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The Story: Chapter 5 - New Commands and a New Covenant
Saints Peter & Paul Lutheran Church - Houghton, MI
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We've been having some troubles at home lately - when it comes to getting our daughter, Lily, to do certain things. For instance, when we say: **Okay Lily, time to get dressed!** She takes off running down the hall as fast as she can, pantsless(!), laughing & giggling all the while. When we say, **"Stop playing with your water at the table, Lily"**-- she'll do one of those sidelong glances -- and then try and pour a bunch out real fast, at which point I kinda lose it & I yank the water away from her rebellious intentions.

We've actually experienced this enough that we've started waging a little psychological warfare at home. Instead of *telling* Lily what to do...we say things like: **"You're not gonna eat those broccolis are you?... Nooo. Don't do it!"** And to our amazement, it actually works! (Some of the time). She eats em!

I'm told that what we're experiencing is a well-known and documented phenomenon called *Psychological Reactance*. In essence, it's the knee-jerk, negative reaction we experience to *being told what to do*. It's why you bristle when your manager asks you to do a task, or why, as a teenager when your mom tells you to put on your jacket, you don't--just 'cause. Even though these things are good for you to do... you resist them -- because it feels like your autonomy has been threatened. Like someone is squashing your freedom.

Well, in our Story today - we see this kind of knee-jerk reaction -- as the people of Israel respond to receiving God's LAW... At first, quickly agreeing to it, but shortly thereafter blatantly breaking it.. But maybe that makes sense, right? It is THE LAW after all. Maybe this *psychological reactance* was just wired into them. Maybe they didn't like *being told what to do*. But what was God really after in giving them the LAW? That's what I want to explore today with you -- what the LAW is about: what it IS... and what it ISN'T.

Our story picks up right off the heels of the Exodus Event: That Great Deliverance. It's been 3 months since the Israelites saw God's Mighty Hand come down to rescue them from the Egyptians. And now, God comes down to speak with His people. And He says: **"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant... STOP.** Do you see what comes first? Before God speaks of obedience? What does He say? *I carried you on eagles' wings*. God depicts Himself as the mighty eagle, swooping down to deliver salvation to the people. Here's the question: What did the Israelites contribute to their salvation? Did they fight their way out? Did they run out? Did they even walk out? No, they were carried out! *They were carried!* They contributed NOTHING to their deliverance.

God says: **I have already saved you! I've carried you on eagles' wings to myself.. Therefore, obey.** So here we see already, what the LAW ISN'T. The Law isn't the basis for our salvation. *The LAW does NOT get you to heaven. The LAW does NOT get God to bless you; it does NOT get God to love you - He already does! He proves that, right off the bat!*

And that's different. That's backwards. From every other religion on the face of this earth. Every other religion says: *If you do right & live right - then you'll be accepted and blessed.* But not our God. He shows us, right here, and all throughout Scripture, that our salvation & our acceptance is NOT based on what WE do, but on what HE'S DONE.

But if that's true, you might wonder: "why should I obey the Law at all?" But you see - that question reveals it's not just every religion, but every human heart (including those in this room) that thinks that way: *That it's our own actions that bring us blessing & acceptance...* If I'm not receiving those things by keeping the LAW - why keep it at all, we ask? And by asking, we show that we misunderstand the heart of God. And we likely misunderstand the LAW. But If it wasn't given to save us... why was the LAW given?

Well, this same key verse from Exodus 19 gives us 3 answers. **"If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."** 3 Things. If you obey you shall be: my treasured possession / a kingdom of priests / and a holy nation. All 3 are significant, but today - I'm just going to focus on that first one.

It's that first one that most intrigues me. Why was the Law given? What is it for? **To make us God's treasured possession.** *To make us His love.* Now wait a minute, didn't we just finish saying that God loves us, apart from the Law! That The Law isn't the basis for God's love? That's right. God already loves us & He loved the Israelites or He wouldn't have saved them...so what does this mean, for the Law to make us God's **treasured possession**? How do we understand this? Well, let me give you an example.

When you fall in love, when you really start to love somebody, if things are going right -- here's what you do: you start to research. Now I'm not talking about Facebook Stalking, exactly, but the research you do is you trying to find out what pleases the person. What delights the person. You don't use the term - but what you're trying to find is that person's WILL. What is it they most want? What delights him or her? Then you give it! Without being asked, you give it! You don't think of it as being coercive, you just give it!

And the reason it doesn't feel coercive, is because when a love relationship IS A LOVE relationship (not an exploiting relationship). In real love you place your happiness and joy INTO the happiness & joy of the other. In other words - their being happy IS YOUR happiness. Their being overjoyed IS YOUR joy. So you research what he/she really wants. And the more you see them delighted - the more that fulfills you.

When God says obey me so that I can treasure you - it doesn't mean so that I can accept you: He's already done that! So what does it mean? Look at the way the 10 commandments start. God doesn't just jump right into saying **Do this...Do that...** "Have no other gods; Don't abuse my name; Keep my Sabbath Day"... No, He says, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (Ex 20:2)

You see what He's saying? He's saying: *I have listened to the deepest needs of your heart. I heard you crying out in your misery/oppression. And I came to you!* Now, reciprocate. What I'm showing you in the LAW - is what delights me. I delight in honesty, integrity, justice, LOVE! Put your love in my happiness. Here it is! I've laid it all out for you. Do this & you will be my **"treasure."**

And The word "treasure" is the Hebrew word: תְּשׁוּבָה (Segulah) - It's a very specific Hebrew word which means: the private wealth of a great king. You see, back then, King's owned EVERYTHING. When you became the King, you owned it! You owned the roads, you owned the buildings, you even owned the people! And unfortunately, you could have them killed if you wanted. But you see, this word is not talking about all of that stuff, but a special, private wealth. Special objects of beauty. That the King probably kept in His room. He dotes upon it. He delights in it in a special way. See, God says: Obey me, so we can have a relationship of intimacy. Obey me so you can know - I'm treasuring you.

Well, the Israelites fail to treasure their Father. You heard them accept the terms of this covenant. They said: **All that the Lord has spoken we will do.**” But they don’t. They agree to the relationship, Moses sacrifices animals and sprinkles the blood on the people to ratify the covenant -- which sounds weird to us, but was completely common then -- whenever you enacted an agreement like this in the ancient world - you demonstrated what was the expectation if you failed to follow through. In this case: **bloodshed.** Sacrifice. You were saying, “may this destruction come upon me, if I don’t uphold my end of the bargain.” ***That’s what the blood of the covenant means.***

And these Israelites didn’t uphold their end; in a few short chapters they’d be erecting a Golden Calf and bowing down to worship it - breaking the first several of YHWH’s commandments. These Israelites failed...but there came one, who didn’t. He came **not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.** *But not out of obligation! Out of Love, for the Father!* He had been with the Father from the beginning - from before all worlds. As John 1 says, He was in “*the bosom*” of the Father; resting in His heart - in His Father’s love, from eternity! Jesus knew He was loved by the Father. He says it over and over in John’s Gospel: **The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.** (John 3:35). **For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing** (John 5:19-20). Jesus comes and fulfills the Law, and look at what He says: **I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father** (John 14:31).

That’s what the LAW is about! It’s about LOVE. And Jesus loved the Father so much that He delighted in being obedient to Him. Even when that obedience led Him to a cross. To pay for ***the blood of the covenant!*** That’s why - you know - Jesus says those words. To us, it may go over our heads -- but to his disciples, to a group of Jews who would’ve been extremely familiar with the Exodus account & the terms of that agreement between Israel & YHWH at Mt. Sinai...oh they knew the gravity of what Jesus was saying when He said: ***this is the blood of the covenant. The cup I will drink! The cup of God’s wrath, that I will take on your behalf!***

But Jesus went willingly to that cross - because of His love for you. Because that’s how God works -- His deliverance comes not as a result of our works, but because He values us. We are His treasure.

So what do you treasure? What do your actions say about your heart? What do you love?

We don’t have to keep the 10 commandments to earn God’s favor. You already have it. How will you respond to God’s deliverance in your life?

I mentioned *Psychological Reactance* at the beginning of this sermon. That knee-jerk reaction we have when we’re told *we have to do something.* You know the trick to conquering it? Changing the way we talk to ourselves. Changing how we think.

Instead of thinking you “have to” do something, tell yourself you “get to” or even “deserve to” do it. By simply changing the dialogue, you empower yourself. You’re not being told what to do—you’re choosing to make time for something that matters to you.

The Law is not a list of “Have To’s” - but “Get To’s” -- because we have a God who has delighted in us so much, He has shared with us what delights His own heart. May we be people who carry out the LAW in Love, not because *we have to,* but because *we get to* -- in response to the One who has Loved us with an everlasting Love - in Jesus’ Name, Amen.