

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “Honoring Truth” (from the “Written in Stone” sermon series)

Scripture: Exodus 20:15-21 and Matthew 5:27-30

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of Exodus, we are exploring the eighth thru the tenth of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses for the people of Israel. The first seven commandments dealt with: “No other gods” (20:3) and “No idols” (20:4-6), “No misuse of God’s name” (20:7); “observing the Sabbath” in verses (20:8-11); “honoring our parents” (20:12); “honoring life” (20:13); and “No adultery.” The eighth thru tenth commandments deal with: stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting.
- Stealing (v. 15): this commandment was given for people to respect each other’s property and not to take it without their consent. Laws that governed society during this time in antiquity (i.e. Code of Hammurabi and Middle Assyrian Laws) usually called for harsh punishment in matters of theft.
- Bearing false witness (v. 16): According to the NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, “...the language here points to a particular type of false statement: false accusation. This prohibition is about wrongful prosecution, specifically coming before a court to initiate a trial and wrongfully accuse another person.” We must be truthful in our affairs with one another, and this commandment helps to safeguard our society’s stability by protecting our reputations from false accusations.
- Covet (v. 17): this commandment prohibits the longing for, or lust/desire of, that which belongs to someone else. These selfish desires threaten the harmony of peacefully living with one another.
- In verses 18-21, the people responded to these commandments from God (through Moses) with fear and trembling. When Moses delivered these commandments to the people, there was thunder and lightning, sounds of a trumpet and the mountain itself billowed smoke. The people, out of fear of being destroyed from direct contact with God, expressed their need of a mediator to God through Moses. Moses’ task would be to mediate the agreement of this covenant between God and His people.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- After being delivered from bondage in Egypt, there must have been an overwhelming sense of communal relief and freedom, but also a desperation to rebuild their identity as God's people.
- At the foot of Mount Sinai, God gave them instructions to live by. They soon realize...obedience to these commandments was going to be tough!
- The first four commandments were instructions concerning our relationship to God. The last six commandments are instructions for living in a covenant community. Today, we are looking specifically at the 8th, 9th and 10th Commandments.
- The 8th Commandment teaches "You shall not steal." This at first was about kidnapping and forcing others into slavery. Stealing today also takes on concepts such as cheating, or creating systems to take from others.
- The 9th Commandment teaches "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." This is more than lying in court...it is to speak unjustly against our neighbor. It is slander, gossip, and sharing our preconceived conceptions about others with no regard to fact. We must always consider each other's dignity.
- The 10th Commandment teaches "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." On the surface this is about habits of the heart.
 - This is also to be overwhelmed by discontentment of what we have and what we desire to have or accumulate to fill this dissatisfaction. Think about all the excess things that we accumulate in order to satisfy our wants and desires.
- After the Israelites received these Ten Commandments from God, they were afraid! They asked Moses to be their mediator out of this fear of God.
- It was not just the Ten Commandments that were written upon stone for the Israelites to take and live by on that day...it was also God's love for His people. God's love for us is written in stone and is faithful to us in our time in the "wilderness." We are called to internalize the gift of these Commandments, so we have the words of Christ written in stone on our hearts. See 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.
- God has called us and will not fail us. We are called by God to: internalize the Ten Commandments; be in a covenant; honor our neighbors; and to know of His deep love for us...it is written in stone!

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- What do these commandments teach us about the nature of God?
- How will living by the Ten Commandments help us to live together as a community?
- What does “fear of the Lord” mean to you? How should this guide our lives?
- Do you think modern society exhibits a fear of the Lord? Has it ever? Why or why not?
- Read Hebrews 9:15-28 and Matthew 5:17-19. What is the “New Covenant” that Jesus brings to us and how does it compare to the Old Covenant (Ten Commandments)?
- What does it mean to possess an identity as God’s people? What does this look like?
- How can bearing false witness against a neighbor (i.e. slander) cause harm? How can we consider the dignity of others?
- What is the difference between what we *want* and what we *desire*? How about our *wants* versus our *needs*?

