

The Force of the Ten Words
Exodus 20:18-26
February 26, 2006

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself any idols. You shall not take my name upon yourself for nothing. You shall set apart the Sabbath Day for me. Honor your father and your mother. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give a false witness. Do not covet anything or anyone. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of your bondage. These words constitute the core of the absolute authority beneath which we live out our lives and by which we will be judged. How do you plead?

At least three responses have been given by people to these words from the time they were written until today. The first is the response of the prideful. So full of ourselves and so blind to our sinfulness that we think that we have kept and can keep these words. Like the rich young man who stood before Jesus to announce that he had kept the law from the time he was a child, the prideful proclaim that they have done what is required by the law for them to do. And like the rich young man the mere suggestion of such a possibility would be funny if it were not so fatal; think of that young man saying those words in the presence of the one who came to give his life for that man and us simply because we cannot do what the law declares. But just as that young man's ignorance was the cover for his arrogance so even in our day do men and women still trust in themselves that they are doing what is right. The second is the response of the pretenders. These are the ones who understand that they cannot fulfill the requirements of the law so they simply contort what God has said about the law and create their own standards for being right with God. Like their predecessors the Pharisees who read the Bible selectively choosing to conform their lives to those parts that they liked diminish or dismiss the rest, so do many in our day diminish or dismiss the absolute truth of the Word of God to create for themselves their own truth through a selective reading of the Bible. The truth is that our lives are lived out either casting aside the canon of Scripture, creating our own canon of Scripture or seeking to conform our lives to the canon of Scripture. And people who live out of the first are far easier to reach than people who live out of the second. The third group is the penitent. Those who hear with clarity and conviction the communication of God through His Word and fall before Him as undone, unworthy, unable, incapable, insufficient; begging for His mercy and grace.

Which category we belong in is easy to answer in church on Sunday but let me ask us this question: when is the last time that our sinfulness drove us in sorrow to weep before the Lord? When is the last time that the depth of our depravity brought us into a state of absolute brokenness before the Lord? When is the last time that we heard weeping and wailing in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? What used to be common in the meeting house on the Lord's Day is no longer present. Mighty moves of the Spirit of God that brought people to bow in brokenness before God are seldom manifest in our day. Is it because we love God before now than others did in the past? Is it because we have a more clear and complete understanding of God than others did in the past? If you would join me in reading godly writers of the past and compare what they write to most of what is written today, it would cause you as it does be to be at best embarrassed. What has changed ever so subtly over a number of years but ever so surely is our conception of God so that it our day we gather to worship a God whose sovereign holiness and righteous justice has been swallowed up by His gracious love and his compassionate mercy so that we no longer take our sinfulness seriously because our view of God is so small, so shallow, so superficial and so foreign to Scripture. That is why we need to meet and have a meeting with the God of the Bible.

So look with me first this morning at the manifestation of this God. This God, the Lord God Almighty, had given His people the foundation for His relationship with them, 2. It is based on who He is and what He does and it is rooted in His revelation. Had God not chosen to come to them to call them to Himself, there would have been no possibility of a relationship with Him. It is then and now His revelation that is the first step in our redemption. It is not first our choice of Him but His choice of us. Our God not only gives us the foundation for His relationship with us, but He gives us the focus of this relationship in the ten words and then He demonstrates the force of His personality and His power. At no point do we see or hear that they saw God.

They saw the thunder and the lightning. This is a manifestation of His mightiness. He thunders over His universe and illumines the darkness below. The thunder and the lightning are a communication of His greatness and His grandeur. They not only see the thunder and the lightning, they hear the trumpet. When we read Numbers 10 we recognize that God established the trumpet as the way of calling His people to Himself and sending them out into battle. God calls His people to Himself to worship Him and God

sends His people out to witness for Him and God's people never do one without the other. Witness without worship has no power and worship without witness has no purpose. Worship without witness is religious ritual that is void of significance and witness without worship is self-generated, self-motivated and self-saturated and produces the kind of witness that will use any gimmick or gadget to get somebody to pray the prayer. But when we come to God in worship we go for God in witness simply to share the truth of God who alone can save and will. So the trumpet sounds to call us to God and to send us into the world to engage the spiritual battle. But this trumpet is sounded from heaven. And the only two times that such a trumpet call comes is here to show the mighty majesty of our God and in the end when Jesus comes to gather home to Himself all those who have invested their lives in the worship of His name as witnesses to His glory. "When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more, and the morning breaks eternal bright and fair, when the saved of earth shall gather to their home beyond the shore, when the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there." Oh, the proud say absolutely. The pretenders who hear about worship and witness and know that there is one without the other in their lives just dismiss or diminish the word, but the penitent cry out, "only by the grace and because of mercy of God will I be there," but until that day when my Savior descends I will worship him and witness for Him day after day without end.

Not only did God manifest His mightiness and His majesty but He also displayed His mystery, they saw the mountain in smoke. This is no cloud cover. This is a mountain engulfed in smoke. God wants us to know that we cannot get to where He is. David Wells says that we live in a culture where the promise of a previous era that our reason could take us to the place of fulfillment has proven bankrupt and we are at a place today where we have only two ways of finding meaning: we either begin with where we are and reach inward or we begin where we are and receive what comes from beyond us. We either make our own meaning by creating our own god or we have our meaning made by receiving what God gives in His revelation. There has always been and will always be a mystery with our God that we cannot penetrate which means that so much of life is lived out in obedience to a God whom we love and serve without fully understanding. But He is real. Very real.

So much so that when He made known His might and His majesty and His mystery the people trembled with fear and stood at a distance. What

caused their fear and why did they stand far off? Their fear was the result of His revelation. They had seen in what He showed the kind of greatness and grandeur that shook them. Their standing afar was the result of their sinfulness. They knew who they were. They knew that the God who was coming to them was a God of whom they were not worthy. Like Isaiah who saw the greatness of the grandeur of God and cried woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips and I live in the middle of a people who are just like me, so these people cannot bring together His sovereignty with their sinfulness, His revelation with their total deprivation, His coming to them with their corruption. So they did what all people do when we see how wonderful is our God and how woeful are we, they cried for help.

It is no mystery that the majestic manifestation of God is followed immediately by the cry for a mediator, 19. There are three realities here that shape what follows. Working from the last to the first notice that the people are so aware of their sinfulness and separation from God that they believe that this Holy God who cannot be corrupted by sin will kill them if they come close to Him. They know Romans 6:23. They know what sin does. And they know that they deserve what sin does. But notice secondly that like most people they would rather someone else die so they want Moses to go meet with God and they want Moses to talk with them. In a sense, they have a higher view of Moses than they do of themselves but in another sense they see Moses as the one who can mediate for them with God so that if somebody gets killed it would be Moses. And thirdly notice that they are willing to settle for the word of Moses rather than the Word of God. Moses is close enough to God that they will take what He says as good enough rather than risk failure in relationship to a God who could destroy them. It is in this context that we can hear what God speaks through Moses.

They have no reason to be afraid because God has come to call them to Himself as His people. He wants them to worship Him and to witness for Him. He wants them as His own. He does not want to destroy them; He wants to keep them from destroying themselves. He has not come to bring them death but to deliver them from death into life. The message of the Mediator is that this mighty, mysterious and majestic God has manifest Himself to them because He wants them as His own and it is the word of the mediator that brings this great God together with this sinful people.

But the word of Moses was not enough. It was temporary. For God was preparing one who was greater than Moses who would come not just to

bring a word but to be the word. Not just to declare the truth but as the truth. One who would do all that was necessary to satisfy the holy justice of God against sin and to deliver us from its death grip. One who was perfectly pure and purely perfect who in Himself would take upon Himself all of our sin and become the way, the only way by which this great God would come to us and we could come to this great God. Moses approached the thick darkness where God was and out of that thick darkness one day would come the only one who can truly and fully reconcile us to God forever. The Bible says that there is only one mediator between us and God, and that is Christ Jesus.

If you could take the ten words today and say without doubt, I have kept them and will do so for all my life; you don't need a mediator between you and God. But if you have already failed to follow them fully, you are either trusting that this Word from God is wrong or you need a mediator. And there is only one who even now is waiting to hear from sinners like me and you, "nothing in my hand I bring, simply to your cross I cling." O God, have mercy on me a sinner.