

The Ten Commandments

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[0 : 00] Now, I imagine some of you are wondering what this is. A present, that's right, it's a present.

It's a lovely wrapped up present. Now, if you've got very good eyesight and are very attentive, you might have noticed the type of wrapper that I'm using, but that's not significant.

It's Christmas paper wrapper, but that's just because that's the only wrapper I could find in the house. But it's a present. And would you like to see what's in the present?

Would you? Okay. I thought you might. Let's see. Shall I open it like I normally open presents at home? Okay.

Right. There we go. That's, oops. There we go. Now, now it's a box. I wonder what's in the box. Let me just... That doesn't give any clues.

[1 : 07] Oh, take that off. Da-da-da-da. It's exciting. What? It's all right. What?

You're excited. Yes, I'm glad you are. I'm excited and I know what's in it. Oh. Look at that. It's just an envelope.

That's a bit disappointing. Oh. I wonder what's in the envelope. Some older children like envelopes instead of presents.

Yes. I wonder why that is. Do they like the cards? We won't go down that road. Hmm. No, there's no money. Just a bit of paper.

It's a bit disappointing as a present. Hmm. Oh. What's that all about? What does it say? Exodus 20, 1-21.

[2 : 11] What kind of present is that? I think we should explore further. I think the best thing we can do is read what it says in Exodus 20, verses 1-21, and then maybe we'll discover what this present is all about.

Okay. Exodus 20, from the beginning. Now, this is especially for the benefit of the older folk in the congregation because the Sunday school children know this chapter so well that they probably don't need me to read it again.

But for those who have maybe forgotten, we're going to read this chapter. Or, yes, part of the chapter, most of the chapter. Exodus 20, from the beginning.

So listen carefully to what we read in the Bible, in God's Word. And God spoke all these words. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

[3 : 19] 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 fathers 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 manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

But 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.

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.

[4 : 31] You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor. When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain and smoke, they trembled with fear.

They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, speak to us to 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 feet of God will be with you to keep you from sinning. The people remained at a distance while Moses approached the sick darkness where God was. God. The word of God. So what have I read? What is that chapter about? What's it about? What do we read there in that chapter? About, yeah? The Ten Commandments. That's right. And you're all experts on the Ten Commandments. Certainly the first part of them. And you'll soon be experts on all of them.

[5 : 34] So that is the chapter that tells us about the time when God gave us the Ten Commandments. And by having this wrapped box and in it the envelope with the passage, what really we're trying to tell you is that that is a present that God has given us.

The Ten Commandments are a present that God has given to us. They're not something that is meant to make our life difficult and miserable. No, they're something good that God has given us. They are a present. They're very special. They're very valuable. Listen to what King David, you know about King David who wrote many of the Psalms. Listen to what he says about God's laws, about His commandments.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold. They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. So they are a very special present. They're a very precious present that God has given to you, has given to us.

Now, this morning I want to think a little bit about this present that God has given us. And there's four questions that I'm going to ask and I'm going to answer.

[6 : 43] So you listen carefully to see if I've done each of the four questions. Just very quickly, each question. The first question is, who is this present from? The Ten Commandments, we're saying, are a wonderful present.

Well, who are they a present from? You're probably thinking, well, that's so easy. Well, we're going to ask that question and answer it. The second question is, who is the present for?

You know, every present, somebody gives it, but it's for somebody. Well, who is this present for? And the third question that we're going to ask is, what is the present like?

What can we say about the present? How can we describe the present? Just one or two little things we want to say. And then finally, what is the present for? What's it good for? What's it any use for? So the first question is, who is the present from? Now, I know you know the answer very well because you've said it already this morning up here at the front.

[7 : 42] In chapter 20, verse 1, it starts off with these words that you've already said yourself. And God spoke all these words.

God spoke all these words. So it is God who has given us this present of the Ten Commandments. He designed the Ten Commandments. He is the one who decided what these commandments should be.

These commandments actually tell us a lot about what God is like, what things he considers to be important. And so God is the one who gives us the Ten Commandments.

Now, it's important, very important when we're talking about commandments, to realize who it is that gives the commandments. And let me just explain that or illustrate that.

Imagine if over the winter when there was a lot of snow and you were out in the playground at playtime at school. Imagine if you saw this happening.

[8 : 41] Imagine if a wee boy from P1 went up to a group of boys who are, say, in P6, and these boys in P6 were throwing snowballs. They were having a great time having a snow fight.

Now, imagine if that wee boy from P1 went up to the big boys and said, now that's not a very clever thing you're doing. That's very dangerous. I order you to stop throwing snowballs.

What do you think would happen? Do you think all the big, yeah, what do you think would happen? Yeah, I think they'd probably carry on throwing snowballs and throw snowballs at the P1 boy, wouldn't they?

Now, imagine if the headmaster or the headteacher of the school came into the playground and said exactly the same words, just exactly the same words that the P1 boy said, and said the same words to the boys from P6.

What do you think would happen? What do you think? Yeah, what do you think, Sam? He'd probably tell them why it's not a good idea to throw snowballs.

[9 : 48] That's right. And I'm sure that they would stop. Now, why is that? Exactly the same words. Well, the reason is because the headmaster has the authority to tell the pupils what they shouldn't do.

And so he says the same thing, but because of the authority he has, people listen, and certainly they should listen. Well, it's the same with the commandments that God gives us. It's not just something that somebody a long time ago thought, oh, these are some good rules that should work well, should help people to live well together, and will tell people to obey these rules, maybe a king or somebody a long time ago, maybe Moses thought, oh, we need some rules for the people of Israel.

No, it is God who has given us these commandments. And because it is God, they carry great authority. And we, all of us, must listen and must obey them because of the one who has given us these commandments, because of the one who has given them as a special present for us.

So that's the first question. Who has given us the present? Or who is giving the present? It's God. But the second question was, who is the present for? And again, you know the answer to that because you've actually said it up here at the front this morning.

And I'll just read it again from that same chapter of Exodus and verse 2. God spoke all these words, I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

[11 : 27] Now, who is God speaking to? Well, he's speaking to the people of Israel, his people who had been slaves in Egypt. And he's speaking to them.

He's rescued them from the slavery. He's taken them out of Egypt. And he is speaking to his people. He's not speaking to the Egyptians. He's not speaking to other nations.

He's speaking to his own people, to the people of Israel. And so what that tells us is that the Ten Commandments are very especially a present for God's people.

Now, they are important for everybody. And everybody who hears these commandments should obey them. But they are very especially a present for his own people.

Also, just notice this. This is quite an interesting thing. Imagine if this had happened, or we might think this would have happened, when the people of Israel were in Egypt as slaves, and they wanted to be free, but they couldn't be free.

[12 : 30] And they're wondering what they could do. Imagine if God had come to them and said to them, I'll do a deal with you. I've got these commandments. Now, if you keep them all, keep them carefully, don't break any of these commandments, then I'll get you out of Egypt as a prize, as a reward.

If you're very careful to keep all these commandments, you don't break any of them, then I'll see how you're getting on, and then I'll come and say, right, I'm going to get you out of Egypt because you've been good. But that's not what happened.

God, because he loved his people, he saved them, he rescued them from slavery. And once he had rescued them, once they were free, he then gave them these commandments as another way of showing how much he loves them.

So he showed them he loved them by saving them, but he showed them he loved them by giving them these commandments that would help them. To live well with one another and with him.

So God is the one who gives this present, and he gives this present very especially to his people.

And his people, those who are Christians, who are trusting in Jesus, have a very special reason to obey the commandments.

[13 : 53] We should all obey the commandments. But God's people have a very special reason because, first of all, we do so out of gratitude to God for his love, for saving us, for rescuing us, for giving us the commandments.

We are aware and we realize that that shows how much he loves us. And so, as we're grateful for that, we keep his commandments. Not because we feel, well, I've got to do it, or I'll be in trouble, or I've got to do it, or else, you know, things will go badly.

No, we keep the commandments because it's a way of showing God how grateful we are. It's a way of showing God how much we love him. Jesus said, if you love me, keep my commandments. He says that's a way of showing that you love me. Don't just say it, don't just sing it. Show it by obeying me. So, we thought about who gives the present.

It's God. We thought about who the present is for, very especially for God's people. But also, what is the present like? What's the present like? You know, some presents are like, they last a day or a week or at most a month, and then they get broken, they're out of fashion, they're no use, they get thrown in a cupboard, and they're forgotten about.

[15:11] They don't last. Well, this present, God's commandments, the Ten Commandments, are a present that last. They've lasted for hundreds, for thousands of years, and they will continue to last.

The way they were given was intended to maybe demonstrate how they were meant to last forever. You know how they were given on tablets of stone.

Not just on a bit of paper that you could scrump up and throw away, but on tablets of stone. And that's a way of reminding us that these commandments were meant to last.

They're meant to last forever. They're still commandments that today are good and necessary for us to keep. Some people think that the Ten Commandments are out of date.

Some people say, oh, that's very old-fashioned. Ten Commandments, oh, we don't need to worry about that nonsense. A few years ago, some very nasty and horrible things happened in this country.

[16:15] I'm not even going to say what they were because they're not nice at all. And because of that, lots of people were worried. They're saying, what's going on? Why are these horrible things happening? Why are people doing horrible things to other people?

And one of the MPs, the members of parliament, one of the people who is responsible for leading us as a country, he was also worried.

And he said something like this. He said, you know, I think as a country we really need to get to grips with some basic rules to help us live. Something like the Ten Commandments.

That's what he said. What we need is something like the Ten Commandments. And we might say, well, that sounds good. He's thinking that the Bible's important. But no, he's saying something like the Ten Commandments.

Not exactly the same. No, they're far too strict. They're far too old-fashioned. But something like them would be quite good. Something that we can make up, that we think is good, that we think suits us.

[17:15] But they were all engraved in stone. They're all for us. We can't pick and choose. Not like a menu in a restaurant. Say, oh, I'll have this, but I won't have that. Don't fancy that. Maybe at the church lunch.

Do you want chicken or do you want beef? Not too sure on beef. I'll have chicken. Or the puddings. All these puddings. I wonder which one I'll have. It's not like that. They were all given by God.

And they're all there for us to keep for our good. So this present lasts forever. It's also complete. We're not going to say much about that.

But you, this morning, reminded us of those commandments that tell us especially about how we should relate to God. How we can treat God in a way that is right and proper.

And then the following commandments tell us about how we can relate and treat each other in a way that helps us to live good lives. Lives that are happy lives.

[18:12] Lives where there's peace and harmony and we're not fighting with each other. So they're very complete. They tell us the two most important things we need to know. How we should relate to God and how we should relate to one another.

And of course in the Bible we have more teaching on those things. But the commandments tell us about these two very important things. So this present, it's forever and it is complete.

It gives us what we need to know. It's certainly a very important part of what we need to know. One final question that I'm going to ask. And that is what is this present for?

This present of the Ten Commandments that God gives us. What's it for? Well we've already said something about that. We said that it teaches us how to live as God wants us to live. But I also want to give you one other interesting reason as to why God has given us this present.

And what I'm going to say is in the Bible in Deuteronomy in another book of the Bible where we also find the Ten Commandments. And there we read as follows.

[19 : 21] God has given the commandments and then He's explaining why He has given the commandments. And He says this, Be careful to obey the commandments so that it may go well with you.

So He's saying be careful to obey the commandments. But why? Why? Because I want you to? Because I'm in charge and you've got to obey me? Those things are true. But no, so that it may go well with you.

They're not meant to be horrible rules that stop us living the way we want to live. They're not meant to be rules that restrict us from living happy lives.

No. They've been given to us so that it may go well with us. And so if we're intelligent, if we're sensible, if we're wise, we'll say, then I will be careful to obey these commandments because I want it to go well with me and my family and those whom I love.

So those people who say that these rules, God's rules, are just there to make our life miserable, they're very, very wrong. So this is a wonderful present.

[20 : 31] The Ten Commandments that God gave through Moses so long ago and that we still have today. A wonderful present. But as I finish, there is maybe something we should just clean up.

What happens when we don't keep the commandments? We can say, oh yes, they're wonderful commandments and that's really good and it's important to keep the commandments. But there's a problem. We don't keep them.

We often disobey them. We break the commandments. What happens then? Is that a big problem? Well, it is a big problem because breaking the commandments is what God calls sin.

Disobeying God is sin and sin is a big problem. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin, the punishment of sin, is death. So it is a very big problem. So what now?

We break the commandments. What can we do to escape the punishment that we deserve? Well, there's nothing we can do but there is something that God has done.

[21 : 34] God has given us another present, an even better present. He has given us the present of his son, Jesus. And so you know the verse in the Bible that says that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish, should not get what he deserves, but have, receive, enjoy eternal life.

And that's a wonderful present that God gives us. Jesus, God's son, kept all the commandments. He kept them perfectly. And when he died, he didn't die for his own sin for he had none.

He died for our sin. He died for the sins of his people. He died in our place. And when we ask him to forgive us, when we ask God to forgive us, he is able to forgive us and is willing to forgive us because of what Jesus has done for us.

And that is the very, very best present of all, that God has sent Jesus to die for our sins. So I hope that's a present that you will receive and that you will be continuing to trust in Jesus or beginning to trust in Jesus as your Lord and as your Savior.

Well, let's pray.