“Saved”

Exodus 20, Romans 7:7-25

October 16, 2016, David M. Griebner, Riverside UMC

This fall we are looking at six scriptures, three from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament. Together these six passages capture the core story of the Bible. Furthermore they also point to how we should experience this story, or what kind of feeling or awareness it should evoke in us. What is this truth? What is this story? And what should it evoke in us? I’ve said it each week. *We need a Savior. We need to be rescued.* Why do we need a Savior? Why do we need to be rescued? Because we cannot save ourselves, we cannot rescue ourselves. Today we are going to see how the Bible presents us with this truth in one of the best-known passages in the entire Bible, the Ten Commandments.

Now I want to look at these familiar words under two headings. First what is the initial purpose of the Ten Commandments? Why did God give these commandments to Israel in the first place? That’s number one. Second, what is the deeper purpose of the Ten Commandments? Why are they still so critical to our lives today?

**The initial purpose of the Ten Commandments –** Why did God give His people the Ten Commandments in the first place? There is a clue to the answer in the timing. Think about it. When did God give Moses, and His people, the Ten Commandments? God gave them the Ten Commandments just a few weeks after they escaped from Egypt. For 400 years they had been living as foreigners in Egypt. For much of that time they had been slaves. Furthermore we have little to no information about they practiced their faith during this time. There were no priests, except the priests of Egypt, no temples except to the gods of Egypt. What did they know of Yahweh? What did they remember of the God who promised Abraham that he would make him into a great nation through whom God would save the whole world? What did they know of that? I suspect not very much. So what does God need to do? He needs to show them how to live with Him and with each other so they can be the blessing He envisioned.

So what is the initial purpose of the Ten Commandments? I’d put it this way. God’s purpose in the Ten Commandments is to create a nation set apart, to establish a people who can be a light to the nations. God will show His people how to live together in such a way that they will show all humanity who God is and how to be in a right relationship with Him. And how to find their way home.

Let me try to give you a small taste of what this might have looked like. This is a story about how one of the commandments made a difference in my life and, I think, in at least a small way, helped me to be the person God wanted me to be. You may not know this but pastors are allowed to opt out of Social Security. The decision has to be made right away, as soon as you start, but you can opt out. So I’m a young pastor. And I’m not making a lot of money. Furthermore I have to pay the whole tax, all 15% because the IRS has classified me as self-employed. And finally almost everyone I talked to wished they could have had the same choice. What do you think I did? I sent in the form to opt out. But there was a problem. I can’t remember what it was exactly, but the IRS found something that wasn’t right and told me if I re-filed the proper form they’d still let me opt out. However, in the meantime I had experienced a change of heart. Why? All four of my grandparents were still alive at the time and they were all receiving Social Security. And you know how the system works? The money you pay in now goes to those who are drawing out now. So in a very small way, the money I was paying into the system supported my grandparents who were drawing money out of the system. And then I remembered that commandment about honoring your mother and father and taking care of those who were older. It wasn’t an exact match, but I felt it.

And there was something else. Pastors were allowed to opt out of Social Security only if you had a moral or ethical problem with the principle Social Security. You couldn’t do it just because you thought it was a bad deal economically. And I didn’t that way, that wasn’t why I was doing it. So in addition to the commandment about honoring your father and mother I would have been breaking the commandment about bearing false witness, or lying. I never sent in the corrected form.

And you know it’s been a long time, and I was a lot younger, but somehow I think I knew that my integrity as a believer, and my witness as a pastor were somehow on the line in my decision, at least a little bit. If I was going to be the light I needed to be for the Lord, if I was going to live for Him and not just for myself, I felt I needed to make the choice I made – ***and many other choices just like it***. So I stayed in. Of course, now that I’m getting up there in years I’m kind of looking forward to that monthly check!

So that’s maybe a little picture of why God gave the commandments to Israel. He wanted them to be different, not self-serving, but self-less. Not worried about how they could get ahead, but about how they could share a Holy God with the world. So how did it turn out for Israel? I think you know. Not so well. Israel struggled to be the light and the blessing they were called to be. The Old Testament, and especially the Psalms, is full of evidence that they loved the law and wanted to keep it, but couldn’t. So let’s ask the second question.

**What is the deeper purpose of the Ten Commandments?** If Israel failed to keep the commandments and be the light they were called to be, then should we say the commandments were a failure? Of course not. So what else might have been going on? To answer this I want you to come with me to the New Testament and to the seventh chapter of Romans. Romans is Paul’s magnum opus. It is the letter where He essentially puts it all together. For the first seven chapters of Romans Paul focuses on our need, of our sin, and our brokenness, and in Romans 7 this story reaches a very personal climax. It’s like everything Paul has been trying to say explodes in a single sentence of utter futility, one I think all of us can identify with. “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do…I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.” (Romans 15, 17-18, NIV) Here are the same verses in the New Living Translation. “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate…I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.”

Can you identify with this, with Paul’s frustration and his sense of disappointment in himself? Do you know what made Paul feel this way? Do you know what did him in? It was the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet…”

What is coveting? Coveting is to desire to want something so bad that you will do almost anything to get it or to keep it. Paul doesn’t’ name anything specific and there might be a good reason why. In his commentary on the Ten Commandments, Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman points out that the tenth commandment is significantly different than the first nine. He writes, “In it’s prohibition of coveting, this law internalizes all the other commandments.” So Paul what Paul may be trying to say here is not just that he couldn’t keep the tenth commandment, but he couldn’t keep any of them the way he was supposed to keep them. He could not do it. He could not save himself. He needed someone to rescue him.

So what happened? This truth, this deep self-awareness, drove him to Jesus. Here’s what he says next in Romans 7. “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” I needed a Savior and I found one in Jesus! I needed to be rescued and He rescued me! I wanted to keep the commandments, but when I saw what they really asked of me, I knew there was no way I could do it. I needed to be saved. I needed to be rescued. And Jesus did it.

***Has this happened to you?*** Have you come to this same truth in your own life? Maybe this will help. Do you remember what Jesus said about the commandment against murder? He said anger, or rage, was often just the same and just as bad. (Matthew 5:21-22) Do you remember what Jesus said about adultery, the seventh commandment? He said anyone who looks as a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28) How many times have we all crossed these lines *and others we are not even aware of?*

Have you discovered this? Have you admitted this to yourself? Have you let it lead you to Jesus? Will you let it lead you to Jesus who alone has the power to rescue, to save?

What is the deeper, or maybe I should say the enduring purpose of the Ten Commandments? To bring us to Jesus, to leave no room for doubt that I cannot save myself, I cannot rescue myself. Honestly, it may sound harsh, but if you can’t see this I don’t know how the Bible makes any sense. But if you can see this there is amazing beauty and assurance and peace that is waiting for you. Here’s what Paul writes next in Romans. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1-3)

The words of our closing song tell it all.

*Come thou fount of every blessing*

*Tune my heart to sing thy grace*

*Streams of mercy never ceasing*

*Call for songs of loudest praise*

*Teach me some melodious sonnet*

*Sung by flaming tongues above*

*I'll praise the mount I'm fixed upon it*

*Mount of thy redeeming love*

*Here I raise my Ebenezer*

*Hither by thy help I come*

*And I hope by thy good pleasure*

*Safely to arrive at home*

*Jesus sought me when a stranger*

*Wondering from the fold of God*

*He, to rescue me from danger*

*Interposed His precious blood*

*O to grace how great a debtor*

*daily I'm constrained to be!*

*Let thy goodness like a fetter,*

*bind my wandering heart to thee*

*Prone to wander Lord I feel it,*

*prone to leave the God I love*

*Here's my heart, O take and seal it,*

*seal it for thy courts above.*