

March 7, 2021

Texts: Exodus 20:1-17; John 2: 13-22

Title: "A Guide to a Rich and Joyous Life"

A book entitled *Stupid History* by Leland Gregory, tells of a big mistake that once was made in the publishing of the Ten Commandments. In 1631, King Charles I ordered 1,000 Bibles from an English printer named Robert Barker. Printing was not an exact science in those days, and sometimes mistakes were made and usually overlooked--but not in this case. Robert Barker inadvertently left out a single word in the Seventh Commandment in Exodus 20:14--the word "not." Readers were shocked to find out that God had commanded Moses "Thou shalt commit adultery" as opposed to "Thou shalt **not** commit adultery." King Charles wasn't amused by this mistake and ordered all the Bibles destroyed and fined him 300 pounds sterling (a lifetime's wages in those days), and revoked his printing license--Barker was out of business.

Not all the Bibles were destroyed; there are eleven known to still exist. Because of the infamous mistake, this printing of the King James Version was referred to as "The Wicked Bible." There are no doubt some people today who would like to rewrite the Ten Commandments. I want to make a few observations about them as I see it as appropriate for us to reflect on them during the season of Lent.

First of all, the Ten Commandments were given to us by God for our own wellbeing. I read a story about a certain church where the members would go to the pastor from time to time for advice and counseling. When the Pastor was asked how

he counseled people, he said, “I just ask them questions until I figure out which commandment they’re breaking, and then I tell them to stop it.” Maybe he’s on to something there. Of course, many of the issues in our lives are not so simple or easily solved but there’s no question that you can’t willingly violate the spirit of the commandments and have a satisfying life. The Ten Commandments were given to us for our own wellbeing.

It’s helpful to note that they’re divided into three parts. **The first three deal with our relationship with God.** “You shall have no other gods before me...You shall not make idols... or misuse the name of the LORD your God . . .”

The commandments begin with God. H. G. Wells once said “If there isn’t a God nothing matters,” he declared. “But if there is a God nothing else matters.” And that’s true. One reason we treasure the Ten Commandments is that we believe they come from God. And so we begin by pledging our allegiance to God above everything else in life. We’re not going to put money or status, or power or comfort ahead of our devotion to God, are we? We’ll not make any image and fall down before that image, even if it be the flag of our country. God is first in all things. We’ll reverence God’s name in all things. And in all we want to bring honor to God’s name. The first three commandments deal with our relationship with God.

The fourth deals with our relationship with ourself. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...” Jesus said when he was criticized by the Pharisees for allowing his disciples to pick some heads of grain while they were going through a

grain field on the Sabbath that, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

This was an amazing and liberating teaching from Jesus; that the Sabbath was made for people, not for God. The Pharisees had all kinds of rules about keeping the Sabbath. Many of them brought more hardship to people than good. Remember how they even criticized Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath? It was stunning for Jesus to say that the Sabbath was meant for people, rather than for God.

But, you might ask, what does that say about worship on the Sabbath? God does mean for us worship on the Sabbath, but worship isn't for God. God doesn't need to be worshipped. We need to worship our God. At least once a week we need to affirm what is critical in our lives and is our relationship with God. Everybody needs a Sabbath...a time for rest and reflection. When the Bible was written, it was common for people to be forced to work seven days a week but that's not right! Working all the time is counter-productive.

The final six commandments deal with our relationships with others. “Honor your father and your mother...“You shall not murder...“You shall not commit adultery . . . “You shall not steal . . . “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor . . . “You shall not covet your neighbor's spouse or anything that belongs to someone else.”

We need to take these rules for living seriously not just because they're for our own good but also because they're part of our witness to the world that we are

followers of Jesus and that it really impacts our lives for the good. They're only gonna take positive notice of us to the extent that we are genuine in our faith practice and devotion to God and to how we express God's love. Our families and neighbors are only going to take positive notice of us and believe in the power and truth of our faith if we are the real thing.

On this third Sunday in Lent, I'm going to give us an assignment. Read through the Ten Commandments. Think about how they impact our lives and how we live them. Interpret them widely and then ask ourselves, how are we doing with them? A great way to find meaning in the practice of this season. Amen.