



Keeping It Simple

The 8th Word

August 20, 2023

Prelude - He Is Exalted by Twila Paris
Welcome/Announcements (Work & Faith Survey)

CALL TO WORSHIP | Isaiah 53:1-6

Who believes what we've heard and seen? Who would have thought God's saving power would look like this?

The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look.

He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum.

But the fact is, it was *our* pains he carried— *our* disfigurements, all the things wrong with *us*. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures.

But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—*our sins*! He took the punishment, **and that made us whole**. Through his bruises we get healed.

We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost. We've all done our own thing, gone our own way. And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong, on him, on him.

Song #1 - Man of Sorrows (Hallelujah, What a Name) by Providence

Song #2 - A Thousand Hallelujahs by Brooke Ligertwood

Dismiss Kids

PRE-SERMON READING | 1 Corinthians 6:9-12

Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's Kingdom? Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor **thieves**, nor **covetous**, nor drunkards, nor **slanderers**, nor **extortionists**, will inherit God's Kingdom.

A number of you know from experience what I'm talking about, for not so long ago you were on that list. **But** you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Just because something is technically legal doesn't mean that it's spiritually appropriate. If I went around doing whatever I thought I could get by with, *I'd be a slave to my whims.*

SERMON |

"Poverty is the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom in all its meanings." (Brian Fikkert & Steven Corbett)¹

According to one source, "Poverty refers to the lack of adequate financial resources such that individuals, households, and entire communities don't have the means to subsist or acquire the basic necessities **for a flourishing life.**"² Remember, we've said that the Ten Words are spoken so that we might know how to live free, not enslaved. They are words spoken for our flourishing, not our impoverishment, to live in shalom, peace, in all its meanings.

Essentially, these Ten Words reveal that *relationships are everything*. When our relationships to God, to others, and to earth are properly ordered, when they are just, when they are for life, they lead to harmony and enjoyment, to *shalom*, wholeness for all. The Ten Words also assume that we are not so good at relationships, that indeed, we need the simple things spelled out for ease of recalling if we want to find ourselves living differently than our common experience, rich in relationships that work.

In this way, the ten commandments are not so much a set of obligations as a revelation of the laws that govern reality, revealing its limitations and potential. If we want to live free and full, we don't fight the law of gravity (as we discussed last week); instead, we learn to flourish within it—which even means, at times, flying! While the natural law of the Ten Words restricts our actions (do this and don't do that), they also expand our responsibility and co-creativity in the relationships that make a life.

We've seen this double nature of the Ten Words throughout our series, haven't we?

I. No other gods besides ME. (life begins with God)

II. No images to serve

¹ Quoted in Tom Nelson, *The Economics of Neighborly Love*, 129.

² <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/poverty.asp>

III. No twisting/making false I AM

IV. Sabbath...and work (**life continues** in rhythm with God's good design & destiny)

In the fundamental relationship of existence, our relationship with God, we have come to see that we are bound by His starting (His primacy in creation and rescue and restoration) and within His rhythmic continuation (joining Him in delight and labor for good). Between these two "laws," we are bound, and absolutely so. Yet, as the writer of Ecclesiastes so pointedly concludes, bound does not meet suppressed.

I have seen the business that God has given to the children of humanity to be occupied with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity in humanity's heart, yet so that [they] cannot find out the work God does from beginning and to end. I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to **be joyful and do good** as long as they live...**tak[ing] pleasure in all [their] labor**—this is God's gift...whatever God does endures forever, nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken away from it. God has done it so that people **fear before him**. What has been already, is, and what is to be, already has been, and God requires an account for what has been *pursued*. (Ecclesiastes 3:10-15)

Be joyful, do good, take pleasure in the work you are made for in the fear of the Lord, the awe and wonder of life bound in God's all-encompassing grace and knowledge.

I. No other gods besides ME. (**life begins** with God)

II. No images to serve

III. No twisting/making false I AM

IV. Sabbath...and work (**life continues** in rhythm with God's good design & destiny)

In the middle of that pursuit, where we work out the tension in our freeing limits, we are restricted to serve no microscopic images of life good (no matter how intricately and beautifully crafted)—but discover, like all those in our faith heritage, that His ways are far beyond our ways (Is. 55:8-9) and go abundantly beyond what we can ask or imagine (Eph. 3:20). Likewise, we are restricted to not twisting/making false I AM—but discover, like all those in our faith heritage, the awe and wonder, and empowerment that comes from His intimate, intricate, intentional, and immutable action and affection toward us, forming us with affectionate purpose from "in the secret places" of eternity (Psalm 139:13-24).

We see the same restriction leading to expanding within our relationships with others in the final six words.

V. Honor father and mother (**life begins** relating well to those who we are given)

VI. No taking life

VII. No adultery

VIII. No stealing

IX. No False-Witnessing

X. No Coveting (**life continues** relating well to what we have been given)

The exhortation to honor those we didn't choose and be content in what is given keeps us bound to our "lot," which the author of Ecclesiastes says is the God-gifted place of our joy (see Ecc. 5:18). But bound here, where

we are with who we are given to and what is given to us, re (rightly) aligns the power of living “long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Ex.20:12), as the Fifth Word declares, not in what others do to us or have that we do not, **but how we relate to and how we use what is ours.** You’re responsible and competent for making life, good; because you are bound in God’s beginning and continuing. Think about how profound such a revelation would be to a people who had known only slavery, only constraints that suppressed rather than relational binding that would empower.

Still, the beauty of the revelation does not immediately outshine the difficulty in its daily manifestations. In the messy middle, we are prohibited from taking life, and so freed from the hatred that would cost us our lives and *empowered* to be thoroughly thoughtful about how to protect and care for life (i.e., the Levitical regulations that Chaz took us through). Likewise, we are prohibited from breaking covenant (as we saw last week), and so freed from the entanglements that would destroy our lives and *empowered* to be continuously and creatively nourishing of the relationships through which we make life, good. And we will see the same constricting to enlarge feature in the Eight Word:

Thou shall not steal. (Exodus 20:15)

The Hebrew word *steal (ganab)* means: to “carry away, secretly, get by stealth” and is the primitive root of “thieve (literally or figuratively); by implication, to deceive.”³

While, like murder and adultery, stealing is a universally acknowledged wrong, the word used here allows us to expand the prohibition from do not unlawfully appropriate someone else’s property, to **do no action to take advantage of another.**

Martin Luther contended that we break the Eighth Word “whenever we take advantage of our neighbor in any sort of dealing that results in a loss to him”⁴ or her.

Acting in a manner to take advantage of neighbors (which includes people we live with or near (physically, family, and our faith community), but also employers as well as customers and the greater society, and by implication, even the earth) is a reason God attests (amid a time of great prosperity, mind you) that Israel would soon find themselves enslaved once again:

Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying,

“When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?”

The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: “Surely I will never forget any of their deeds. Shall not the land tremble on this account, and everyone mourn who dwells in it, and all of it rise like the Nile, and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?” (Amos 8:4-8).

³ Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance accessed here: <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1589.htm>.

⁴ Quoted in Philip Ryken, *Exodus*, 644.

Likewise, it is the consideration of neighbor, seeing neighbor not in pity but compassion as a person of dignity and ability, that informed the Levitical laws for gleaning—the restricting of all that could be gained for the sake of another’s opportunity to be responsible.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner. I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:9-10)

The consideration of neighbors extended from the max potential of production to the establishment and use of private property:

And if you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. You shall pay your neighbor according to the years of jubilee, he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops. If the years are many, you shall increase the price, and if the years are few, you shall reduce the price...You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God.

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners *with me*. And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land.

If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God...

(Leviticus 25:14-15 & 23-24, 35-36)

Gleaning limits and the right and self-restrictions of private property was revolutionary for a world dominated by survival, by those possessing power taking all that they were able to take. Taken together, it is no wonder why John Calvin would later argue,

“It follows, therefore, that not only are those thieves who secretly steal the property of others, but those also who seek gain from the loss of others, accumulate wealth by unlawful practices and are more devoted to their private advantage than to equity.”⁵

Whether through ethical business practices or diligent labor or respectful limitations, or generous living, the Eighth Word is not only a prohibition from taking from and taking advantage of others; it is a directive to steward with soul, for our souls and the souls of others.

The Eighth Word suggests that the right to private ownership (whether of property, possession or even of your own person) is essential for our individual and collective flourishing. After all, you cannot steal something from

⁵ Quoted in Ryken, 633.

another unless it belongs to them. Private property/possession/person rights, which were evolutionarily novel at the time—especially for those whose centuries of experience had known life only under the oppression of such personal rights. And I think I say this without getting too lost in the weeds, but the importance of this word to establishing a flourishing life is profound. As one theologian argues,

“Societies that have a deep and unyielding respect for the sanctity of private property have traditionally fostered institutions that we associate with a vibrant social and cultural life: for example, intact families, savings and deferred gratification, cooperative social norms, and high standards of morality.” (Robert Sirico)⁶

But perhaps at the foundation of this observation is the “relationship between private property rights and capital creation.”⁷ When people are empowered to use what is given (their wit, ability, history, and anything else in their bound existence), when they are empowered with personal responsibility with personal incentive, people are able to create value, not just for themselves but for an entire community. In short, they can create an economy.

Pastor Tom Nelson points out that “our English word *economics* comes from the Greek word *oikonomia*, which connotes the idea of household [management] or family stewardship.”⁸ Just as in the structure of the Ten Words, **family stewardship** takes center stage in most of our lives—whether towards flourishing or poverty (both material or spiritual).

V. Honor father and mother

VI. No taking life

VII. No adultery

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IX. No False-Witnessing

X. No Coveting

“poverty,” argues pastor Tom Nelson, “is a relational deficit...lacking relationships that bring flourishing.” And “None of us are fully flourishing as God designed us to flourish,”⁹ whether because of lack of fidelity in our most bound relationships and/or poor stewardship...our own or others. Disloyalty and deception (exploitation) always erode relationships, especially the bedrock relationships of economics (family and stewardship). It can (and is) argued that “There is a seamless, interdependent relationship between family life, the workplace, and the broader economy. In a real sense, as the family unit flourishes, the broader economy flourishes.”¹⁰ This means, once again, there is a great opportunity and potential for good in our daily relationships...in our fidelity and our stewardship, even if these too are the places we experience and participate in the oppression of life good.

⁶ Quoted in Nelson, 95.

⁷ Nelson, 95-96.

⁸ Nelson, 106.

⁹ Ibid., 129.

¹⁰ Ibid., 106

We began the sermon with _____ reading the same text we read last week. In Paul's letter to his faith family of Corinth, he reminds his friends that there is a way of living that is outside "the kingdom," that is not the experience of life free and whole, bound in love, but enslaved to whims (our own or others). A way of living that, apart from Jesus' fidelity and stewardship and the Spirit's continued indwelling, would remain normal and less. But notice the two areas of the list:

Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's Kingdom? Don't be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals, nor **thieves**, nor **greedy**, nor **drunkards**, nor **slanderers**, nor **extortionists**, will inherit God's Kingdom. And such were some of you. But... (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

According to the "rule of categories" that we mentioned last week, the first five in the list relate to the Seventh Word (whether physically or spiritually), while the second five relate to the Eight Word. In Paul's estimation, in-fidelity (in all its forms) and exploitive stewardship (in all its forms) work hand in hand against life whole and holy. You cannot be faithful in your relationships and a poor steward, nor can you be a poor steward and faithful in your relationships. And so were some of you...I'd argue/testify were all us...but by the grace of God.

Yet this wisdom of a good life being a life of integrity, all of life integrated and congruent with what is true, good, and beautiful in our bonds and labors (i.e., life with God, life in the kingdom, the promised land)—is not new to Paul. It is old wisdom.

Proverbs chapter six is divided into two parts. The second, as we mentioned last week, warns of the foolishness of adultery, the self-destructiveness of failing to nurture fidelity in our bound relationships.

Adultery is a brainless act, soul-destroying, self-destructive; expect a bloody nose, a black eye, and a reputation ruined...(Proverbs 6:32-33)

But the first half of the chapter is warnings on the foolishness of poor stewardship, whether caught in another's exploitations to exploiting others in laziness:

So how long are you laze around doing nothing? How long before you get out of bed? A nap here, a nap there, a day off here, a day off there, sit back, take it easy—do you know what comes next? Just this: You can look forward to a dirt-poor life, poverty, your permanent houseguest! (Proverbs 6:9-11)

We looked last week, and in the pastoral note, how we might nurture fidelity in this whole life of ours in Jesus. So what, then, might stewarding with soul entail?

Stewarding with soul means doing good work, well and generously.

I won't belabor the point as we spent several months leading into summer on this topic. Still, I do think it is helpful and important to point out how in the same letter describing how to live with fidelity to the Seventh Word, Paul describes how we're to keep the Eighth Word:

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing good work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. (Ephesians 4:28)

How do we steward with soul?

We stop thieving (taking from and taking advantage of others) by doing good work, work that is good and makes things good.

And do it yourself, not passing on the responsibility to others, not taking advantage of others so that you don't have to work (or do good work).

And, lastly, do so not, as Calvin contended, self-absorbed in your efforts, but with a generous openness to others "so that we might have something to share with anyone in need," including those we are responsible for. Imparting compassion and dignity to those like us, in need of other's good stewardship. As Luther said, "God doesn't need your good work, but your neighbors do."

And in doing so, we actually participate in creating a good (whole, shalom) economy for all so that all might flourish.

REFLECTION |

Allowing the Spirit to examine your heart in your relationships to your responsibilities/employment, property/possessions, community/society:

- In what ways am I stewarding with soul?
- In what ways am I taking, rather than taking responsibility? What do I need to do to give up "thieving"?

COMMUNION INSTRUCTIONS |

In the end, Jesus died between two thieves. One laughed at the predicament of the One who took what God had given him and gave his soul to it, and gave his life for it. The other recognized in Jesus something fundamentally different about this **breaking of body** and **pouring out of blood**. To the thief who expressed his recognition of Jesus and desired Jesus to recognize him, Jesus shared what was only His to give (which no thief could steal): Today, Jesus said, you will be with me in paradise.

PLEASE STAND AND MAKE YOUR WAY DOWN TO RECEIVE THE COMMUNION ELEMENTS.

Song #3 - Love Will Never Fail (1 Corinthians 13) by Leslie Jordan

COMMUNION & TEN WORDS|

His body, broken for our sins. His life poured out as a forever promise to give what cannot be taken.

Because we have been freed and empowered to live life whole and holy with God and others, we say together the highlighted Ten Words:

Then God spoke all these words:

"I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from...the place of your slavery.

"Have no other gods.

"Make no images to serve.

"No twisting who I AM.

"Sabbath...and work.

"Honor others...especially those to whom you were given.

"Do not take life...protect and care for it.

"Do not break covenant...nurture it.

"Do not steal...steward.

"Do not lie about your neighbor.

"Do not covet."

Song #4 - Neighborheart by Citizens

BENEDICTION | Micah 6:8-9

As we conclude the day made for us, we enter into the work for which we are made [**LIGHT THE CANDLE**], remembering that:

But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously—take God seriously. Attention! God calls out to the [Christ] city [Church]! If you know what's good for you, you'll listen. So listen, all of you! This is serious business.