not steal, He is calling them to be His people who imitate his giving character.

The Lord calls His people to imitate His giving character.

- Now, you are all probably thinking, "Where in the world did is he getting that? I don't see that in Exodus 20:15."
- This is where we allow the Bible to interpret itself and we consider other places of Scripture where stealing is brought up.
- When you flip to the New Testament and look for where stealing is brought up, it is spoken of several times, but I want us to look at two places in particular.
- Paul writes in Ephesians 4:28
 - *Ephesians 4:28*
 - *⁸Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*
- Then he writes in Romans 13.
 - *Romans 13:9-10*
 - *⁹For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*
- So, we get to the New Testament and the command is for the thief to work and share with those in need and then the believer is to love their neighbor as themselves, which fulfills the law, even the command not to steal.
- The idea Paul is getting at is that giving is an act of obedience and to love our neighbors who are in need.
 - The thief no longer steals but now works to give to the needy.
 - The believer sees to it that they love their neighbor, which ultimately means they should not steal from their neighbor nor should their neighbor be in need!
- The best example of what Paul is talking about is in Acts.
 - In Acts 4, the believers sell all their possessions and give it to those in need and the passage describes the scene as "*There was not a needy person among them...*"
- None of the believers in Acts should have felt the need to steal because God provided for His people through the generous giving of His people.
- There should not be a single person in this faith family that should feel the urge to steal because our faith family gives in such a way that there is no one in need.

- We should all feel the freedom to tell those in our connect groups when we are in need and know that with confidence that they will take care of us.
- Let me just pause here for a moment and ask: Is that true of us? Do we love one another so much that we have come to see that all that is rightfully ours is what has been graciously given to us by God in order to share with those who are in need?
- The point is not for us to become better people who hand out a few dollars every now and then.
- The point is for us, as God's people, to look to Him and imitate His giving character!
 - Which we can see in three ways.
- ***The Lord gives abundantly.***
 - When the Israelites were delivered from their slavery in Egypt, they were in the wilderness and started to grumble about their hunger.
 - God hears His people and abundantly supplies His people with the food they need.
 - By looking throughout the Bible, God has always abundantly provided for His people.
 - In other words, God never shortchanges His people.
- ***The Lord gives freely.***
 - When the Lord gives to His people, he always offers it as a free gift.
 - He never has any strings attached.
 - God never manipulates His people with whatever He gives.
 - He gives freely but it's because he gives generously.
- ***The Lord gives generously.***
 - The Lord generously gives what is rightfully His!
- Want to see the perfect picture of how the Lord abundantly, freely, and generously gives to His people?
 - Look no further than to the person of Jesus Christ!
- This is the gospel!
 - The Lord sent His one and only Son who lived a sinless life, a life that we cannot live, and died on a cross, reserved for criminals, and paid the price for our sins in full, and was put into a grave, where he did not stay long because three days later he rose again!
 - It is ***in*** the person of Jesus that the Lord provides abundantly, freely, and generously.
 - But it is also ***through*** Jesus that the Lord provides abundantly, freely, and generously salvation for His people.
 - And He provides salvation for those who repent and believe.

Luke 23:39-43

- *³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

- The same God who sends Jesus to the cross to die in the place of sinners, dies next to two criminals, where one repents and believes and freely receives the gift of salvation.
- Hear me...
 - Maybe you're a guest in this room (and we are so glad that you are here with us) or maybe your someone who has yet to believe.
 - You cannot work to *earn* your salvation, nor can you steal to *gain* your salvation.
 - Salvation is abundantly, freely, and generously given to those who repent and receive it through faith in Jesus!

So What?

- The students in here know that I close every sermon with "So What?"
- It's my way of getting us to consider some questions that we can honestly answer between us and God.
- The Lord does not leave any room for confusion in this command.
- The Lord is very clear... "You shall not steal."
- So, it is only right for you to ask the question.
- ***Are there areas of my life where I may be stealing what is not rightfully mine?***
- But maybe you are still thinking the same way we started.
 - Maybe you're someone who is walking away saying, "I've obeyed this command. I'm good for this week!"
- ***Am I trusting in the Lord to abundantly provide for my every need?***
- ***Am I imitating the giving character of God who provides for my every need?***
- We have a God who gives abundantly, freely, and generously because that's who He is.
- I hope that we see that the Lord is not just simply commanding us not to do something, but also calling us to something much more.
 - Our God is calling us not to steal but to be good stewards of His provision.
 - He is calling us not to be a greedy people but a generous people.
- May we be the people of God who obeys His command not to steal and instead are good stewards who imitate His giving character.