

Title: And God Spoke
Text: Exodus 20.1-2
Theme: God uses His authority to mercifully communicate the truth.
Series: Exodus #24
Prop Stmt. God's gracious act of revelation enables us to see how things really are.

Read Text:

On the night of January 27, 1986, Robert Lund was concerned and with good reason. The Space Center was preparing for a shuttle launch the next morning. Lund, vice-president for engineering at Morton Thiokol, had earlier presided over a meeting of engineers at which time it was unanimously recommended NOT to launch. Lund told his boss, Jerald Mason, who informed the Space Center. The Space Center had a good safety record because it would not allow a launch unless the technical people approved and Lund had not approved because the temperature at the launch site would be close to freezing at lift-off. Lund was concerned about the "O-rings" sealing the boosters' segments. "O" rings were a great idea. They enabled Thiokol to build the huge rocket in Utah and ship it in pieces to the Space Center. The cost savings enabled them to underbid the competition, and they made \$150 million in profits from the shuttle contract. However incomplete data from previous flights seemed to indicate that the O-rings tended to erode in flight, with the worst erosion occurring when the temperatures were the coldest before lift-off. Testing on this was not complete, but, with the lives of seven astronauts at stake, the decision seemed clear. Let's not take a chance; no lift-off.

The decision to delay did not sit well with the Space Center. They wanted to launch. The shuttle program was falling behind its launch schedule. Congress was murmuring. And if the launch went as scheduled, then the publicity from having the first teacher in space would be very good for the program. But they would not launch without Thiokol's approval. So, they urged Mason to reconsider. He reexamined the evidence and decided the rings should hold. The signature for launch approval was prepared if Lund agreed; and he didn't. He didn't until Mason said something that made him re-consider. Mason asked him to "take off your engineering hat and put on your management hat." Looking at the situation from that perspective, Lund changed his mind and the next morning the shuttle exploded during lift-off, killing all aboard. An O-ring had failed.

What do you do when the ethics of management collides with the ethics of engineering? Perhaps ethics of management is somewhat of an oxymoron in this example but do you see what happened here? Two points of view collided and a choice had to be made. It was not a situation where each side could say, "well you have your opinion and I have mine and we will agree to disagree." No, a call had to be made. Do we go forward with the launch or not? Do we accept the values of the management over the values of the engineers? What if the shuttle had not exploded? Who is right? On what basis do we determine whether or not something is right?

We live in a time, when the truth regarding the authority of God is publicly ridiculed and rejected. In throwing God under the bus, his truth has been thrown out the window. And

with the loss of final truth comes with it the loss of everything that was once sacred, because now, nothing is any different than anything else. Carl Henry, one of this country's pre-eminent theologians wrote a monumental 6-volume work on this subject, entitled, *God, Revelation and Authority*. I don't know anyone who has read the entire thing, but it sure looks impressive in your library ('know what I mean?'). Henry stated, ***"If the truth of truth is lost, then obviously the final import of each and every word vanishes also. We are left with only a multiplicity of "latest words," none of them fixed and final....When truth is lost, falsehood no longer exists; everything becomes relative to its own situation."*** He goes on to say, ***"Relativism begets pessimism, and pessimism begets nihilism."***¹

Our world is lost and empty. Our bookstores are gagging on the number of books that publishing companies vomit out month after month. Talk radio, and debate TV as noisy and numbing as that is, cannot even begin to compare to the overwhelming volume of words and opinions that continue to be heaved upon the internet. They are "always learning, but never able to acknowledge the truth" because there is no one authority. We are suffocating under the volume of words which have no ultimate meaning because we fail to acknowledge the ultimate authority of God. Wishing Him to be extinct, wishing Him dead, it is man who dies, not God. Without God, we have no spiritual oxygen. Here in Exodus 20, God is setting forth the terms of His Covenant with his people. The terms begin with a series of commandments. Later on in Exodus 34.28 they are referred to specifically as, "the Ten Commandments." But, notice how even before the first commandment is stated, we read these words: "And God spoke all these words:"

The opening events of time itself all hang upon the breath of God. God spoke and the universe came into being. God spoke and planets popped, stars burned, orbits began their rotations, galaxies put on a dazzling and incomprehensible display of power, order and control. God spoke and fish swam, while plants grew and birds flew. God exhaled and man inhaled and became a living being. All of life begins with God. Life comes from God and life goes back to God. Because He is the author of life, He is the author-ity, the authority on life. Please understand that the desperate and ultimately doomed and damned attempt to authenticate evolution is not rooted in honest science, but comes from hearts that want to be rid of the voice of God. This text stands at the fountain-head of the 10 commandments because we need to approach this with the proper understanding. You and I need to know that:

1. **God speaks because God is.**

"And God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God."

A. **"I am" means you ain't.**

You cannot read these words without thinking back to the first time God revealed His name to Moses. Yahweh is the name that God chose to reveal the fact that He, absolutely and simply is. (period) He is, and has always been (issing) and will forever be (issing).

¹ Carl F H Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 1, p. 28, 29. Crossway Books, Wheaton, 1999.

Can you remember when that truth first made your mind dizzy as your thoughts raced as fast as they could in an effort to catch up to it, and you couldn't. I AM the One who is! I AM the one who has always been. I AM the one who has no maker, no beginning and no end. I AM, the only I AM. All truth begins here. All authority starts here. All commands start here. God begins this with reminding us that He is absolutely self-existence. He defines reality. Before any reality existed that you are aware of, He was before it, made it, named it, defined it and limited it. All of life, including you, is brought into existence under His authority, whether you like it or not. Your opinion in the matter is not consulted by God. What matters above all else in life is God. He is the Creator, we are the creation. He has and exercises the right as the Sovereign, Creator God to place us under Him. You do not call the shots – He does. You do not make the rules – He does. You do not define your own reality – He does. Even when you are “in charge”, you are not in charge, He is. Meaning, even the way you exercise your authority is to be done in a manner that reflects that you are under His rule and reign.

God does not seek your permission and does not need your permission to do what He does. Now, in principle many of us understand this. But in practice, some of us act like atheists. Meaning, we live in such a way that we demand to be noticed. We demand to be reckoned with. We demand attention. What happens when a girl dresses in an attempt to be an object of desire and attention? It is like getting robbed. When you get robbed, a person takes from you something that does not belong to them. When a girl dresses to kill she is attempting to steal from others, that which does not belong to her. She is demanding attention in a self-glorifying manner. Glory belongs to God and He will not share what belongs to Him with others. In Luther's treatment of the 10 commandments, he speaks of the sin beneath the sin. Most of us don't think that deep. I am hopeful that in this study God will be pleased to open us up to come to grips with our own desires and motives. Some guy in high school can't keep his mouth shut. He is loud, obnoxious, irritating and always demanding a response from others. His parents should not pretend that his behavior is cute – why? Because He is attempting to steal from others what does not belong to him. So, when we study v.15, we have to see it in light of verses 1-2. Stealing is more than shoplifting. Self-centered manipulation and obnoxious behavior comes from a heart that is demanding to be worshiped! And that belongs only to God.

We are the new covenant people of God who understand that He is and we ain't. That demands of us, humility. If it is ever said of you, or me, that “he thinks that he is a little god” we should weep and tremble, because I am means you ain't.

B. “I am” means the others aren't. (the others ain't either)

We will explore this specifically next Sunday when we look at the very first commandment (v.3). You are not permitted to have any other gods before God because all other gods are imposters. We do not worship the gods of materialism or fashion. We are not impressed with the icons of entertainment or politics. We fear and respect and worship God. We bow to no other. We are to be kind, gracious and humble, but we will not deny God for a lesser god, because the others ain't either. And sometimes that drives them mad, because they cannot take from us what is reserved for God alone.

Polycarp was a follower of Christ who was disciplined by the apostle John. He was so respected by the people that when he was arrested because he refused to acknowledge that Caesar was lord, the proconsul urged him to simply swear allegiance to Caesar, deny Christ and then he would be set free.; Polycarp declared, Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior? Eventually the proconsul's mercy (in his mind) turned to angry threats. He said, "I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast you, unless you repent. Polycarp said, "Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous. But again the proconsul said to him, I will cause you to be consumed by fire, seeing you despise the wild beasts, if you will not repent. But Polycarp said, You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why do you tarry? Bring forth what you will.

C. I am means, no "yea-but"

Know what I mean? You shall not commit adultery...yea, but we discovered that we were soul mates. You shall not steal...yea, but everyone else downloads music without paying for it. You shall not bear false testimony...yea but everyone else gets their research papers from the internet. What is a "yea-but"? It is a willful denial of the authority of God. You cannot live for Him if you disregard His commands.

2. God speaks because God is truth.

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

The truth is, God delivered Israel from Egypt – no one else did. To believe anything else would be to believe in and then bank on a lie. God speaks because He wants you to know the truth about your life and the truth about Him. Israel could not save themselves from Egypt. Only God could save them. No other god could save them from Egypt, because all other gods are imposters. God spoke to them so that they would know the truth about what has happened. What a gift from God, is the fact that He has spoken. If He didn't speak we would believe in so many lies and we have demonstrated throughout human history that we are capable of some rather colossal acts of stupidity.

The other day I was asked, as the pastor of this church, upon the recommendation of some people in the community, to speak at a certain function. Now there is obviously a level of expectation that goes along with these sorts of things, and I try to keep all of that in mind. So, I went to meet the people to whom I was recommended, and during the meeting, in which we are all sitting facing each other, I get this sense that something is not quite right. Fact is, I failed to zip up my pants, and here I am sitting there, in front of three women, and I am dying. It would have been such a help to me, if someone before

that meeting had informed me of my failure to zip up my pants. I needed the truth about my condition to rescue me from my own failure.

Isaiah, the OT prophet, talks about what mankind has done when he does not either know or listen to what God speaks. In chapter 44, Isaiah tells us how a man will cut down a tree and use some of the wood for a fire that he will use to stay warm and over which to bake some bread. With the other part of the tree, he will carve it into a god (of his own imagination) and then bow down to it and pray to it and say, “Save me, you are my god.” That is so pathetically moronic, but even deeper than that, it is pathetic. It is sad, because that stripped piece of cedar or cypress or oak, cannot hear, cannot act and cannot save. God speaks because God is truth, and married to His truth is His goodness. What is true about God is that God is good.

3. **God speaks because God is good.**

God is good and He wants to get the credit for it – and He should. He made it very clear to Israel that He is the one who saved them, because He is the only one who can save. That is good for you to know that. It is so good for God to inform you that He is the only One who can rescue your life from sin. It is so good for God to tell you the truth about your sin, so that you can understand the truth about how powerful He is to save. God’s speaking to us is driven by His goodness and by His desire for us to know how good he is. This is critical for you to understand. Because we have hearts that naturally (and unwisely) bristle against any authority. So, when God commands us NOT to do certain things, we instinctively resent that. Aw, c’mon, who says! We need to fight our self-centered stupidity and idolatry with good theology. We need to remind ourselves of the goodness of God. We need to see that His commands are good, and therefore they must be treasured and thought deeply upon. How do we know that God is good? Look at what He has done! That is exactly what this text is pointing out. God said, I am the one who rescued you from Egypt! For us, we see that the unbelievable redemption from Egyptian slavery only set the stage for God to pull off an even more incredible act of salvation. 2000 years ago, God sent His own Son to die in your place on the cross so that your sinful soul fast bound in sin and nature’s night could be redeemed; could have your shackles broken, and your chains loosed. There was no other way for you to escape His judgment against sin. Christ took your judgment upon Himself. And God has told you about it! In telling you about His goodness, God is seeking your good. In dying for you on the cross, Christ secured your ultimate good. I am paraphrasing Jonathan Edwards:

In communicating ...he [God] does it for himself, because our good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is our good. Our excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God’s glory. God, in seeking our glory and happiness, seeks himself, and in seeking himself,... he seeks our glory and happiness.²

² Jonathan Edwards, The End for Which God Created the World, included in John Piper’s God’s Passion for His Glory, Crossway Books, Wheaton: 1998, p.177. In the original text, Edwards was referring to the benefit of the creatures and used the plural pronoun “their”, which I changed to “our”.

Communication by God is such a good thing for Him to do for us, since communication is what enables us to have a close relationship with Him. And beloved, that is so good! His Word has decrees and commands, but they are given so that you will experience His goodness and not his wrath. His commands and warnings are given to protect you, so that your joy and life are full and rich. Have you ever met a happy coveter? These commands are good and pleasant, rich and sweet. These commands are health for our bones, and joy for our hearts.

This week, a friend of mine asked me to pray for him and his daughter. We'll call her Jessica (not her real name). She is committed to a relationship that is a train-wreck looking for a track. Rather than just sit and watch this happen, he has from day one loved her so much that he has spoken truth to her. Recently he wrote her a letter of which he sent me a copy. In it he said,

I urge you once again to forgo this unwise relationship which could result in marriage. (and then goes on to explain again why and then asks) Don't you want God's best for you? I do. Your mother does. Everyone who has loved you and ministered to you all these years does. The only one who seems not to care about God's best for you is [this guy]...and perhaps you yourself.

There are other predictions about the consequences of the path toward which you seem to be headed that I (and others) could make. They too, would likely come to pass...not because we are prophets but because we have life experience coupled with a fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. I fear they would only anger you at this point and you would pooh, pooh them as you seem to have done with godly advice and insight so far. But these predictions are more dire and fraught with potentially life damaging elements. Jessica, your life for God is on the line here. We are talking about your whole life, and the rest of your life, being impacted in ways I don't think you can even imagine right now.

I love you deeply, Jessica. I am so earnest about this let me tell you how I have often prayed. I have prayed that somehow if my death could keep you from this path, I would gladly die. If God were to assure me that my death would protect you from this potential path that would, I am convinced, scar your life... and that my death would secure for you a life of God glorification, satisfaction in God, and usefulness for him...I would give my life to secure that. And frankly if any of my children would come to spiritual ruin I long not to live to see it.

I am no longer able to send you to your room or restrict you. I can only do so with my love, my prayers, and my best counsel. I know I have not been a great father. I have failed in so many ways. There are many young dads at church that put me to shame. But I have never, ever failed to love you and to try to do my level best for you. That will always be true. I will always love you. Whatever else may happen, I will never withdraw my love for you and my desire to bring you closer to God.

Why did this dad speak? Because he is a good dad who cares deeply about the life of his daughter. I know him and believe him when he says that he would gladly give his life to secure the joy of his daughter. We are moved by that – aren't we? Some of you girls are sitting here wishing to God that you had a dad who loved you like that! You know what? You do! God sent His own Son to die in order to secure your joy, by redeeming you from sin. Do you believe His warnings? Will you follow His counsel? Will you live

Beloved, His commands are not grievous, because they come from His heart. Believe him. Trust Him. These commands are for your good. His Word is life. We were made to depend upon God's Word. We cannot live off of bread alone. Physical food only sustains our bodies, but we are more than sweat glands, blood vessels and brain tissue. We are humans, the highest level of God's creative work, made in His image, made with souls, made with a need to know God, trust God, love God, obey God and follow God. When there is no Word from God, we starve. When there is no Word from God, we have no basis for ethics, no norms or standards upon which to stand. Without absolute moral ethics, we will do more than blow up space shuttles, we will implode our very lives.