

# Then God spoke, Pt. 1

Pastor Chris Baker //03.12.23 // Centralia FBC

## Introduction

Good morning, church! Kindergarten through third graders you're dismissed for children's church at this time. You can head out through the doors in the back on my right. Parents, they'll be returned to you right here at the end of the service today. While they're heading out, turn with me to Exodus chapter 20. If you don't have a Bible with you, today's passage can be found on page 64 of the black Bible in the pew in front of you.

We've arrived at one of the most famous passages in all of Scripture. All of Israel's experience so far in the book of Exodus has been preparing them for this moment. God is going to speak to His people—not through Moses, not through signs and wonders, but He's going to speak His Word to His people. This is a vitally important passage in the canon of Scripture. We call God's Words here the 10 Commandments.

American Christians have memorized them, we've hung them on our walls, and we've fought all the way to the Supreme Court for the right to display them in public buildings.

But, I'm afraid we don't really *know* them in the sense that knowing them matters. A Pew Research poll a few years ago asked Americans several questions about religion. While 72% of those surveyed identified Moses as the one who led Israel out of Egypt (that's not too bad), a question about the 10 Commandments was much less promising.

They asked a multiple choice question—which one of these statements is *not* in the 10 Commandments.

- Do not commit adultery
- Do not steal
- Keep the Sabbath holy
- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you

Barely half identified that last one, do unto others, as the Golden Rule which is found in Matthew 7 as not one of the 10 Commandments. Better than 1-in-4 in fact thought 'keep the Sabbath holy' *wasn't* one of the 10 Commandments.

(<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2010/09/28/us-religious-knowledge-an-overview-of-the-pew-forum-survey-results-and-implications/#2>)

If barely half of us can intellectually know them, then we're in big trouble when it comes to knowing them in the way God intended. We're not talking about memorizing facts. We're talking about truths that shape

your life. We're talking thoughts, words, and deeds. God is after captivating Israel's thoughts, words, and deeds.

I struggled a lot with how to preach these verses. We're going through the book of Exodus over the course of about 6 years or so here at FBC—at least, that's the plan if the Lord wills. We camp here from January through Easter every year and we did that because when I broke out Exodus into preachable passages it was just over 80 sermons. I didn't feel three years ago that it was wise for us to spend a year-and-a-half of consecutive Sundays in Exodus, so we're trying it this way.

We could definitely spend a week on each of these 10 Commandments. Each deserves its own sermon in some respect, and maybe sometime down the road we'll come back and do that. But what we're trying to do here is get a big picture sense of what God is doing in the life of Israel and what He wants to do in our lives. So we'll touch every commandment, but we won't get as granular as we could and I pray God uses this to grow your affections for him. We'll take two weeks on the 10 Commandments, today on the first 11 verses and next Sunday on verses 12-17. This is really one sermon, but we're going to put a pin in it right in the middle and come back next week.

So let's read verses 1-11 to get started.

### **Read Exodus 20:1-11**

#### **Pray**

On September 14, 1822 the man who is now perhaps the most famous philologist of all-time collapsed. Philology is the study of languages and the hero of our illustration was named Jean-François Champollion. He had spent countless hours studying a centuries-old Egyptian rock unearthed over 20 years earlier. The rock was a fragment of a larger monument that had inscriptions of the same text in three different languages: Greek, Demotic, and Egyptian hieroglyph. No one understood Egyptian hieroglyphs at the time and it was thought the stone would be the missing piece to unlocking this ancient language.

It came to be known as the Rosetta Stone, named after the town where it was discovered. Initially, they thought it would take a couple of weeks to interpret it. It took 22 years. Champollion invested so much of himself in his interpretive work that when he finally solved the puzzle, he burst into his brother's office, declared in French "I've got it!" And then promptly collapsed. He didn't recover for five days, but once he did, he was able to share his work with other scholars and the Rosetta Stone became the lens through which ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs have been interpreted ever since.

(<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/rosetta-stone-hieroglyphs-champollion-decipherment-egypt-180980834/>)

Just like the Rosetta Stone gave us the interpretive lens for hieroglyphics, Jesus gives us the interpretive lens for the 10 Commandments. In Matthew 22 the Jewish leaders ask Jesus a series of questions in trying to trip Him up. They thought they were smarter than Him and they had built their own system of rules on

top of the Law God gave in the Old Testament. So they asked Jesus, which command is the greatest? Here's His answer:

**37 He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and most important command. 39 The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."**

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Then He boldly says EVERYTHING, all the Law and Prophets—the whole Hebrew Bible—depends on this. This is the foundation for everything.

Love God, and love people. When we use Jesus's words here as our interpretive lens for the 10 Commandments, we'll see that the first four commands teach us to love God with our thoughts, words, and actions and the last six teach us to love people with our actions, words, and thoughts. I know that's a peculiar order, but I list them that way on purpose and I'll show you why as we go.

***The first four commandments demand that we love God with our thoughts, words, and actions.***

One quick point before we hit the first commandment, though. Look at the very beginning of verse 1 again: *I am the Lord your God*. That is God listing out His qualifications for making this demand of His people.

These are not the 10 suggestions, 10 invitations, or 10 requests. These are 10 imperative statements and the Lord is absolutely qualified to make these demands of His people. This is our Redeemer speaking. He's not dictating to Moses who relays the message, no. This is God speaking directly to His people. He bled and died so that we may have life, so let's see what demands He makes of His people. First, verse 3:

**Do not have other gods besides me**

I like what the CSB translators did here. Some translations say no other gods before me. God doesn't just want to be first in line—He wants the truth to be recognized. He is the only true God and He demands to be *your* only God.

God is to be first in our thoughts. Israel was about to live for generations among a people who worshipped multiple little 'g' gods. And they struggled—they committed idolatry and adultery with those little 'g' gods throughout their history.

Our culture worships its own Olympus of little 'g' gods, they just don't call them that. And it's very easy for those gods to divide our loyalty in the same way that the worship of Baal will come to divide Israel's loyalty in a few generations.

Comfort, money, status, relationships, video games, all those things can become a little 'g' god for us if we let them.

Here's a simple test: What do you love the most? What do you desire the most? What do you strive for the most? What do you aim for the most? What takes up the biggest chunk of your time? What do you think about the most?

The answer to those questions will tell you who your god is. Church, whatever we love and serve and desire and strive for and think of the most is our god.

It's easy to equate failure to keep this commandment with pagans worshipping the sun god, but it's just as much danger for modern American Christians on padded pews in climate controlled sanctuaries to give themselves over to worship of something else.

These first commandments are all about worship. The first one is about whom we worship. The second one is about how we worship. Verse 4:

### **Do not make an idol for yourself**

*Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. 5 Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, 6 but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.*

We move from the 'who' to the 'how' of worship.

The specific command is that God is not to be imaged. He is not to be visually represented.

God goes further in Deuteronomy 4:15

***“Diligently watch yourselves—because you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you out of the fire at Horeb— 16 so you don't act corruptly and make an idol for yourselves in the shape of any figure: a male or female form***

He goes on to say not to make an idol from any creature that crawls on the ground or flies or a fish or anything in the heavens. The point is don't reduce God to something created—because He is not a created being.

God reveals Himself to His people precisely how He wanted to. God is self-revealing and His revelation came to us in word, not in picture. Not in statue. Not in our experiences or imaginations or opinions.

God's Word is to be our source of who God is, not some picture. And let's be honest, church. Most of our ideas are pretty terrible. The Bible teaches that we are created in God's image, but anytime we draw a picture of Jesus we're making God in our image, aren't we?

Monika used to work in a Christian bookstore and they had one section of what they called 'Christian art.' There was one painting that I don't think ever sold that was supposed to be a smiling Jesus carrying a

lamb on his shoulders. I love the idea—but the Jesus looked just like Tom Cruise. I have no idea what Jesus looked like, but I can tell you He didn't look like Tom Cruise.

Isaiah 53:3

***He didn't have an impressive form  
or majesty that we should look at him,  
no appearance that we should desire him.***

I've seen Top Gun. Tom Cruise, according to some, has an impressive form. When we try to re-make God in our image, we fail.

When we make images of God, we're recreating Him in our image. We tend to serve the God we want, not the God who is.

This affects us in everyday life, but it especially affects us in our gathered worship. Of course, we don't use images of God in worship. And on top of that we try to limit what we do in worship to what we see prescribed in Scripture. There's a reason we don't do skits or drama or anything like that in worship here.

In Scripture, we see God prescribing that His people sing His Word, read His Word, preach His Word, and pray His Word. We try to do that here. That's more than enough for our gathered worship. Some churches do other things and I wouldn't necessarily say they're in sin, you just have to be very careful. God gave us plenty of ways to worship Him directly in Scripture without us coming up with anything extra on our own.

And notice that He goes on to say that worshipping Him correctly is a way we express our love for Him. There are consequences for worshipping wrongly, consequences so severe they're carried out for generations. But there's an even stronger blessing for carrying out this command. Worship God the way the Bible teaches and His faithful love will not fail you.

That kind of worship is not limited to the time we spend here together. It's everything you do. John Piper said the root issue when it comes to worship is more than right thinking, it is right valuing.

(<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/all-of-life-as-worship>)

We're to rightly value God with all our life. That means our worship grows from our thoughts outward to our words. Look at verse 7:

**Do not misuse the name**

*7 Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God, because the Lord will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name.*

I'll be the first to admit that I didn't have a great sense of this verse until I was an adult. I learned this like many of you originally in the King James Version which read this way: *7 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.*

I'm not sure if it was taught to me this way or that I just picked up on it as a teenager, but that meant basically we don't use God's name as a swear word. We don't say 'oh my God' when we're frustrated. That's good, but I don't think it encompasses all God meant here.

What we say reveals who we are. The word translated use, or misuse in the CSB, literally means to pick up. To carry. God is telling Israel that because He saved them, because they are His, they bear His name. They're carrying His name. So carry it rightly—particularly by the words that come out of our mouths.

We carry the name of God, we have special access to God, so the words we say tell a story about the God we belong to. If we call ourselves by His name, but don't live out the reality of that truth then we take His name in vain. If we live out the reality of what it means, if we speak as though we belong to God, then Scripture shows us what happens. Look at Acts 11:

*19 Now those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord's hand was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. 22 News about them reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to travel as far as Antioch. 23 When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged all of them to remain true to the Lord with devoted hearts, 24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And large numbers of people were added to the Lord.*

*25 Then he went to Tarsus to search for Saul, 26 and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught large numbers. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch.*

In Acts 11, things are bad. The church is being heavily persecuted. They were run out of their homes, it's likely many of them were killed. They're dispersed all over the known world, but everywhere they go, what do they do? They carry the God's name with them by speaking His Words. In Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch they spoke it to Israelites. Others went to Antioch and spoke it to everyone. They proclaimed the good news about the Lord Jesus. They carried God's name so well that they earned His name, do you see that in verse 26? They were called Christians--that word in the original language means little Christ. It was basically an insult. They carried God's name so well that they ended up wearing it. That's using it rightly.

How, then, do we use it in vain? The word in the original language means emptiness or worthless. Do not take up the name of the Lord in a worthless manner.

Claiming to be His and not following Him, not trusting Him, not loving Him, not having faith in Him. Not speaking His Word to the lost and dying world around us. That's taking His name in vain.

We take His name in vain when we do not speak in a way that glorifies Him. God is concerned that we love Him with our thoughts and with our words. Finally, we're to love Him with our deeds. Verse 8:

### **Remember the Sabbath**

*8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: 9 You are to labor six days and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates. 11 For the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.*

To remember here is not just to remember in thought. It's embracing the realization that God rested on that day—not for His own benefit—but for the benefit of His creation.

God created that Sabbath Day even before sin entered the world. God established a pattern of rest and memorial for His people.

Now, we need to pause and ask, is there still an application for this, for us, as believers? Do Christians still remember a day? Do Christians have a day in which the cycle of their lives is governed for their worship of the living God? Jesus never directly affirms the Sabbath in the same way that He affirms the other commandments. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's null and void for Christian.

The Sabbath day is Saturday, the sixth day of the week. The day on which God rested. Israel had specific rules that governed the Sabbath. We don't live by those laws anymore.

We do, though, have a day that is set aside. We do have a day that is communally focused on worship.

In Revelation 1 we read that John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. He meant Sunday, but since Revelation is one of the latest New Testament books written there was already enough awareness among God's people that Sunday was the Lord's Day that he didn't have to specify. They knew what he meant.

God set a rhythm for His people in the creation account. He worked for six days in creating the world and He rested on the seventh.

We memorialize this rhythm not by locking ourselves in our homes on Saturday, like the Israelites of Jesus's day were essentially doing. No, we do what the early church did. We gather on the first day of the week to celebrate. Jesus is raised on the first day. The early church quickly developed a pattern of gathering for worship on the first day of the week. We see it in Acts 20, Paul talk about it in 1 Corinthians 16 and elsewhere.

The major point is that our love of God establishes first and foremost the pattern of our actions. That's why our membership covenant states that we will give this church priority over all human organizations.

God established the pattern of devoting a day to Him and the New Testament reveals the imperative to do that with His people in the context of a local church. We base all our other actions around that truth.

Church, the 10 Commandments memorialize truth that God wants us to love Him and to love the people around us at the level of our thoughts, words, and deeds.

It's understandable for us to look at the Old Testament Law, which the 10 Commandments really launch, and be a little confused. It's a bit like that old Rosetta Stone. It's a relic from another time, written for another people in another language. But Jesus gave us the key. He gave us the lens through which we now interpret God's Law. And when we see the Law rightly, it's not a burden. It's a joy because it teaches us to worship God rightly. Church, let's embrace worshipping God in the way He has called us to, amen?

Let's pray.