

Sun., Jan. 19

2020 Winter Message Series: Set Free to Live Free: The 10 Commandments

Love God, Love Others

Message: Set Free to Love God First

Scriptures: Exodus 20:1-3, Matthew 22:37-40

Memory Verse & Text: “Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” - Matthew 22:37-38.

Blurb: The first of the 10 Commandments is the key: Make God first in your life. We may have God in our lives, but we struggle keeping Him first. Yet when we don’t, we suffer. God’s plan for our best life is only possible when we put Him above everything else. This Sunday, come ready to do just that!

Opening Song: *Jesus* -Tucker Hennlich & Kayla Brunner

Welcome: -David

Welcome Tucker Hennlich & Kayla Brunner

Memory Verse: -David

“Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” -Matthew 22:37-38.

Worship Music Set: -Tucker Hennlich & Kayla Brunner

Build My Life

In Christ Alone

Worthy of Your Name

Worship Prayer -Kayla or Tucker

Offering: *10,000 Reasons* -Tucker Hennlich & Kayla Brunner

Lemuel the Lion -David & Vicky

Pastor: **I am so excited to be talking about the 10 Commandments! I mean this is *rock solid* stuff. Literally, these lessons were written in stone! Talking about rules may seem dreary, but these are not just *any* rules! These are God's rules! It's very exciting!**

Lemuel: (rising from behind table) Excited? Excited? Me too, I'm so excited!

Pastor: **Oh... hi there Lemuel (Lem-you-el). How are you?**

Lemuel: I'm doing fantastic. I'm so excited!!!

Pastor: **Oh, really, why are you so excited?**

Lemuel: Uh...because you are!

Pastor: **I'm excited about the Ten Commandments.**

Lemuel: About the what?

Pastor: **Ten Commandments. Don't you remember? We talked about this last week. The 10 Commandments are God's rules for us.**

Lemuel: Ohhhh. Never mind! Not excited anymore. Actually, kind of feeling like...blah.

Pastor: **Lemuel, why are you feeling like blah? I thought you were excited. What happened?**

Lemuel: I'm not excited about talking about more rules! When I lived out on the wild plains of South Africa, I could do whatever I wanted! Now, I have rules at home, rules at school and rules at church. I even have rules in the car. Do you know what that is like? Now I have to learn about God's rules...great.

Pastor: **Now come on Lemuel, what rules that you have to follow are so bad? How bad are the rules in the car?**

Lemuel: I'm not allowed to smash my peanut butter cookies in the carpet anymore. I forgot last week again and ohhhhh did I get in trouble.

Pastor: **(under your breath) Remind me to never offer you a ride.**

Lemuel: Whatcha say?

Pastor: **Never mind. (Ahem) God's rules are the most important rules we can follow. I have a feeling you've been keeping some of His rules and not even really knowing it.**

Lemuel: Really? Like what?

Pastor: **For example, the first rule is found in Exodus 20:3 it says "Have no other god's before me." Now I have heard about some of the ways you help those who are in need and, trust me, I heard you singing out loud and clear during worship. It seems like you love Jesus with all of your heart.**

Lemuel: Yes I do. I can be excited about that rule. That's easy, piece of cake... or pie or cookie or how about ice cream or...

Pastor: **Anyway, this is the commandment we are talking about today. Are you ready to hear some more about it?**

Lemuel: Ready and willing! With open ears and open heart and open mind and...open stomach.
Wow, I'm hungry. My stomach is hungry. Pastor David, do you have any food? I'm hungry!

Pastor: **No, I don't have any food for you Lemuel. Just spiritual food. It's time to get into the message.**

Lemuel: Well, I guess I'll see what's left over from Community Care...(goes down talking about food)

Pastor: **Everyone needs a white handout. Kids too! Everyone needs one.**

Take the WHITE insert, and turn to the side that shows the 2 stone tablets. Last week we learned that God gave the 10 Commandments because He loves us so much and wants the best for us. So, to remember that these are gifts of love from God, draw two lines at the bottom and make them into a heart. These show us God's heart, and come from God's heart!

Now, turn your page over. You see the #1 written there. Today we are looking at the first of the 10 Commandments. The first commandment is that we put God first. We are to have no other gods before our God. Take your pen, and use it to make the #1 into an arrow that points up. Our #1 rule is to take our Heavenly Father as our first love, as our only God. Remember, first is up!

Prayers: *Sinai Covenant* -David

David: In Exodus 19-30, God assembled the people He had freed from slavery in Egypt at Mt. Sinai and entered into a sacred covenant with them. God chose the people as His people, and the people chose God as their God. The 10 Commandments and the rest of the Law that God gave was the terms of the covenant. Sinful people were reconciled to God through sacrifice. Until the coming of Christ, the sacrifices were animal sacrifices. The consequences of sin is death, and the death deserved by the God's people was first paid for by animal sacrifices, and ultimately and finally by Jesus' death on the cross. For our prayer time today, we go back to that covenant made at Mt. Sinai, and we join God's people. Through Jesus, we are adopted into God's chosen people, and we are made children of Abraham. So we, today, as our prayer time, also enter into the covenant that God made with Abraham and later His chosen people at Mt. Sinai. This is the foundation for our covenant of salvation with Jesus. So, as we study the 10 Commandments, today we go back and reaffirm this founding covenant. This becomes our binding agreement with God.

Exodus 19 "Israel camped there in front of the mountain while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him from the mountain, 'This is what you should say to Jacob's household and declare to the Israelites: You saw what I did to the Egyptians, and how I lifted you up on eagles' wings and brought you to me. So now, if you faithfully obey me and stay true to my covenant, you will be my most precious possession out of all the peoples, since the whole earth belongs to me. You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation. These are the words you should say to the Israelites.' So Moses came down, called together the people's elders, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him."
(Exodus 19:2b-7)

People: "The people all responded with one voice: 'Everything that the Lord has said we will do.'" (Exodus 19:8)

David: Exodus 20:20 “Moses said to the people, ‘Don’t be afraid, because God has come only to test you and to make sure you are always in awe of God so that you don’t sin.’” God then gave the people the 10 Commandments, and the rest of His laws. “Moses came and told the people all the Lord’s words and all the case laws. (Exodus 24:3a)

People: “All the people answered in unison, ‘Everything that the Lord has said we will do.’” (Exodus 24:3b)

David: “Moses then wrote down all the Lord’s words.” (Exodus 24:4a) “Then Moses took the covenant scroll and read it out loud for the people to hear. (Exodus 24:7a)

People: “They responded, ‘Everything that the Lord has said we will do, and we will obey.’” (Exodus 24:7b)

David: Exodus 24:8 “Moses then took the blood and threw it over the people. Moses said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord now makes with you on the basis of all these words.’”

People: Amen!

Bumper:

Message: 10 Commandments: Set Free to Love God First

PP#1: 10 Commandments: Set Free to Love God First

“Jesus replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” -Matthew 22:37-38.

10 Commandments: Set Free to Love God First. Matthew 22:37-38 “Jesus replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”

As we begin the new year, and the new decade, we’re going back to *bedrock* of abundant life, the foundation *stones*. We seek to build our best life.

PP#2: *Image for someone pointing out the right path to choose, perhaps wearing big sign.*

We keep trying the plans this world has to offer, plans that come from our own thinking, our wants, our desires, but we admit that we are not living vibrantly like we know we could and should.

We also know that God is our creator, and that He designed us for abundant life. He has a plan for us to live fully. He knows how we can live well. And He has provided clear instructions for how we can live vibrantly, as we long for.

God’s pathway of good living is outlined, summarized, in what we call the 10 Commandments. Isn’t it just so cool that God doesn’t hide the path, but instead has provided it openly and clearly? And the key components of abundant living are timeless. Yes, living conditions change, technology changes, the kinds of possessions we have look different. And our scientific understanding has developed. But the key component of meaning, purpose, the key to a fulfilled life, is timeless. It’s a matter of what we now call the heart. It’s a way of life, an approach to living, not the details of life itself. What made a person fulfilled 2,000 years ago is still what makes a person fulfilled now. So, the plan that God provided in the Old Testament is in no way obsolete, but actually it’s super relevant today...perhaps even more so because our core grounding is now blurred with the dazzling newness of our stuff, and our belief that because we know more, we are supposed to be smarter.

God laid out the timeless building blocks of a rich and contented life 4,000 years ago at Mt. Sinai. This ancient wisdom still holds the key to full life for us.

PP#3: Set Free: To Love God First

1. True freedom is not the ability to choose any path, it's being able to choose the best path.

Last week we looked at the context of when God gave the 10 Commandments. He had worked a mighty act of salvation, freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. God sets them free, so that they can live free! But living free does not mean being able to do anything and everything. God knows that doing many things leads to bondage, many different kinds of bondage. It's like having multiple paths in front of us. We may think that we want the freedom to go through any door we choose. But God knows more. He sees *behind* the doors. Many doors lead to cages and pits and jail cells and shackles and giant rabbit traps. Going through those doors will just lead to different kinds of bondage. So when God frees His people from one form of slavery, He in great love also points out the path that does not lead to any other prison cells. Rather than releasing them into the desert where they will certainly perish by following their selfish wants in ego-centric freedom, God brings them to Mount Sinai where He sets them up for success, where He describes the pathway that leads to their best lives. True freedom is not the ability to choose any path, it's being able to choose the best path.

PP#4: Set Free: To Love God First

1. True freedom is not the ability to choose any path, it's being able to choose the best path.
2. God's way is my best life!

And before He gives them the outline of life, He reminds them that these rules are the pathway of life. He points back to where they have come from and says, "See? I have proved to you that I have your best interest at heart. I give you this path to life because I love you and I want the best for you. You can go any way, but this, right here, is the path of true freedom." So, once again, write this down on your sermon note sheet: "God's way is my best life."

Many people look at the Bible and say that Jesus replaced the Old Testament laws. The Commandments given *way back then*, He replaced. Well, that is true for the laws of sacrifice. But that is not true for the laws guiding to abundant life. Those laws are still intact, showing God's plan. Jesus says in Matthew 5:17 "I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it." Jesus came to offer us true freedom: free access to God's path for my best life.

PP#5: Matthew 22:37-40 (CEB)

- 37 Jesus replied, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.' [Deuteronomy 6:5] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.' [Leviticus 19:18] 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

God's path to abundant life has two major movements. The Old Testament gives 613 different, specific laws. But they are all contained in two big ideas. One day Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was that God had ever given for people. What summarized God's loving plan for people to live best? In Matthew 22:37, Jesus replies, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.' [Deut. 6:5] This is the first and

greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ [Leviticus 19:18] All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

So, the two major components to living best are loving God and loving others.

PP#6: Greatest Commandments = 10 Commandments

First: Love God = Commandments #1-4

Second: Love Others = Commandments #5-10

And we see exactly this in the 10 Commandments that God gave to His people on Mt. Sinai. We always visualize the 10 Commandments as on the two stone tablets God told Moses to take to the people. This is such a helpful image, because the 10 Commandments are an outline, a description, of the two greatest commandments. (2 tablets!) The 10 Commandments and the two greatest commandments, are the same!

God sets His people free so that they can truly live free! Set free to live free! And to do that, we love God and love others!

There is an order of importance here. The first set of commandments come first. They are the greatest commandment. The last six come second, are the second commandment. They are first and second, not in order of importance, but in order of progression. I mean: the second part depends on the first commandments. They flow out of the first. They are what a life living the first ones look like.

This winter message series we’re looking at the first four of the 10 Commandments. These are the *Love God* Commandments. We are set free by a loving God, who calls us to love Him. After Easter, we’re going to come back and look at the last six of the 10 Commandments. These are the *Love Other* Commandments. We live free to love others.

PP#7: Exodus 20:1-3 (CEB)

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 [or besides] me.

Let’s look at the first commandment. Exodus 20:1-3, “Then God spoke all these words: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” [I am trustworthy. I have proved to you that I have your best interest at heart. Here is how to live best. Ready? #1...] You must have no other gods before [or besides] me.” The Hebrew word means the same.

Deuteronomy 6:4 puts it in terms of *agape*, self-sacrificing love, “Love [*sacrificially*] the Lord your God with all your heart and being and mind.” It’s a total commitment. Here on Mt. Sinai God says it this way, “You must have no other gods before me.”

Don’t miss this: these are the same commandment. Loving God totally and self-givingly means having no others before Him. Loving means putting Him first.

PP#8: Set Free: To Love God First

1. True freedom is not the ability to choose any path, it’s being able to choose the best path.
2. God’s way is my best life!
3. Love is a commandment!

Isn't it shocking that God *commands* us to put Him first? We are commanded to love. Think about that. That's not how we normally think about love. Think of the persons you love most. Why do you love them? Do you love them because you have to? Because you're told to? No. Loving them describes your relationship to them, not your obligation.

But God, right from the beginning, commands us to love. And I think that's because we've lost the true understanding of love. We think of love as a bond, a feeling. And it certainly is that. But that bond, that feeling, actually is *the result* of our grounding commitment.

Think of it this way: What would you be willing to do for those you really love? Would you give up your plans for tomorrow? Would you go do whatever they needed from you? Would you give all your money? If your dearest love needed medical treatment to be cured from a terminal illness, and the only way they could get it would be for you to give up all your possessions, would you do it? Of course you would! I remember holding my son when he was deathly sick as a toddler and thinking, "If only I could die instead of him." I meant it! I would have done it in a heartbeat.

But it wasn't my *feeling* that made my commitment to be willing. It was my commitment, that I sensed as a feeling we call love, that would compelled me to do it. So love, rightly clarified in the Bible, is not the feeling, but the commitment. God, then, rightly commands us to make the commitment to love.

This is what we do at marriage, isn't it? In true marriage vows, the word love is never used. "I vow to take you as my spouse, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in sickness and in health, until death do us part." No feelings there! It's all commitment. But this is love, described. Love is a commitment to put you *above* me in my life. The feelings we call love are a *result* of the commitment we make to our spouse. Those feelings grow. They can also ebb and flow.

And the first commitment, our first love, is God. God tells us to do it. God commands us to love Him first. It's a vow we take, a choice. It's not a feeling. We commit, we vow, we promise, we determine, we set our jaw and clench our teeth. It's an act of self will, we commit, all in! We put God first.

PP#9: *Book cover of Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas*

So, if you don't feel like you love your spouse, it's okay. Live out your commitment anyway. God can restore those feelings. And God will give you the Holy Spirit so that you can live out your commitment. You can't in your own strength. God knows that. That's why the marriage covenant is a God covenant! God makes it possible for you to do it, even when you're at the end of your ability. Notice it doesn't have anything to do with your spouse's behaviors! It has to do with your commitment. Andrew reminded me of an awesome book on marriage. It's basic message is, what if God's intention for your marriage was to make you holy, not happy? I know most of your spouses. Let me just say, God has graciously given you each ample opportunity to grow in holiness!

And, if you don't feel like you love God, don't give up. Live out your commitment anyway. God will grow those feelings into your heart. Follow the rules. Again, you can't in your own strength. That's why God came in Jesus to die for our sins, and that's why God sends us the Holy Spirit, to put His strength in us to live out this commitment.

PP#10: *Image of a person with a heart outlined in his chest, with a big question mark inside it.*

This is the first commandment because this is the one that determines all the rest. Take God as your God. Make Him first in your life. That means above everything and everyone else.

Now, here again, we all may agree to this. We affirm this is right. But God commands this because rather than just agreeing, we need to actually do it...make it a reality in our lives.

God tells the people in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel, the Lord your God: The Lord is One!” There is only one God. Then, the next verse, Deuteronomy 6:5 is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind.” There is only one God. Love Him first!

Now, none of us worship physical idols, statues of god in our homes. This commandment seems easy. Perhaps for our context, I need to put it this way: There is only one God, and YOU are not it! We may not worship statues, but we still have other gods. And as I’ve been thinking about this, it seems to me that all of the other gods we follow are some version of putting ourselves first. We put our happiness as our god, our wants, our plans, our importance.

But God booms from Mt. Sinai—and from Jesus’ empty tomb: “I have set you free to live free! Do not become a slave to your own selfishness, your own will! It is also bondage!”

Our reality is too often that we have been set free—thank you Jesus!—but we are not living free. We choose the doors that lead to the bondage in some form of selfishness. Oh, we still have God, but we’ve made Him our butler, answering our requests we call “prayer.”

But, when we make ourselves the center of our lives, in reality *we make ourselves miserable*. What does this look like? Let’s talk about your work, or your marriage, or your money, or your sexuality. Who makes the rules? Who is calling the shots? Who is lord?

We are not made to be the center of our lives. We are made to live best when we put God in the center of our lives, and when we ask God to be in charge. If you are miserable, I can fairly confidently say it is because you are, in some way, locked into worshiping yourself.

PP#11: Set Free: To Love God First

1. True freedom is not the ability to choose any path, it’s being able to choose the best path.
2. God’s way is my best life!
3. Love is a commandment!
4. Not putting God first hurts yourself

God’s path is our best life. When we choose otherwise it is to our detriment. The Bible calls that sin. Isn’t it amazing that when we violate God’s plans for our lives—that’s called sin—that we are actually violating ourselves? It’s sinning *against God* because God is so in love with us, that when we hurt ourselves by not living His best way for us, it hurts God’s heart!

The reality is that we are free to choose. But, the Bible tries to make it abundantly clear: to choose to sin is to choose to suffer. God is trying to direct us to the path of abundant life. When we choose otherwise, we choose to forfeit what could be. We may think we are doing what we want in the moment, but we are actually hurting ourselves.

The gods that tempted the ancient Israelites are the same gods that tempt us. Yes, they had idols of Baal and Astarte and Adonis. But they offered the same desires: money, success, possessions, influence, sex. We still worship these, we just have different names.

Our God says He is a jealous God. He is the only God. And it is a love covenant. Love is exclusive. Like godly marriage: I choose my wife over all others. I put all others away. I commit to be faithful only to her. There is no room in my marriage for another. Real marital love can’t include it. Real love of God can’t include room for other loves, other priorities. Love of God must come first.

PP#12: Set Free: To Love God First

1. True freedom is not the ability to choose any path, it's being able to choose the best path.
2. God's way is my best life!
3. Love is a commandment!
4. Not putting God first hurts yourself
5. Take an honest look into your heart

Church, look into your heart. Who is there? I bet God is. But how about other gods? My guess is that you may also have some other very good things in there. Your spouse. Your kids. Your career. Your image. Your dreams. Your happiness. Your comfort. They are good things. But notice how they are vying for your priority. When good things become god things, they become bad things.

Perhaps you have made God your *functional* God: the one you profess to be your God. But when you look inward, who do you see is your *actual* God? What do your life behaviors and choices reveal is first? God gave the 10 Commandments so that your professed God can be the same as your actual God.

When you look inward, when you get honest, perhaps you see that you are stuck in a form of bondage that comes from not keeping God first.

Perhaps, for example, you believe the lie that you cannot change, over the belief that you are already changed. You see, when you ask Jesus in your heart, He changes you, makes you able to live differently. You are able to be different. But your belief that you cannot change is *first* over your belief in Jesus' power in your life.

Perhaps you fear change more than slavery. It's easier to stay with the demon you know.

Perhaps you feel shackled to your loyalty to your personal or family history, what others expect from you, how they see you. You behave how they expect.

Perhaps you are quick to return to enslaving habits. You go back to unhealthy patterns as a reward, as a relief, to celebrate as something you've earned or deserve. Your mind is still subject to your old gods.

Perhaps you practice self-deception of your past, thinking that your former slavery is freedom. You romanticize it, remember only the good parts. You go revisit them, the old glory days. The Israelites did this, you know. They asked to go back to Egypt rather than face the unknown future.

PP#13: *Image of a person(s) praying at an altar, or in a pew, pouring his/her heart out to God.*

Your biggest problem is not your issue. It's not your worst behavior. The real issue is your God! Who is your God? Who is your first love? Who has your commitment?

Before we can progress into the rest of the commandments, we need to first settle #1.

So, I want to call you to look into your heart and setting your first love. Perhaps you need to come honest with God. Perhaps you need a sign of your commitment. If so, I am going to designate the front right pews as prayer pews. If you want to confess your cluttered heart to God, come up and do that. If you want to commit your heart singularly to God, come up and do that. If you want God to refresh your commitment to having Him first, come up and do that.

There'll be members of our prayer team in the pews to pray with you, if you want it. Otherwise you can just come up and pray, too. You can also pray where you are. But there is something memorable about making the move to go and pray, making it special. So, during our

closing song, it's a song about how God is first!, you are invited to come up and pray. The pew is ready. God is listening. You need a heart refresher!

Tucker and Kayla?

Closing Song: *How Great Is Our God* -Tucker Hennlich & Kayla Brunner

[Prayer team members pray with any who come for prayer.]

Announcements:

Special exit, through door on the right!

Exit through the Fellowship Hall.

Ministry Fair

And cookies!

Wednesday, will have pancakes there, too.

Memory Verse -David

“Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” -Matthew 22:37-38.

Benediction -David

...Amen. Go in peace.

I invite everyone to follow me out through this door!

Postlude -Tucker Hennlich & Kayla Brunner