



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



HG162 Moses: The Prince Of Egypt The Ten Commandments

Exodus 21:1-21

Home Group Study Notes

8 April 2018 - Rachel Orford



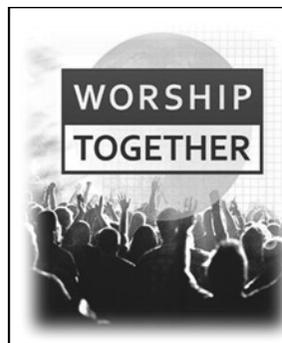
**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!**

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

If a film was to be made of your life, what would it be called?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...

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HG162 *Moses: The Prince Of Egypt* The Ten Commandments

Exodus 21:1-21

Home Group Sermon

8 April 2018 - Rachel Orford

Introduction We have arrived at the last in our home group series – although not at the end of the story of Moses. In fact, we have jumped back in time a bit since the last time we were with him, when he returned from Mt Sinai carrying the two stone tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments. But this is not actually the first occasion the Israelites receive the commandments. For this, we have to go back to three months since the Israelites left Egypt. They have been travelling through the Sinai Desert and have just set up camp near the foot of Mt Sinai. And Mt Sinai is to become hugely significant to them all because this is the place where Moses goes to talk to God. It's where God speaks to the Hebrew people through Moses – where he receives their Laws – their instructions – and the terms of His covenant with them. We learn just before this week's passage (in chapter Ex19), that almost immediately on arrival Moses disappears up the mountain to get his instructions from God and it becomes very clear that God actually wants to speak to His people. But of course, no one had ever seen God nor could they; even Adam and Eve never saw God, only heard His voice and Moses is told later by God that "no one may see my face and live." They would presumably be too awestruck. So, The Lord said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you."

God Speaks To His People And Moses prepares them for this by consecrating them and purifying them; they have to wash their clothes and get ready to hear what the Lord has to say. Moses even has to set a boundary round the bottom of the mountain to stop people going up it and they aren't even allowed to touch it – so sacred is the ground from which the Lord will speak. So, you can imagine the anticipation. Then comes thunder and lightning, smoke and fire, an earthquake and loud trumpets and "everyone in the camp trembled". After a final warning via Moses that they must not try to come up the mountain God spoke all these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery". And He goes on to deliver His commands to His people.

The Terms Of The Covenant God had spoken. He had spoken to them. And when God speaks to you, you know that what He has said must be really important. And as we learn later, God doesn't just tell them the commandments. He writes them down – on tablets of stone. They are clearly not to be trusted to memory. But He doesn't just trust Moses with a bit of dictation either. He writes them Himself. In Ex 32:16 we read that "the tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets." And in fact, He has to do this twice, because as we learned last time Moses smashes the tablets in anger after he finds the people worshipping the golden calf, but God is not going to let it go. He summons Moses to come back and see Him and He writes them again, in His own hand, on tablets of stone. Ex 34:28 – "And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant – the Ten Commandments." These are the words of the covenant or in some translations – the Terms of the Covenant.

4. What idols do you have that might make it hard for you to keep to the second commandment?

5. Keeping the Sabbath was considered the least important commandment today. Why do you think this might be? Share some ideas about how you might observe a Sabbath.

6. In what ways do you think our love for God and each other "inclines" us to keep his commandments?



This study into the life of Moses has been an informative, challenging and encouraging series in many different ways. What, out of all that we have studied through this series, really sticks in your mind? What has strengthened your faith the most? What has challenged your faith the most? What has inspired you the most?



Looking Upwards (40 mins)
Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. God equipped the Israelites with a strong leader, proof of His intent to redeem them and set of rules to seal His covenant with them. How do you think God has equipped you for your journey?

2. Mt Sinai was where Moses went to speak with the Lord and receive his instructions. Where do you find it easiest to speak to God? If you don't have a particular place, how might it help you if you did?

3. The survey suggests that not all of the commandments are important for life today. How far do you agree with this? Which one(s) might we be able to leave out?

The terms of the agreement that God has made with His people to take care of them and raise them up if they will keep faith with Him and obey His commands. And it is clear that they took this agreement seriously. The stone tablets were kept in a sacred chest called the ark of the covenant – an elaborate box made from acacia wood and gold and was carried with them in the most sacred part of the tabernacle wherever they went. They are the cornerstone of this nations identity.

End of Part One? And at this point it's almost like end of part One of the story of the Israelites and of the journey that we have been following this home group series – the journey of a fledgling nation and their relationship with God who has chosen them as His favoured people. We have seen how a great leader was chosen for them and prepared to lead them and we have seen him commissioned – sent out by God to begin his task. We have seen them freed from slavery and their enemies defeated, then how they were led through the water in the ultimate miracle of deliverance. With no effort on their part they were saved! Then we follow them into the desert on their way to the promised land. And now, despite their displays of defiance God has chosen to redeem them again and given them instructions for the onward journey. He has sealed a covenant between Himself and Israel. So, we could be forgiven for thinking “What could go wrong? How could they fail?” They have a great leader, commissioned by God Himself, they have God on their side, and now they have a clear set of rules to guide them and so they set off..... Of course, we know that things didn't go to plan. The problem being Israel's “keeping faith with God and obeying His commands” part of the agreement. And we know that as a result of their disobedience things went very badly for the whole nation. But we also know that despite this God, then set in motion His ultimate plan for their redemption. He sent His son into the world.

So, let's fast forward to the New Testament and find out how the Ten Commandments are faring at the time of Jesus' ministry. How important were they then? On the face of it they are still very important. People were clearly still not doing so well with obeying them or keeping to the Law. That's pretty much why Jesus was there after all. But was Jesus' Good News that it was ok to do away with all these hard rules? Not a bit of it. Jesus consistently upholds the importance of the Law and the commandments. In His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Ch 5, He very pointedly stated: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them” and he just to assure us that he means all of them he continues “...anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven”. So, he was not saying – “OK I know it's all a bit hard. you don't really have to take much notice of it anymore.” He was pretty clear on this point – we have to keep them. ALL of them.

How are we doing today? But how are we doing today? Do we still think they are important? Well Yes – and No apparently. According to a survey carried out by the internet-based research site YouGovUK last year, only 6 of the commandments were felt to be important by UK citizens – and this included people who identify themselves as Christians. I suppose the good news is that six of them at least seem to still be considered good laws. The poll tells us that 93% of us agree upon the importance of not murdering or stealing. Bearing false witness and committing adultery are not considered a good idea either and more than half of us still think it important to honour our parents and not to covet other people's possessions. And then there is a huge leap. Just 31% of us are against the worship of idols, slightly less are against taking the Lords name in vain and when it comes to having no other Gods and keeping the Sabbath, these commandments were supported by 20% or less of people overall. But three out of these four “least important” commandments are the commandments about our relationship with God – the first three which the Israelites were given in fact. As we heard earlier, God wrote all of the them.

They are His laws, but if we don't find these three important, then isn't it almost as if we are removing God from the Commandments?

J John, in his book *Just 10* which looks at each of the commandments in detail, agrees that people often try to do this and in fact he claims that he could have written a book about most of the commandments without mentioning God at all. He says “I could have argued that not murdering, coveting or stealing were good ideas because they were the best way for a stable society to exist. I could have argued that not coveting leads to less stress, having a day off a week makes you feel better and that not committing adultery keeps your marriage intact. I would not have been lying. All these things are true. I could have justified all of [these] commandments without bringing God in at all. I could have even have called them the Common-Sense Commandments.” You will of course have spotted that he has missed out the Commands to honour our parents and not to give false testimony against our neighbours, but following his idea, I think we could also all agree that in a civilised society it is right that we should take care of and respect the older generation and that telling lies about people isn’t going to gain you any friends. Of course, it’s great that as a nation it appears that we uphold the values which govern our relationships with each other. But shouldn’t we be concerned about also making ourselves right with God? Isn’t it important to have a good relationship with the God who gave these laws to us? The Least Important Commandments? So is there a case for promoting them up the scale of importance.

Having no other gods People taking the YouGov survey were instructed that this commandment meant that you should only worship the Christian God. And the thing that really surprised me is that only 36% of people identifying themselves as Christians thought that this was an important commandment. Only 36% of Christians thought that it was important to only believe in one God – one way to salvation! But isn’t the claim that there is only God rather arrogant and narrow minded? Of course, if anyone had simply made up their own theory about god and claimed it was true just because they believed it was, that would of course be arrogant, but this isn’t the case. Our faith is based on objective evidence rather than just personal preference; besides anything else the bible tells us that it is so. This commandment is not the only place we learn of it. There are several key passages which tell us that the Lord is the only God (Deut 4:39 - Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other) and Jesus confirms it in gospel Mark when he is questioned about the greatest commandment. ‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one”. As Christians we believe that Jesus is God incarnate and he says about Himself in John 14:6 “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”. There is no he” I want to make it clear that I am not preaching religious intolerance here, but it is one thing to protect the right of every religious person to follow their own conscience without fear of persecution (that’s a given) and it’s quite a another to say that all their different beliefs could be true and we certainly do have to think it doesn’t matter who we believe in.

Not worshipping idols Only 31% overall considered this still to be an important commandment, but this is quite not what the commandment says. It says “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” There are in fact a few denominations, like the Amish and Old Order Mennonites, that continue to take the second commandment seriously — so seriously, in fact, that they often refuse to have their photographs taken. But it is important not to ignore the next part of the commandment: You shall not bow down and worship them. And some modern versions of the bible the commandment is translated as “You shall not make for yourself an idol” which in turn is often expanded to mean anything we depend upon to meet our deepest needs such as security, worth, or significance. When we seek to find identity and security in something besides God, we have made it an idol. We often search for idols through the form relationships, substances, money, or entertainment.

Not misusing Gods name Survey participants were told that this meant not cursing using God’s name and 23 % overall thought that this was still important.

But there is much more involved in a misuse God’s name. God has bigger concerns than occasional OMG or slip of the tongue (important though these are). There is a larger sense in which people today take the Lord’s name in vain. It could be said that anyone who uses the name the name of Christ to pray in His name, and who take His name as part of their identity as Christians, but who deliberately and continually disobey His commands, are taking His name in vain. When we call ourselves Christians; when doing so we are acting as His ambassadors and we don’t always represent Him well. I am sure we have all had some of our actions labelled as “not very Christian” when we fall short as everyone does – we all acknowledge ourselves as sinners. Clergy in particular have a hard time when they every now and again fall from grace with the media often getting in on the act. Unfair as this may seem, acting and speaking in the Lord’s name is a serious responsibility and one which we can pay attention to not just individually but as a Church.

God at the heart of the Commandments So, for us as Christians, we cannot make these commandments less important than the others, in fact they should be at their very heart, because they are about our relationship with God. In Hilary’s talk about the Israelites’ worship of the golden calf in the previous sermon in the series, she talked about brokenness. She suggested that when we turn away from God, something gets broken. There is undeniably something broken in the world today and surely now cannot be the time to relegate our relationship with God to something “less important.”

A New Covenant But let’s finish by turning back to Jesus and what else he tells us about the commandments. In the first of this series of sermons Paul pointed out that Moses is often referred to as a type of Christ in the OT and identified many similarities in their life experiences. And as God used Moses to deliver the terms of the covenant to His chosen people, Jesus is the deliverer of the New Covenant - His death on the cross and the shedding of His blood is the basis of the promise that God makes with humanity - that He will forgive sin and restore fellowship with those who put their faith in Jesus and whose hearts are turned toward Him. When asked by the Pharisees in Matthew Ch 22 which He considered to be the greatest commandment this is how Jesus answered: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.’ Do you see what Jesus has done here? He has already told us of the importance of keeping all the commandments. But He knows we find them hard. He knows we will fail. But He has introduced love into the mix. In the liturgy for Holy Communion in the Book of Common Prayer the congregation are led through all the ten commandments and the response as each of them is said is “Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law”. And Jesus is telling us in His response to the Pharisees that love will incline us to keep all of the commandments.

We know that if we love our children we don’t need to be told to care for them, pick them up when they fall over, to encourage or defend them. If we love our friends we don’t need to be reminded to share with them, to comfort them and support them. If we love our pets we don’t need a set of rules to remember to feed them, take them to the vet and make sure they don’t get lost. We do these things because we love them. All of the commandments are important, they were given to us by God. And underpinning them all, as the foundation of God’s new covenant, Jesus told us that the greatest commandment is to love – to love our god, to love each other and to love ourselves – because everything hangs on this.

Emmanuel Church Text for 2018

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry ‘Abba Father.’

Romans 8:15