

Addiction

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Bible Text: Exodus 20:1-3
Preached on: Sunday, September 17, 2017

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Good morning. Please take your Bibles and turn with me to the Old Testament book of Exodus 20. If you're using the pew Bible located at the bottom of the chair in front of you, you can turn to page 61. I'll be reading Exodus 20:1-3.

1 And God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before me."

This is the word of the Lord.

Let me pray.

Our Father, you are the God who comes to us, breaks the chains, sets us free to live for your glory. We pray that your Gospel message will ring forth from every pulpit in this community, in this country, around the world today that your kingdom may grow. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

You might have heard about a mechanic who accidentally swallowed some brake fluid and it turned out that he really liked the taste of it and so before he knew it, he had finished the entire bottle. One of his coworkers caught him sneaking a drink of brake fluid the next day and he said, "Man, that stuff will kill you. You've got to give it up." And the mechanic said, "Look, don't worry, I can stop anytime."

Today and next Sunday, I want to speak to you about addiction. Addiction. For example, what do the Scriptures have to say about our vulnerability for addiction? What do the Scriptures have to say about that? Do they have anything to say about it? Another question is what does God know about addiction that we don't know? And most importantly, what does this text that we chose today say about addiction? Why this text? What does it have to do with addiction? I mean, why can't we find a verse in the Bible that says, "Thou shalt not do heroin." Or, "Thou shalt not do meth." You know, why don't we find verses like that? We don't but we find verses like this and I think that we're going to see this text strikes at the very heart of addiction.

Now before we get into the text, I want us to ponder the problem for a moment because I'm going to imagine that some of you are sitting here right now and you're thinking, "Well, doesn't have anything to do with me. I'm not addicted to drugs. I'm not an addict." But listen, right at the beginning I want to say to you: addiction has many many faces. For example, it might even have this face, okay. Some of you who know me a little better than others, you know that this is my favorite chip. Now I love potato chips and so I've tried all kinds of chips and this is my favorite. It's Lay's but it's not just ordinary Lay's, it's called Simply Lay's, sea salted, thick cut potato chips, and I show you this because there are foods and they call it a carbohydrate addiction. What that means is there are certain foods that can actually increase your hunger rather than satisfy your hunger. When you consume them, what happens is you're creating this escalating recurring need for the very substances that intensify the problem in the first place, you see? And so I eat these and I end up wanting more and more, you see, and so there is such a thing as a carbohydrate addiction.

But let me expand that a little bit further. Carol Arends has written a lot about addiction. She said this, "We drink liquids that dehydrate us. We buy objects that require us to buy more objects. We make some money ratchet up our lifestyle in response and find we need more income to sustain us. The harder we work, the more work there is to do and the harder we play, the more elusive the fun. Ask anyone working in Hollywood special effects or in extreme sports or in the sex trade industry and all will tell you the same, yesterday's thrill is today's old news. We always need more."

You'll see a picture of a man named Russell Brand. He is a comedian in England, rather profane. He's been addicted, had been addicted to numerous things. He was talking drugs, alcohol, sex. I mean, this never-ending list, and he's been very very forthright because he's written a brand new book. It's coming out just in a few days. You'll see the title of it here, it's called, "Recovery." No picture of that? I'm sorry. I've dropped the ball on that one. There is a book he's written that's coming out just any day called "Recovery," and here's something that he understands. Now he's not a Christian, he doesn't profess to be, but he understands that addiction take many shapes and sizes. For example, he believes that the question is not why is a person addicted, but "what pain is your addiction masking?" In other words, why are you running into the wrong job, into the wrong life, or into the wrong person's arms? So what he's saying there is one of the underlying problems for the addict is yearnings and pain.

Let me give you another example. Edgar Allan Poe. Edgar Allan Poe, a very well-known poet, here's what he said, "I have absolutely no pleasure," now listen, "I have no pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge. It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure that I have periled life and reputation and reason, it has been the desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories, from a sense of insupportable loneliness, and a dread of some strange impending doom."

Now here's what we notice: both Russell Brand and Edgar Allan Poe and hundreds of others speak about pain. They speak about pain. Now they're not talking necessarily about physical pain, they're talking about an emotional pain, some of the pains of living

in a fallen, broken world. In fact, one person said this, "Addictions provide a remedy that helps us to forget the pain at least for a little while." You say, "Pain? I mean, if it's not physical pain, what do you mean by emotional pain?" I'm talking about the pain of living what Paul called an empty way of life. Before we come to know the Savior, before our chains that enslave us set us free, we live what the Bible calls an empty way of life, and that creates a great deal of multi-levels of pain in our lives in a fallen world.

But then also addicts talk a great deal about yearnings and desires, unfulfilled desires, unfulfilled yearnings, cravings, strong desires that long to be met. And look, that is not a bad thing. Let me remind you: our longings for connection and significance and freedom are given to us by God. In other words, we were created with desires. There's nothing wrong with having desires but what is killing us is the way we are trying to satisfy or deaden those God-given capacities. In other words, it's not the desires that we have that are God-given, it's how we go about trying to fulfill those yearnings, those cravings, those desires that we have deep within us.

So here's the question this morning: what does God say about addiction? What does our text say about addiction? Well, let's look at it very closely. Notice God is speaking and he says, "I am the LORD your God," in verse 2, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." Then we didn't read this section but if you'll drop down further, you will notice in particular that God speaks about being a jealous God in verse 5, he says, "You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God."

Now you're going to hear a quote in just a moment but let me set it up for just a moment. Julia Sweeney is a comedian, had been on Saturday Night Live before, and she's come out speaking all around the world over the last few years about her disdain for God and one of the things that she doesn't like about God is she thinks that God is insecure because he says, "I'm jealous. Don't be going after other gods, stick with me." I want you to listen to her for just a moment.

Video.

Julia Sweeney: That was one of the many things that ?? in the Bible, is first of all how insecure God is. I mean, God is so insecure that he needs everyone to say, "You're number 1! You're the number 1 of all the other gods! You're in the top 5." The most insecure character.

Now that's her interpretation of when God says, "Don't go after other gods. I'm the one true God. Don't go after other gods. I'm a jealous God." Her and others, they say, "Well, what is wrong with this God? He's so insecure. What's wrong with him?" Let me ask you: is that the right interpretation of that? Is God insecure? Or could it be that there's another explanation? Could there be a reason, could there be a profound reason that God said, "Look, don't go after other gods. Serve me. Me only." Could there be a good reason? In other words, could it be that God is giving a solemn warning against our own self-destruction? God is not insecure, God is self-sufficient. He doesn't need anything so he's

not insecure but what he does care is he cares deeply about his creation and he doesn't want us to self-destruct and, therefore, we must not go after other gods.

Let's look at the context of this. Why did God say this in the first place? Well, God has delivered his people, Israel, out of Egyptian bondage and he has called them to himself and they have come out now and they're out in the wilderness and now God is getting ready in chapter 20 to give them what is called the Ten Commandments, and basically what God is doing is saying this, "Now that I have graciously saved you, here is how you are to live." He doesn't save them because of their keeping rules, he saves them out of his grace but then he gives them rules to live by. And in verse 3, notice he said in verse 3, "You shall have no other gods before me." Now that command right there implies that they will be inclined to do so and, in fact, if you read the Old Testament, that's what you find, is a history of the people of God abandoning the living God and going after other gods.

But notice he said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." Now what does that mean? Those two words are filled with great helpful information. "Before me" means "in addition to me; in opposition to me; or as rival objects of service, adoration and worship." Understand God's saying, "No other gods before me. No other rivals. You are to have no other rivals." Now here's where this gets interesting: the very word "addiction" comes from the Latin word "addictus" which means this: to surrender to the gods. To surrender your life to the gods.

That's what addiction means. We're surrendering our lives to gods, the very gods that Jesus said, God said, "You have no other gods, no other gods before me." You see, you get to the heart of this and you see that this verse has everything to do with the subject of addiction. What God is saying in this commandment is that addiction is a worship disorder. Now that may sound strange and I'm sure it will to some who will hear because our culture has been indoctrinated with what's called the disease model for addiction. You see, we have been told for a number of years that addiction is a disease and we've been indoctrinated with a certain way of thinking that addiction is all about a disease. It sounds like this: your addiction is not a moral failing, you are not responsible, you can't help it because you have a disease.

Now there are parts of truth in that, okay, little pieces of truth. For example, there's a point at which you can't help it. You're enslaved, you see. There's a part of that that's true and another part is this: addiction may be like a disease but being like a disease and being a disease is a far long way apart. In other words, all we can say about addiction is not that it's just a disease. It is like a disease in some ways but being like a disease is a long way from being a disease.

Let me give you an example. The cravings and the desires at the core of the addictive experience are not quite the same as an invading virus. For example, if you catch a virus, you don't want it, right? You don't go, "Hey, I'll have two viruses, please." You don't ask for that. You don't want it and you would be glad to get rid of it, right? So in that way addiction is not like a disease at all, in that way.

The progression of addiction usually goes like this, it's fairly simple: addiction begins with a choice, it becomes a dominant choice in our lives, and then finally it becomes no choice, leaving a person enslaved or addicted. I want you to see a definition of addiction. I think this is really helpful. Addiction is bondage to the rule of a substance, activity or state of mind which then becomes the center of life defending itself from the truth so that even bad consequences don't bring repentance and leading to further estrangement from God. That is a very helpful definition. It's a bondage, notice to the rule of maybe a substance, it may be a drug but it might be an activity. It might be work. It might be the attainment of money. It might be pleasures. Activity or a state of mind. Next Sunday, Lord willing, we'll talk about the addiction that Jesus spoke about the most and you'll be surprised to hear what it is. Then it defends itself from the truth so that even bad consequences don't bring repentance. You wonder if a person gets thrown in jail, a person loses everything they have, you say, "They'll stop now. They'll stop now." And many of you know they don't.

So this is what God is warning us against. Verses 2 and 3, notice, "You shall have no other gods before me." Understand that. You look at it now and you say, "My goodness, God is trying to protect us. God wants our good. He doesn't want us addicted. He doesn't want us enslaved." Why? Because we were created in the image of God and, therefore, we have an inbuilt need, a desire to know and enjoy God. It's there, folks. It's there. We can't run away from it. It's there. That's how we were created and when that desire is frustrated or misdirected in a fallen world, we experience pain. In other words, when we do not connect with our Creator as we were designed to do, we are going to experience the pain and the frustration of life in a fallen world and we will deal with that pain in two ways: we will either repress the desire or we will attach the desire to something else, a substance, an activity or a state of mind, and this attachment enslaves the energy of our desire until we are obsessed by unworthy masters who can never truly satisfy us. It's what God called "other gods." Other gods, those unworthy. We attach our desires to something outside of God and we get enslaved by these unworthy masters, these other gods that can never meet the deepest need of the soul.

Do you see why God is saying this, "No other gods in competition to me. No other rivals to me." But, you see, if you're listening closely, you should be asking this question: if God is the only God, and the Bible says that, right? He is the only God. There are no other gods out there. He's the only God. If the Bible says that, then why does God speak of "other gods"? Now that's an important question. I mean, if there are no other gods, what is God talking about here? This would mean, when God says "other gods," the first thing we would recognize is it means he is speaking of false gods, right? Not true gods but false gods. That's number 1. False gods can hold a kind of spiritual power over people. Have you ever noticed that? Like money, money can hold a power over a person. It really can, but money is a false god, you see, and so how do false gods have a spiritual power over people? They have enslaving powers – listen – because demonic forces use them to gain mastery over us. Oh, friends, I know there are people that would laugh and say, "Ah, you all believe in a devil. You believe in demonic forces and dark forces in the world." Listen, the Bible makes it very clear that there are really no other gods but there

are false gods and behind those false gods are demonic forces enslaving people, presenting things kind of like a Hollywood movie set, presenting things in such a way but when you widen the lens, when you bring the lens out, you see it for what it really is. And that's what God is doing here, he's widening the lens for us to see that other gods will never truly satisfy.

You see, addiction is a worship disorder because when we seek out other gods, we are giving our heart and our soul to something that we believe will heal our pain, take away our stress, and provide us with a more palatable world. Sometimes we have a hard time living in this world and, "I need something. I need something to help me get through this world." And the Bible gives us the answer for what happens when we do that in Haggai 1. Look at these verses and you wonder, "What are they saying?" Well, in the context that we're looking at, they make better sense now.

5 Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. 6 You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

Do you understand what that's saying? It's going after other gods, going after other gods and they fail to satisfy and what people were looking for, what we were looking for in that god, what we were looking for in that substance, what we were looking for in that activity, what we were looking for failed to satisfy us and all it did was enslave us to go back for more. More chips. More chips. More chips, you see. Other gods cannot do what the only true God can, the God who created us to enjoy him and reflect his glory, the God who came down to earth and took on human flesh. We sang about him this morning. Jesus, Messiah, he came, he came to show us the living God and we see the glory of God in the person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

I want to take the remainder of my time to talk about him because there was an occasion in the New Testament where Jesus walked 50 miles in the hot sun into the forbidden territory of Samaria to cure a woman's addiction. Fifty miles in the hot summer, hot sun, in order. Now, he goes into a forbidden territory of Samaria and you can read all about it in John 4. He goes and he's going to meet a woman there who has an addiction. It's not heroin. It's not meth. It's not her job necessarily. You see, what we find in this story, I'm going to read it in just a moment, what we're going to see is Jesus, fully God in human flesh, is a seeking and a finding God. He came to those who pursued unholy pleasures to find them and rescue them. Her addiction, now her addiction was a string of failed relationships. If you know anything about this story, she's come for water. It's in the middle of the day, not the typical time of day to come for water because she kind of has a reputation, you see. Everybody kind of knows that she's had this man and it didn't work out, and she had this man and it didn't work out, and then she had this man and it didn't work out, and now the man that she's living with is not her husband. Her addiction was a string of failed relationships. Do you know what the number one addiction is in the world? Do you know what it is? It's not drugs. The number one addiction is relational

issues and that's exactly what this woman had. This woman had earned the title of disgraced social outcast. She comes out at noon to get water but Jesus sees people with a very different set of eyes. Let me read this to you.

13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." 16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

She says to Jesus after he says, "Look, I've got water. I've got living water. I've got what you need. I've got what you've been looking for. I've got what you've been looking for in all five of those previous men and what you're looking for in this man you have right now. I have exactly what you need, it's called living water." And she said, "Give me that water. Give me that water." And what did Jesus say? "Bring me your husband." What in the world is that all about? Jesus is saying to that woman and every one of us who would go after other gods, Jesus is saying, "Bring me your addiction. Bring me your addiction so I can give you living water. Bring me your addiction that has failed you. Bring me your addiction that has let you down and I will give you what you need, it's called living water."

Now you say, "Now what does that mean?" Well, it's beautiful when you see it. In the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, God said to his people, "My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and they have gone after and made broken cisterns that cannot hold water." Now, he uses imagery. God uses imagery and he said, "You left me." Remember in Exodus 20, "I'm the living God. I'm the God who saved you. I'm your Creator. You left me. I am your living water." What is living water? It means a running supply of God and his faithful goodness. God is saying to every creature that he has made, "I am your living water." But what do we do? We go and we make broken cisterns and they become our addictions and Jesus says to this woman, "Bring me your addiction that has let you down, that has broken your life, that has left you a slave, that I can set you free and give you the faithfulness of a God in his goodness which is what you are really looking for."

You see, in some way, in some way our addictions can be a gift. In some way. You say, "Brother Van, how in the world could drug addiction be a gift? How could alcohol addiction be a gift? How could relational addiction? How could sexual addiction be a gift?" One, addictions show us the end of ourselves. Addictions show us the end of ourselves. Addictions contribute to our transformation. In other words, we come to an end of ourselves and we confess before God our brokenness and, "I need living water! Give me that water!" That can lead to an open door transformation of hope and

blessedness. Also, it's the wound of our addiction is where the love of God can get in. You might see your addiction as just an open gaping wound and you're thinking, "I need to be free! I'm so sick of this!" And that wound of our addiction is right where the love of God can seep into our hearts.

You see, Jesus is not ashamed to love and rescue those who have been disillusioned by other gods. He comes right to this woman to rescue her and cure her. Jesus comes to bring order to our worship disorder. Jesus is merciful to those who have done wrong and those who have been done wrong and he brings the kind of mercy that can change a person.

If you're here this morning and you long for change, you're here this morning and you long for this living water, if you're here this morning and you would say, "Give me that water! Give me that water!" Jesus has come to do that for you. Whatever the addiction may be. Whatever the slavery. Whatever mastery there may be in your life that the other gods have ensnared you with, I plead with you this morning, I invite you, come to the living God and let him give you the living water that you have been looking for.