

Hope Church South Haven July 27th, 2025

Exodus 20:1-21

From the Nile to Nebo: Ten commandments.

Almost everyone knows what happened at the **Coldplay concert** last weekend.

I must confess, at first, I enjoyed all the memes. People are QUICK and FUNNY and WITTY. I

think it's part of my South African heritage. To survive all the challenges, South Africans turn

to humor to cope. We have this innate ability to find humor in even the darkest of days.

But WHAT STRUCK ME THIS WEEK was that in a world where **people hate to be judged**,

judgement comes easy online. KEYBOARD WARRIORS love playing **judge** and jury. So

many of the comments were ruthless and harsh and toxic. Indulgent – they enjoy the fall-out that these two families must deal with.

The internet has a way exposing our true selves.

All of this happened in a world where people are struggling with the idea of right and

wrong. A world where people are PESSIMISTIC about **morals and ethical standards**.

- According to Pew Research – 63% of American adults.
- And the **Barna Group – 8 out of 10** of American adults.

Reasons:

- Rise of relativism – Two thirds of American adults believe that **morality depends on circumstances** and not absolute truths.
- Social shift from moralism to self-fulfillment.
 - ⇒ The welfare of the **individual replaced the welfare of the community.**
 - ⇒ The most important thing in life is to be true to yourself, to be HAPPY, and to **do whatever feels right** for you. Not what is best for the community.

The crisis is not simply that people are doing wrong things; that has been going on since the fall in Eden. The crisis is the loss of shared understanding of what is right. Worse, it is a crisis of doubt as to whether there even is a moral right or wrong at all.

Lewis Smedes

We are continuing our series: From the Nile to Nebo. Today we are reading from **EXODUS**

20.

Just a quick reminder:

- God made a covenant with Abraham – ***You belong to me, and your descendants will be my people.*** This covenant was passed from ABRAHAM to his son ISAAC. From ISAAC to his son JACOB. From Jacob his TWELVE SONS (including Joseph).
- They ended up in Egypt where they suffered under slavery. During the centuries of slavey, Jacob's family became a nation.
- While they suffered and cried out to God, **God remained silent.** He did not speak a word. Nothing/niks/nada...

- We know the story well: Moses in the basket. The burning bush. The ten plagues — God showed that He is more powerful than all the Egyptian gods. The Exodus happened. Israel crossed the Red Sea and travelled through the wilderness.
- In **EXODUS 19** they finally reached Mount Sinai.
- At Mount Sinai, God **breaks His silence**.
 - ⇒ JHWH speaks to a NATION that only knew slavery for generations.
 - ⇒ JHWH speaks to a NATION whose **identity and way of life were defined by Egypt**.
 - ⇒ JHWH speaks to a NATION that had no laws of their own.
- In **EXODUS 19** Moses climbs up the mountain to meet with God, then comes back down to talk to the people.
- Up-and-down. This happens a couple of times.
- God instructs Moses that **Israel weren't ready** to meet God. They needed to CONSECRATE themselves before He shows up.

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Exodus 19:16-19 NIV

- Moses went back up again. **EXODUS 19** ends where Moses comes back down Sinai.

Verses 1-2

And God spoke all these words: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

- God reminds Israel that He is their creator and their rescuer and the helper of his people.
- This is a **public event**, not a private revelation. God talks directly to everyone, not just to Moses.
- I am your God – The Commandments are based on an existing relationship with God.
- The COMMANDMENTS are **more than just a list of do’s and don’ts** for Israel. It’s their constitution. It’s the foundation of their everything.

Verses 3-11

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image 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 parents 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.

“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless

who misuses his name. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.

Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

- In **EXODUS 20:3-11** God tells Israel what their relationship with God should look like.
- God deserves th:
 - ⇒ God deserves their undivided loyalty: God is not denying the existence of other spiritual beings like angels or demons. God reminds them that He **won't share their loyalty** with anyone or anything else.
 - ⇒ God deserves their undivided devotion: God is not a side hustle. He deserves to be first in their lives. **More important than money and sport and work and even their children.**
 - ⇒ God deserves their undivided respect: God's name reveals His identity. If they don't respect His Name, they won't respect and honour who He is.

⇒ God deserves their undivided rhythm: God challenges Israel that they **should follow**

His creation rhythm. Take time to rest. Take time to focus on God. It's a way to

honour God's work in creation. It's a way to celebrate God's work in saving us. Easy when you have a one-day-a-week-job.

- **EXODUS 20:3-11** challenges us that loving God means **putting Him above everything else** in our lives.

Verses 12-17

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. "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. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

- In **EXODUS 20:12-17** God tells Israel what their relationship with all people should look like.
- The purpose of these **COMMANDMENTS** is to create a stable and safe society for everyone. Men and women and children. Citizens and immigrants and illegal immigrants. Bosses and slaves. Believers and unbelievers.
- The rules and boundaries of **EXODUS 20:12-17** celebrate God's design of **life and marriage and sex and future generations** and **respecting people's property**.

- God also highlights the importance of honesty and **being satisfied with what you have**.

Verses 18-21

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.” Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.” The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

- God shows up with **thunder, lightning, and smoke**. The writer of EXODUS is screaming: God is holy and powerful.
- God’s **presence is so holy** that sin can’t exist around Him, and the people of Israel understood this. Hearing God’s voice directly TERRIFIED them. They knew they couldn’t handle it.
- This TYPE OF FEAR has a **purpose**—it motivates people to stay away from sin.
- As a side thought: I wonder if, after Jesus’s death and resurrection, we have lost some of that fear and deep respect for God?

When God spoke to His people for the first time in over 400 years, He gave them the rules and boundaries for their relationship. Describing what kind of relationship He wanted with them.

GOD GIVES His people rules and boundaries to show them how to live.

He was giving the Jewish people a new identity. **God was rewriting their story**. And the COMMANDMENTS provided the safe and stable foundation for that.

What does this moment at Sinai mean to us today? After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

We need to understand that the Ten COMMANDMENTS are much more than just a set of rules. The COMMANDMENTS challenges us to **rediscover the heart and the purpose and the beauty** of the rules and boundaries for God's design for life.

AFFIRMATION of an existing reality.

- Someone once said: Rules without relationship lead to rebellion.
- **I am the Lord YOUR God** –God reminds Israel that he already had a relationship with them. Even if they didn't really understand it.
- The relationship is not something they had to earn. They did **NOT have to perfectly obey** all rules and boundaries before God committed Himself to them.
- **I have already chosen you. You are My people!**

Rules and boundaries are not a condition for a relationship; rules and boundaries are a confirmation of a relationship.

- Because of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, we have a relationship with God.
- Rules and boundaries are a **confirmation of that relationship**.
- Rules and boundaries invites us to have a closer and deeper relationship with Him.

IDENTIFY – we are to be set apart for God.

- To be set apart means embracing an identity and lifestyle that is marked by **devotion to God**.
- **The way we speak to others. The way we treat other people. Our lives** need to be different than that of the world.
- We are called to reflect God's character in every aspect of this life.
- To be set apart is **not about isolating ourselves**. To be set apart does not mean we are better than others.
- To be set apart means we are FAITHFULLY CARRYING OUT GOD'S WILL in this world.
- Rules and boundaries **shape our identity**. It shapes the identity of a community.

PROTECT: it's God's way to keep us safe.

- God's rules and boundaries protect His family.

- Gameplan to keep us from HARM and INJUSTICES and SUFFERING. Getting stuck in the hurts and the hang-ups and the abuse and the pain.
- Rules and boundaries were created to **guard our hearts** and **empower healthy relationships**.
- Rules and boundaries creates a path for a **just and thriving community**.
- TRUE COMMUNITY can only exist when **rooted in reverence for God** and respect for each other.

ATTRACT: Inviting people into God's family.

- Make God's justice and compassion and integrity visible.
- Do life in such a way that it **attracts the lost and the broken** – that they want to have what we have.
- Commandments was God's gameplan to invite other nations into his family.

EXODUS 20 teaches us that having rules and boundaries isn't just helpful—**it's necessary!**

When Jesus walked this earth 2000 years ago, He showed us that **God wants even more from us** than just obeying the COMMANDMENTS.

Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures—either God's Law or the Prophets. I'm not here to demolish but to complete. I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama. God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky and the

ground at your feet. Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's Law will be alive and working.

Matthew 5:17-18 The MESSAGE

Jesus **changed our understanding** of God's rules and boundaries.

Before Jesus, people were saved by following the rules and boundaries. It was like a map showing how to get to salvation.

After Jesus, **we are not saved by keeping to the rules and boundaries**. When we live by God's rules and boundaries, it is the proof that we are already saved.

In other words:

We obey because we are saved, not that we can be saved.

Philip Yancey says:

If we comprehend what Christ has done for us, then surely out of gratitude we will strive to live 'worthy' of such great love. We will strive for holiness not to make God love us, but because He already does.

Three types of rules and boundaries to live a MEANINGFUL LIFE:

Flexible rules and boundaries.

- Boundaries can change over time as your **life and circumstances change**.
- For example: When you need to be home at night.

- A Biblical example: People were told in the OT not to eat pork. What happens if you don't cook pork the right way?

Strategic rules and boundaries.

- Rules and boundaries that protect us from getting hurt or making stupid mistakes.
- Usually, we create boundaries to separate right from wrong. What is a sin and what isn't.
- When we cross these boundaries, we get hurt or end up sinning.
- Strategic boundaries challenge us to draw boundaries before we get to the danger zone. When you cross a strategic boundary, you don't fall into trouble right away.
- These boundaries help us recognize our weaknesses and **protect us from them**.
- For example: I might want to give away everything I own, which isn't always the wisest thing – story of Hizek Riffel. Squatter for almost two years.
- A Biblical example: The Bible says not to marry someone who doesn't share your faith. This is a boundary to help protect you.

Core rules and boundaries.

- Core rules or boundaries **define what life is really about**.
- For example, the essence of soccer is that players can't use their hands—if you let them, it turns into a different game, it's not soccer anymore.
- If we change these rules and boundaries we change the game.
- In the Bible, Jesus explained these core rules and boundaries in Matthew 22:34-40.

⇒ Love God (this covers the first four of the Ten Commandments)

⇒ Love other people (this covers commandments five to ten)

It is when we start changing and challenging and ignoring these core rules and boundaries for life, when the problems start. When we do this, we aren't just changing or challenging or ignoring the rules and boundaries — we are changing and challenging and ignoring our relationship with God. It questions why we exist and who is really in charge of our lives:

is it God, or is it me?

Exodus 20 shows us that God's rules and boundaries aren't meant to ruin our fun or make life harder. Instead, they are meant to help us and are a blessing.